

Chapter IX

Blogging

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INTRODUCTION

What is a blog? According to a recent report from The Pew Internet & American Life Project, well over half of the American adult population do not know what a blog is (Rainie, 2005).

A blog can be simply defined in the following manner: “A blog is an easy-to-use content management tool. When you ‘blog,’ you are instantly adding new content to your site via a Web interface. No technical or programming skills are necessary.” (Weil, 2004, n.p.). In a nutshell, a blog is a “do-it-yourself” Website. Gone are the days (of say 2003) when one would have to be knowledgeable in html or xml programming or make use of complex, and often expensive, Web creation software to create or update a Website. With a blog, your Website can be constantly added to and updated, without having to do anything more than typing (or cutting and pasting) into a text box. Through posting links, you can link your blog to any other site on the Web. You can even add audio/visual material to your blog site by uploading them, much as you would add an attachment to an email. Others who find your site

of interest can use RSS (really simple syndication) or sign-up for e-mail alerts to be notified when you post or add material to your blog.

Blogging—the act of creating and maintaining a blog—has been characterized in nothing less than laudatory terms, hailed as:

- “The ‘next big thing’ on the Internet” (Gallo, 2004)
- “The next killer app” (Weil, 2003),
- “The Web’s coup de grace, the heart of a personal publishing revolution to rival desktop publishing” (Johnson, 2005),
- “The most profound revolution in publishing since the printing press” (Sullivan, 2005).

On the other hand, many people associate blogs as a phenomenon of teenagers and college students. When they do think about them, they think of either the folks who blog about their cats, dogs, or hamsters (Butler, 2006) or the “bad” news stories about blogs, such as when a blogger—the person creating and maintaining the blog—named his murderer in his last, dying entry in his blog (Wikipedia, 2006). Chris Anderson is the author

of *The Long Tail*, which speaks to the fragmentation of the marketplace and mass audiences with the advent of the Internet. He recently commented that blogs are an extension of this overall trend, as they are an excellent way of communicating with microaudiences, with blogs like his own being “exactly what four people want” (quoted in Schechner, 2006, p. W2).

Blogging may thus become one of the megatrends of the next decade. Writing in the prestigious journal, *Foreign Policy*, Drezner and Farrell (2004) commented that: “Although the blogosphere remains cluttered with the teenage angst of high school students, blogs increasingly serve as a conduit through which ordinary and not-so-ordinary citizens express their views on international relations and influence a policymaker’s decision making”.

BACKGROUND

The roots of the phenomenon that is now referred to as ‘blogging’ can be traced back to Tim Berners Lee (the originator of the World Wide Web), who created a ‘What’s New’ page in 1992 (Dvorak, 2005). In 1994, online personal diaries began to emerge on topics spanning areas such as diets, movies, politics, and sex (Sullivan, 2005). Jorn Barger, editor of one of the original sites, coined the term ‘Weblog’ in 1997, defining it as “a Webpage where a Weblogger ‘logs’ all the other Webpages she finds interesting.” The shorter version, “blog,” was coined by Peter Merholz in 1999, when he broke the word “Weblog” into the phrase “we blog.” “Blog” then grew in acceptance as a shorter form of the noun (Weblog) and also for the first time as a verb, with to blog meaning “to edit one’s Weblog or a post to one’s Weblog” (Blood, 2004).

The key to the rapid rise of blogging is the ability of users to easily create content and to be able to instantly update their online Websites. Probably the seminal event in the growth of blogging was the innovation made by Evan Williams. In 1999, Williams, then living in San Francisco, was seeking a way to more easily update his own

Website. He created a simple software solution that eliminated the need to know how to use HTML to do so, allowing for Websites to be updated by simply typing text into a text box. This software became the foundation for blogger.com, one of the first blog creation and hosting sites (Ramos, 2004). In fact today, the vast majority of blogs are created and maintained by individuals making use of a variety of free or low-cost software and/or hosting services, such as those listed in Table 1.

Blogging reached its “tipping point” in 2002, when the blogosphere grew from a self-contained community to a wider, global marvel (Manjoo, 2002a). Today, as Drezner and Farrell (2004) observed, the blogosphere has become “a new medium” that has become “an elaborate network with agenda-setting power”

Undoubtedly however, blogging is fast-changing the way many of us interact with the Internet. Mortensen (2004) chronicled that blogging is now following the same development pattern as the Internet itself. Whereas in the early days of the Internet, access was difficult and limited to academicians, researchers, government officials, and other elites, the rise of the World Wide Web and the development of browser technologies enabled the Internet to widen its audience and reach, while greatly changing—and perhaps decreasing—the quality of the content and interactions online. With the wide availability of blog creation software tools and blog hosting services, one no longer needs specialized computer knowledge and resources to create content online. Indeed, blogs have been categorized as the rise of easily self-created Web

Table 1. Major blog software/hosting providers

Service Provider	URL
Blogger	www.blogger.com
LiveJournal	www.livejournal.com
Moveable Type	www.sixapart.com/movabletype/
MSN Spaces	www.spaces.msn.com
Radio Userland	www.radio.userland.com
TypePad	www.typepad.com
Word Press	www.wordpress.org
Xanga	www.xanga.com

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