

Disseminating Knowledge Resources Through Weblogs

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This paper is based on the case study which keeps updating my professional knowledge through *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Weblogs* by Charles W. Bailey from the year 1992. This SEPW insight helped me to create a Weblogs for library service for the Internet resources. Weblogs is one of the current awareness services tools in the Internet era in the Digital Library world. This article describes under the following sections: What is Weblogs? How to create a Weblogs and its importance in the field of Library and Information Science. Definition of Weblogs in the context of libraries. And also highlights the important library Weblogs.

1 Introduction

“A Look Back at Sixteen Years as an Internet Electronic Publisher” entitled as a subject in my E-mail sent by Prof. Charles W. Bailey’s listserv SEPW@LISTSERV.UH.EDU on June 29, 2005. I was fortunate to receive this E-mail in time. From the beginning of my career in Library Science from 1991 a special PACS Review issue on “Network-based Electronic Serials” appeared. I am one of the regular readers of Prof. Charles W. Bailey’s scholarly communication services. The uniqueness of his service coincides with the evolution of the networking development such as PACS, PACS Review (Public-Access Computer Systems Review) PACS_L Mailing list issues are distributed through Listserv software as ASCII files. PACS News, a free electronic newsletter was established in 1992. Since 1994, PACS Review and PACS News have been available via Gopher server. The first HTML version of PACS Review was established in 1995 added with authors who were allowed to update their articles in this review. This version was called “Network-Based Electronic Publishing of Scholarly Works: A Selective Bibliography” with 26 versions. In 1996

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he started publishing the first HTML version of *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Bibliography* (SEPB), a free updated electronic book. Then in 1997 the SEPB became SEPR (*Scholarly Electronic Publishing Resources*). Now this valuable Info-product is developed as SEPW (*Scholarly Electronic Publishing Weblogs*) and RSS feed added in March 2005. The advantage for us is that SEPB, SEPR and SEPW comes under Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial License. The latest 58th version SEPB was published on June 10, 2005. In fact, I would like to prepare a detailed study about this service coverage. When I received the NAFLIN 2005 brochure Entitled “Strategies for Managing Knowledge Resources: Promoting Research, Education and Skills”, I had planned to describe in detail Prof. Bailey’s SEPW products and its development. In fact, that may be the right topic for this convention. But while collecting the literature review, I found the following articles described in this electronic publication. Anyhow, I was really excited with the Weblog version of SEPW and the same insights helped me to create blog for NIPFP Library to disseminate the “Internet Resource of Indian Public Finance” information available on the Net with linking options. Before starting this service, I prepared the feasibility study material and that will be described in this article.

Internet accelerates information overload in the networking world. Since the late 1970s, it is an outgrowth of the ARPANET. The Internet becomes ubiquitous in nature. Library and Information professionals are forced to use the Internet as a reference tool to do immediate search for primary information. Especially, reference service/desk at the special library, we search the Website to find some data, articles, information, etc. The reader would like to keep this link information in the proper form. That’s why we chose the bookmark. But the bookmark can be maintained in the PC, it can’t be shared in the network environment. Based on this type of need the Blogs concept arrived in the 1990s. Blogs were originally named Weblogs, a name coined by Jorn Berger in December 1997. This was later shortened to “Blog” (we was dropped) with the person keeping the Weblog being known as a “blogger”.

Blogs in essence are Websites operated by one person who updates the information on a frequent basis. Information is normally displayed in reverse chronological order and can include commentary by the blog’s author and even links to Website. According to www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html, the original Weblogs were link-driven sites

containing a “mixture in unique proportion of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays. “In publications that track Weblogs, this definition from Salon contextualises best describes the functions: “Weblogs, typically, are personal Websites operated by individuals who compile chronological lists of links to stuff that interests them, interspersed with information, editorialising and personal asides. A good Weblog is updated often, in a kind of real-time improvisation, with the pointers to interesting events, pages, stories and happenings elsewhere on the Web. New stuff piles on top of the page; older stuff sinks to the bottom”.

Dave Winer, on his site, says that there are four key words that describe the personal Web publishing communities known as Blogs:

1. A Weblog is personal – done by a person not an organisation and you see a personality that makes it interesting.
2. A Weblog is on the Web—updated frequently and accessed via a Web browser.
3. A Weblog is published – process is automated; can use advanced writing tools and syndication can be active – form of publishing technology.
4. A Weblog is part of the community – does not stand-alone – and connects people together using the Web through common interests. Journals, diaries and other written expression composed in the first person are also part of Weblogs.

