PEW / INTERNET

PEW INTERNET & AMERICAN LIFE PROJECT

DATA MEMO

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RE: **The state of blogging**
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Blog readership shoots up 58% in 2004
6 million Americans get news and information fed to them through RSS aggregators
But 62% of online Americans do not know what a blog is

By the end of 2004 blogs had established themselves as a key part of online culture. Two surveys by the Pew Internet & American Life Project in November established new contours for the blogosphere and its popularity:

- 7% of the 120 million U.S. adults who use the internet say they have created a blog or web-based diary. That represents more than 8 million people.

- 27% of internet users say they read blogs, a 58% jump from the 17% who told us they were blog readers in February. This means that by the end of 2004 32 million Americans were blog readers. Much of the attention to blogs focused on those that covered the recent political campaign and the media. And at least some of the overall growth in blog readership is attributable to political blogs. Some 9% of internet users said they read political blogs "frequently" or "sometimes" during the campaign.

- 5% of internet users say they use RSS aggregators or XML readers to get the news and other information delivered from blogs and content-rich Web sites as it is posted online. This is a first-time measurement from our surveys and is an indicator that this application is gaining an impressive foothold.

- The interactive features of many blogs are also catching on: 12% of internet users have posted comments or other material on blogs.

- At the same time, for all the excitement about blogs and the media coverage of them, blogs have not yet become recognized by a majority of internet users. Only 38% of all internet users know what a blog is. The rest are not sure what the term "blog" means.

These results come from two nationwide telephone surveys conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project: One was in the field between November 4 and November 22 and involved interviews 1,324 internet users. It has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points. The other was conducted between November 23 and November 30 and involved interviews with 537 internet users. That has a margin of error of plus or minus five percentage points.

Further analysis

Bloggers

The Pew Internet & American Life Project began asking about blog creation in the spring of 2002. In June of that year, 3% of internet users said they had created a blog or web diary that others could read. By the beginning of 2004, the figure had grown to 5% of internet users. Our survey in late November showed that the number grew to 7%, which represents more than 8 million people.

Blog creators are more likely to be:

- Men: 57% are male
- Young: 48% are under age 30
- Broadband users: 70% have broadband at home
- Internet veterans: 82% have been online for six years or more
- Relatively well off financially: 42% live in households earning over $50,000
- Well educated: 39% have college or graduate degrees

Previous work of ours (please see "Content Creation Online" http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/113/report_display.asp) suggests that bloggers can be quite casual about their online postings, regularly updating material on their blog less frequently than once a week.

Blog readers

An even more dramatic story emerges in blog readership. We began asking about this in the spring of 2003 and found that about 11% of internet users at that time had read blogs. The figure jumped to 17% this past February and leapt to 27% in November. The growth in 2004 alone amounts to 58%.

Blog readers are somewhat more of a mainstream group than bloggers themselves. Like bloggers, blog readers are more likely to be young, male, well educated, internet veterans. Still, since our survey February, there has been greater-than-average growth in blog readership among women, minorities, those between the ages of 30 and 49, and those with home dialup connections.

1 - The growth of the blogosphere
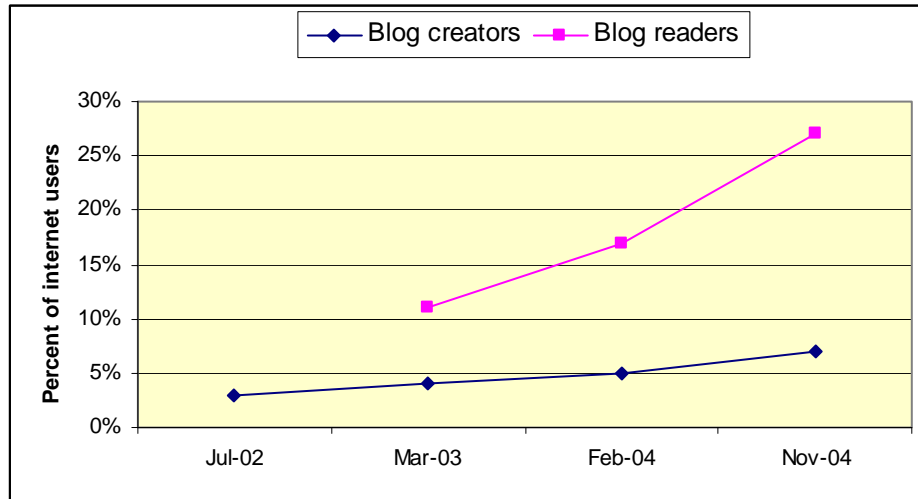
Blog posters
More than one-in-ten internet users (12%) say they have posted material or comments on others' blogs. That represents more than 14 million people and is a threefold increase from April 2003 when we first asked a question about those who contribute to others' blogs. Many of those posters themselves have blogs and a quarter of young adult internet users (those 18-29) have posted to other blogs.

Readership of political blogs
Just under one-in-ten internet users (9%) said they regularly or sometimes read political blogs during the campaign such as the Daily Kos or TalkingPoints Memo or Instapundit: 4% said they did so regularly and 5% said they did so sometimes.

Those who were heavily involved with the campaign online by getting news and information, using email to exchange arguments and mobilize others, and connecting to campaign events, were more likely than others to read political blogs. It was also relatively popular with younger internet users and with broadband users.

Kerry voters were a bit more likely than Bush voters to be political blog readers.

Users of RSS aggregators and XML readers
The rise of blogs has also spawned a new distribution mechanism for news and information from web sites that are regularly update their content. An RSS aggregator gathers material from Web sites and blogs you tell it to scan and it brings new information from those sites to you. RSS aggregators are usually downloaded and installed on users' computers and then are programmed to "subscribe" to the RSS feeds from blogs, news Web sites, and other content-rich sites. When you go to your RSS aggregator's page, it will display the most recent updates for each channel to which you

subscribe. Many programs run inside Web browsers while others are standalone programs. Most are free.

Our first query on the use of RSS aggregators and XML readers shows that 5% of online Americans have RSS aggregators or XML readers that feed them content. They are classic early adopters: veteran internet users, well-educated, and relatively heavy online news consumers.

Here are some sites that explain the basics of RSS and give tips about how to set up RSS feeds and give some perspective on blogs:

http://www.faganfinder.com/search/rss.shtml
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_%28protocol%29
http://www.digitaldivide.net/articles/view.php?ArticleID=68
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~libacq/News_Center/ncrss.shtml
http://www.iupload.com/news/rss_overview.asp
http://www.xml.com/pub/a/2002/12/18/dive-into-xml.html

Blogs still are not that well known
As a reality check on the blogosphere and its prominence, we decided to ask a general question of all internet users: "In general, would you say you have a good idea of what the term internet 'blog' means, or are you not really sure what the term means?" Some 38% of internet users said they had a good idea and 62% said they did not.

Those who knew about blogs were well educated, internet veterans (about half of those with at least six years of experience knew what a blog is), and heavy users of the internet. In contrast, the internet users who did not know about blogs were relative newbies to the internet, less fervent internet users, and those with less educational attainment.