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Innovate-Blog: A Step Into Blog 2.0
by James Shimabukuro

With the advent of free blog publishing platforms and tools such as WordPress and Blogger in 2003, the individual finally had a simple yet sophisticated means to publish directly to the Web. After a few years however, some (e.g., BBC News 2006, Gross 2006) claimed that blogs would reach their peak in 2007 and begin leveling off. Preliminary statistics seem to support this opinion (Rubel 2006).

However, I'm inclined to agree with Steve Broback (2007), whose argument is summed up in his article title: "The 'Blogs Have Peaked' Notion Confuses Content with Architecture." He notes, "WordPress, Movable Type, Typepad, Drupal, etc. are . . . simply a better way to build a WEB SITE. Blogs are an essential Web architecture, not just a limited platform for diaries" (¶2). The distinction that Broback makes is critical: The medium defines the message (McLuhan 1964, 7) and not the other way around. And in this case, the medium is a free or inexpensive ticket for professional and commercial organizations to publish something that is similar to yet different from traditional Web pages. It is in the differences that blogs have a potential that is only now being tapped.

In the last few years, major dailies such as the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune* have begun to include blogs in their online news sites. In this application, blogs are a means to add commentary and individual narratives to straight news, bringing depth, breadth, spin, and controversy to otherwise vanilla reporting. As they become increasingly sophisticated in their incorporation of blogs, publishers are beginning to group them into news categories. For example, the *New York Times* includes blogs under its regular section headings, classifying them under politics, world, technology, media, business, economy, or opinion, among others.

Organizations such as Britannica are taking blogs to a whole new level with initiatives like Britannica Blog that include attractive graphics and videos. However, the most intriguing development is what Britannica refers to as a "blog forum." Instead of simply gathering individual blogs into categories or listing a patchwork of the latest posts in blog forums such as Are Newspapers Doomed? (Do We Care?), Britannica gathers influential writers contributing as "participants" and "respondents," who engage in discussions around a central theme, inviting the public to join in via comments. The result is a platform that extends Britannica's publishing reach into the realm of Web 2.0 and fosters dynamic exchanges among a wide range of experts and the public.

When we focus on the medium—blogs as Web publishing platforms and tools—rather than on the content, we begin to see the possibilities for applications that go far beyond personal journals. Whereas first-generation blog content is overwhelmingly defined by individuals sharing observations and experiences, pursuing personal objectives via independent platforms, second-generation content is defined by organizational purposes and teams of writers. Web 2.0 is giving birth to a new generation of blogs that is being published by organizations rather than individuals. In this Blog 2.0, the strength of the medium, its architecture, is being used to radically expand the Web as we know it, allowing for a seamless mix of corporate and individual communication.

Introducing I-Blog

In this inaugural column, I take great pleasure in announcing *Innovate*'s new Blog 2.0, Innovate-Blog, or I-Blog, which is modeled after Britannica's blog forum and has a similar goal: to extend *Innovate*'s publishing reach and foster dynamic exchanges around issues in educational technology. However, I-Blog differs from

Britannica's model in one important aspect: Instead of concentrating on themes, it focuses on a select group of writers covering current topics and issues in their areas of interest. The wide range of articles will reflect the interests of our I-Bloggers and the response of our audience via hits and comments.

I-Blog is one of two Web 2.0 features offered by *Innovate*; the other is Innovate-Ideagora. Each complements the other via two of the most dynamic Web 2.0 media: blogs and forums. Innovate-Ideagora engages subscribers and the public at large via open discussion threads and personal blogs initiated and maintained by individual members. I-Blog offers longer, more structured posts, closer to articles than to off-the-cuff conversations, and only staff and guest authors are allowed to submit articles although anyone may post a comment in response. Additionally, the "blog forum" approach assures readers of a steady stream of thoughtful and thought-provoking articles.

We hope you'll log in to I-Blog regularly to read the latest articles and to participate by posting comments. We also invite you to join our team of writers. If you're interested in blogging about the latest trends, issues, and developments in educational technology, review the I-Blog Submissions page and e-mail me at jamess@hawaii.edu.

Happenings in I-Blog

Our staff and guest authors this month are John Adsit, Claude Almansi, Steve Eskow, Gary Greenberg, Carrie Heeter, Harry Keller, John Thompson, and Lynn Zimmerman. Together, we form a team that will work closely with *Innovate*, Innovate-Ideagora, and Innovate-Live to bring you the latest developments and most provocative discussions on educational technology. We look forward to your joining us in making I-Blog a dynamic venue for the exchange of ideas.