2 A Brief History of Weblogs

In 1997, Jorn Berger with his Robert Wisdom Weblog coined the term “Weblog”. When Google released the free Weblog creation programs such as “Blogger” at www.Blogger.com in 1999 the proliferation of the Blogs increased dramatically. These programs are easy for even those who are not familiar with the HTML skills. In fact this program process is called “push button publishing”. Most recently according to Penry Garrod’s regular columns in *Ariadne* Issue No: 40 says that a search on Google (using the search terms “Library Weblog” returns 544,000 hits on June 21, 2004. But when I searched the same word “library Weblog” in the same search engine on July 14, 2005, it yielded 1,720,000 hits. It is almost double the hit within the year period. In Yahoo search engine there is an excellent article overview of the history and development of Blogs entitled “Genesis of Blogging”.

The specialty of development of Blogs is without the help of an editor and technical people are writing directly and publishing with the simple three easy step clicking option “*Create an account, Name your Blog, Choose a template and publish it*”. With this immediacy, intimacy and frankness fact the Blogs are created and disseminated better than E-mail. Stephen O’Hears writing in *Education Guardian* believes that Weblogs have a key role to play in education, partly because they are so easy to use.

“Blog software simplifies the process of writing and publishing online. Creating and editing Blog entries is no more difficult than sending an E-mail.”

3 Definition of Weblogs

The slogan “push-button publishing for people” makes Weblogs have an extensive professional impact, particularly journalists and Library and Information scientists who are given a wide range of definitions for the simple concept. With my preference I like the following definition in the context of library Weblogs.

“Blogs are a natural for librarians”, says Paula J. Hane (2001); certainly some librarians have been quick to recognise that Weblogs can be important sources of information and information dissemination tools for communication. The best Weblog I know is Charles W. Bailey’s. *Scholarly Electronic Publishing Weblogs*. Peter Scott’s definition in his Library Weblog (<http://blog.xrefer.com>) says, “a Web page containing brief, chronologically arranged items of information”. And the final version of Weblog definition or an excerpt from the definitive definition by Jill Walker, Department of Humanistic Informatics, University of Bergen, Norway as follows: “A Weblog, or Blog, is a frequently updated Website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first (see temporal ordering). Typically, Weblogs are published by individuals and their style is personal and informal. Weblogs first appeared in the mid-1990s, becoming popular as simple and free publishing tools became available towards the turn of the century. Since anybody with a net connection can publish their own Weblog, there is great variety in the quality, content, and ambition of Weblogs, and a Weblog may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers”.

4 The Structure of Weblogs

Although the above definition of Blogs is broad enough to describe the structure, the blogs generally have home page with static content and a list of the most recent posts. Posts are chunks of text and links arranged in reverse chronological order. Each post generally has the following fields: Title, Date-time stamp, Body Comments, Track banks and permalinks.

Home page columns may be more static or contain automatically generated content, such as headlines from recent posts, links to personal profile, links to the archive, and a list of favourite Websites, etc. Archives are created immediately so the same post will occur on the main page and in the archive section. The structure of the archives, post pages, comment pages and permalinks can be exploited for precision searching. Therefore the nascent distinctive features of the Weblog is as follows (2005):

- Automatic formatting of content in the form of “headlines”, followed by “entries”, or “stories”
- Time-and date-stamp of entries
- Archiving of past entries
- A search function to search through all entries
- A “blogroll”-a list of other Blogs read by the author(s) of the current Blog
- A section associated with each entry where readers can post comments on the entry
- Simple syndication of the site content via RSS (Really Simple Syndication)

Typically, these features are all supported by Blog server software, and the user (or “blogger”) does not have to do any programming or even formatting, to create a technically sophisticated, visually impressive Website.

Blogs have a very low barrier to access. You post using E-mail, voicemail, Web forms, or a downloaded WYSIWYG program. Hosted Blogs have preformatted template choices that allow varieties of layout and colour without detailed knowledge of HTML, cascading style sheets (CSS), or XML. The content can be anything from a sparse list of links to

extensive collections of essays, videos, recordings, or pictures. Feeds are XML-formatted abbreviated posts or lists of headlines then can be gathered, displayed, and consumed efficiently in an aggregator.