Our initial articles cover a wide range of topics, but a common theme running through most is change—why it's not happening, how to facilitate it, and what needs to be done.

Addressing the issue of cost as a formidable obstacle to change, Steve Eskow argues in "The 375-Billion Dollar Question. And the New Agora" that college costs continue to skyrocket because decision makers steadfastly pour resources into the old technology of buildings and classrooms, ignoring new technology that could significantly lower costs. "The new Agora of the Internet," he says, "is classroom, lecture hall, library . . . students can take the Agora with them and listen to lectures and read books and engage in dialog with teachers and students who are scattered in time and space."

Lynn Zimmerman in "Resistance to Technology: Conscious or Unconscious?" suggests that one way to address "the problem of faculty resistance to using IT tools in active learning instructional strategies" (Morrison 2008) is "to look more closely at what teachers are really doing as opposed to what they think they are doing in the classroom/educational space." She says, "It is possible that not only are teachers actively resisting learning about technology and technological advances, but some are perhaps unconsciously resisting it."

John Adsit views the quality of online offerings as an obstacle to change. In "Technology Must Be Based on Quality Instructional Practice," Adsit claims that teachers who are armed with best practices and appropriate technology are at the heart of the change process. The greatest obstacle, however, is pedagogy based on tradition rather than on hard data and technology that fails to address critical issues. He says, "Much of the educational technology I see is imitating the bad instruction that produces poor student achievement. Technology developers must seek out what really works and focus their attention accordingly." In a second article, "Old School Thinking Blocks Quality Online Science Classes," Adsit asserts that "well-designed online classes have lab programs that are far superior to what students encounter in 'typical' lab programs." The problem, though, is policies that restrict development of effective programs, such as the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) rule that high school courses that use virtual labs and simulations

are unacceptable to fulfill requirements for admission.

In response to Adsit, Harry Keller argues in "Simulated Labs Are Anathema to Most Scientists" that the best course of action in the UCOP case is to abandon the idea of simulations. "We must," he says, "present them with real innovations that don't depend on simulated activities but use real data from the real world with highly interactive collection of personal data by students." In his follow-up article, "Making a Case for Online Science Labs," Keller suggests a step-by-step approach to working with academic governing bodies such as UCOP and the New York State Board of Regents. The key, he feels, is to negotiate the "exact extent" of hands-on labs in high school curricula. To this end, he says, "I'd be happy to hear of other approaches that are not simulations and to work with anyone who'd like to see a change in the UCOP and Regents standards for lab experience."

At the 2008 University of Wisconsin Distance Teaching and Learning Conference, Gary Greenberg conducted a panel on the question of innovation in the creation of online courses: Is it at a standstill? In "Quality in Distance Education: Stakeholders' Perspectives Part One," he summarizes the results by quoting comments from participants Robert Bulik, Kay Shattuck, Katie McDonald, and Joeann Humbert. All seem to agree that innovation has stalled, and the consensus is that the dialogue "between faculty members and instructional designers [is essential] in the design of a quality distance education course."

To improve the quality of online offerings, Claude Almansi explains in "Making Web Multimedia Accessible Needn't Be Boring" how videos can be easily retrofitted with "captions or auditory descriptions of the visual track" via online services such as DotSub and WebMultimediale and options such as Synchronized Multimedia Interaction Language (SMIL). She says, "While these features are primarily meant to facilitate access to deaf and blind people, they can also be used creatively to enhance all users' experience of a video."

Finally, in "Green Computing: How to Reduce Our Personal Carbon Footprints," John Thompson sets the problem of change in the global arena, arguing that the move to online classes helps to protect our environment. He challenges each of us as "individual computer users" to support the "green energy" initiative. What can we do to reduce our "personal carbon footprints"? He focuses on three areas: power management, e-mail, and online learning. He says, for example, "If you have a choice between taking a college course in a traditional campus setting or accessing your course from work or home, consider the online choice. No campus presence equates to less energy use." He leaves the reader with a question: "Why are computer users not seeking to achieve the TBL—triple bottom line (economic, environmental and social)—and save money, help protect the environment, and do what's right for society?"

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