Many so-called Blog search engines really only index feeds. Feeds are XML versions of the Blogs that can be read using an aggregator or incorporated into portals or Web pages. Many feeds are not full-text. In fact, some just include the title of the post. Additionally, many scholarly journals mainstream media outlets, and government agencies offer feeds. Searches in these engines provide many more relevant posts higher in the result list, but return fewer results overall. Below are several of the most useful Blog-specific search engines:

Bloglines [www.bloglines.com]

Feedster [www.feedster.com]

PubSub [www.pubsub.com]

Technorati [www.technorati.com]

Waypath [www.waypath.com]

5 How to Create a Simple Blog

The creation of Weblog is very simple and takes only a few minutes to develop a Blog. Blog can be created by the free and fee-based software. I develop the Blog through blogger.com (free) in the following simple steps. It is just like the “do it yourself” method:

First: create a free account in blogger.com

Second: Location of the Blog to default is free Blog at blogspot.com

Third: as usual read the Terms of Service

Fourth: choose a template for your Blog. Now your Blog is ready (see the figure). Then you have to post an entry to your Blog.

Log on your Blog with password post and the editor page will appear. Give a link or cut and paste your content on the editor page. You may preview the post and do editing, decoration, add, delete, re-edit, etc. Then publish your post. This will simultaneously go to the archive for searching purposes. Blogger.com is a great Website to start your blogging experience without any fee and hurdles.

6 Creating Weblogs for Libraries

Laurel A. Clyde in his book *Weblogs and Libraries* describes four different pathways to develop Weblogs for individuals as well as libraries. Here I am listing the four different paths and their advantages and disadvantages in tables only.

Path 1 - Using external, Web-based Weblog development software and an external Weblog hosting service (bearing in mind that some of the Web-based Weblog development services also provide Weblog hosting services).

Path 2 - Using external, Web-based Weblog development software but hosting the Weblog on a local server.

Path 3 - Downloading Weblog development software to a local machine, creating and updating the Weblog on the local machine and hosting the Weblog on a local server.

Path 4 - Using a locally developed Weblog system ('roll your own') and hosting the Weblog locally.

The advantages and disadvantages of each path are listed in Table 1. Any decision about Weblog software need not necessarily be the 'final solution'. It is possible to migrate a Weblog. From one Weblog software/system to another, particularly if the Weblog owner has kept a backup of the archives. In an article written for his own Library Stuff Weblog. Steven M. Cohen has described a series of moves, from Blogger to Movable Type to Radio and back to Blogger again.³ These three moves in no way reflect the quality of the software packages but rather a need to have support for particular Weblog features and for particular versions of RSS. By the same token, any decision about Weblog hosting also need not be final; it is, in fact, easier to move a Weblog to a new host than to move it to new software. However, it is even easier if no changes have to be made to software or to hosting for the Weblog.

7 Conclusion

Information explosion in the Internet era and its influence at the library primary source in the electronic medium is available on the network world with the E-mail overload. The Weblogs may be given much relief because of the intimacy, immediacy nature of creation of Weblog without any technical skills like HTML creation and linking, etc. With

the slogan of "push-button publishing for the people" by Blogger "changed the face of the Web", said Neil Macintosh in *The Guardian* British newspaper article "A Tale of One Man and His Blog" and no need of new skills to learn for creating Blogs. There is no need of specific software to browse; Blogs can be browsed by any Web browser. Weblogs provide an alternative to multiple electronic list subscriptions and ever-increasing amounts of E-mail as well as the new mechanism of Current Awareness Services in the libraries. This service may be used as a Reference Service tool. Librarians have always had two primary missions - preserving all human knowledge and connecting users to the knowledge that can serve them. Based on the updating modality of anywhere from the desktop, chronological order of posts, links to the other source of information and referral linking to other Weblogs and resources they can be used at the Reference Desk or in the provision of information services. The Weblog will play a major role in the information service field. Finally I conclude with a following statement made by Hazel D'Aguiar in *Clip Update* magazine. "I have felt much more up-to-date with issues affecting libraries...since starting to read Blogs, and have enjoyed being part of a wider community of bloggers, and that is just by commenting...Blogs provide us with a beautifully simple method of developing a global community for the exchange of knowledge."

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Table 1 Blogging Paths: Advantages and Disadvantages of Each

| Blogging Path | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Path 1 - Using a Web-based Weblog development service and an external Weblog hosting service (bearing in mind that some of the Web-based Weblog development services also provide Weblog hosting services).</p> | <p>Registering on the service and setting up a Weblog takes a short period of time. When free Weblog and hosting services are used, this can be a very cheap way to begin. Even the paid options are relatively inexpensive. The Weblog can be created and updated from any computer that is linked to the Internet. It is not necessary to purchase any special software or equipment. There is no need for the blogger to learn about maintaining a server. It is not necessary for the blogger to have a high level of technical skills. Support is usually available from the service and/or from a user group. Many of the Weblog development services provide support for the creation of RSS feeds, making this relatively easy.</p> | <p>The Weblog owner is dependent upon both a remote Weblog service and a remote hosting service; if either goes down, then there is nothing the blogger can do except wait. While most Weblog development services provide a degree of flexibility, the blogger will not have complete control over the appearance of the Weblog; further, the greater the Weblog owner's deviation from the service's standard templates, the greater the level of technical skill needed. The service may not support some of the features the blogger would like to have. It is difficult to create a near-seamless interface between the Weblog and a library Website. The Weblog will have a different base URL from the library Website. If the hosting company goes out of business, then the content of Weblogs hosted on the system may be in jeopardy (unless there is a local backup).</p> |
| <p>Path 2 – Using a Web-based Weblog development service but hosting the Weblog on a local server.</p> | <p>Registering on the service and setting up a Weblog takes a short period of time. Even the paid options for Weblog development are relatively inexpensive. The Weblog can be created and updated from any computer that is linked to the Internet. There is no dependence upon a remote hosting service over which the Weblog owner may have no control (if a remote host goes down, the blogger has no option but to wait until the problem is solved). The Weblog and the library Website will have the same base URL. Many of the Weblog development services provide support for the creation of RSS feeds, making this relatively easy.</p> | <p>A higher level of technical skills is required than for Path 1 (to set up the local server, unless the Weblog is hosted on an existing Website). If the Weblog is hosted locally and the local server goes down, then the problem has to be solved locally, so technical support may be needed. The Weblog owner will be responsible for backup of the Weblog, which takes time and planning. It is difficult to create a near-seamless interface between the Weblog and a library Website.</p> |

| Blogging Path | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Path 3 – Downloading Weblog development software to a local machine, creating and updating the Weblog on the local machine and hosting the Weblog on a local server.</p> | <p>If the software is chosen well, then it should support all or most of the Weblog features that the Weblog owner would like to have. There will be more possibilities to customise the appearance of the Weblog. With content on the local server, the Weblog owner has control over the archives. It is easier to create a seamless interface between the Weblog and a library Website. The Weblog and the library Website will have the same base URL.</p> | <p>A higher level of technical knowledge is required than for Path 1 or Path 2. If the local server goes down, then the problem has to be solved locally, so technical support will be needed. The Weblog owner will be responsible for backup of the Weblog, which takes time and planning. The selected software must run on the in-house equipment (whether Windows, Macintosh, Linux/UNIX) which may limit choice.</p> |
| <p>Path 4 – Using a locally developed Weblog system ('roll your own') and hosting the Weblog locally.</p> | <p>This path gives the organisation complete control over the software, the features of the Weblog and the machine on which the Weblog is hosted. The organisation may be able to create a Weblog using software that is already available within the organisation (such as database software). The advantage of this is that no one has to learn to use a new system. The Weblog can be developed to meet specific local needs, with the highest level of customisation. Weblog features can be developed as needed. The integration of the Weblog into the Website of the library can be seamless. The Weblog will have the same base URL as the library Website.</p> | <p>This path requires the highest level of technical knowledge and skills. Technical personnel will need to have knowledge of databases, XML and scripting languages like .asp or PHP, among other things. If the Weblog owner does not have those skills, then he or she will be dependent on technical staff at every step of the process. Ongoing maintenance costs increase with the complexity of the Weblog that is built. The costs in technical staff time will be higher than for the other paths. No free support will be available from outside the organisation.</p> |