The Blog – A New Paradigm for Exploiting The Educational Resources

Marian STOICA, Bucharest, Romania, marians@ase.ro

By using blogs, the way towards a new learning environment within which the teacher and the student are connected, thus becoming more powerful, more motivated and reflective, is opened. In this way, the balance between individualized technologies and centralized ones is more stable. The use of web logs within an educational system will have a limited impact if the present dynamics of this communication system is ignored. In the light of these data, a possible resemblance with the implementation of institutionalized systems of study is underlined as an alternative form of the online studying environment.
Keywords: *information society, Internet, blog, e-learning, e-business.*

Personal online journals- **the *blogs*** – have managed to transform the internet from a network of computers into one of the humans and of their relationships. „The global village" foretold four centuries ago by Marshall McLuham (Marshall McLuham) seems to be closer to us now more than ever. With an audience that may vary from a few friends and family members to hundreds of thousands of daily visitors, blogs change slowly but for sure the face of the internet that is transformed in a global network of conversations. People tied up by common interests are introduced to each other even if it is more than likely that these individuals may never meet face to face other than by using web cams.

Blogs may be classified in the following categories:

a. *News and politics*. Lately, we notice the tendency of political candidates for incorporating the blogging within their campaigns. Some candidates are actually writing themselves into blogs, while others, especially presidential candidates, designate members of their campaign team to take over the responsibility of blogging.

b. *Personal*. The format of a blog also allows the less experienced users of computers to post easily. People post in their bloggs poems, prose, various thoughts, daily experiences, many times allowing the others to contribute. Online journals are part of the life of high-school teenagers and students. Friends use blogs in order to communicate with each other.

c. *Business*. The stock exchange is a popular subject of blogs. Amateurs, as well as professional investors use blogs in order to share the secrets of stock exchange. These blogs are also used in order to promote or slander certain companies, to impose and disseminate economical concepts.

c.l *The use of blogs with a corporational purpose*. A blog may be a weapon for elective or advertising campaigns because the author of it is an issuer of opinions with influence upon the public. Thus, blogging becomes an important element in marketing campaigns.

c.2 *Blogging – a form of cibermarketing*. Within the virtual context, marketing is tied up with the selling activity, with electronic trade and electronic business. Cibermarketing activities are a union of the following activities: marketing, economy and technology. Companies perform cibermarketing activities through their online information strategy or online marketing by using blogs. The reduced cost and high efficiency of the virtual world, as well as the world expansion of computer networks offer marketers unprecedented opportunities with respect to new target segments of marketing activities, especially oriented toward clients.

d. *Collaborative*. Many blogs are written by more than a person (often by a certain subject). Collaborative blogs may be opened to anyone or may be limited to a group of people. MetaFilter is an example. Slashdot, whose status is still debated, has a team of editors which approve and post links every

day to the news from the technology domain.
e.*Educational*. Students may use blogs in order to record what they are studying and teachers in order to record what they are teaching. For example, a teacher may post on a blog a course, specifying the themes of the lecture and the links for the helping resources from the internet. This use has many advantages: the student may easily retrieve, in case he/she lost a course; the teacher may use the blog as course plan; the blog serves for summary of the course that other students and teachers will be able to use it.

f.*Blogs depending on the topic*. There are themes of common interest in blogo-sphere: health, traveling, research, legislation, religion, media, animals, war.

g.*Forums*. An internet forum is not technically a blog, but a blog may function as a forum. Existing forums on the internet usually allow any user to post. Blogs limit the use of the posting process, being accessible only to the blogger or to those from the approved list. The distinction between blogs and forums is not always clear.

The information and communication technology is known as a means of shaping the future of the world and of achieving the development objectives presented in the statement of the millennium but the world leaders reached to the conclusion that in order to build an impartial information society we need a dialogue and a global vision (figure 1).
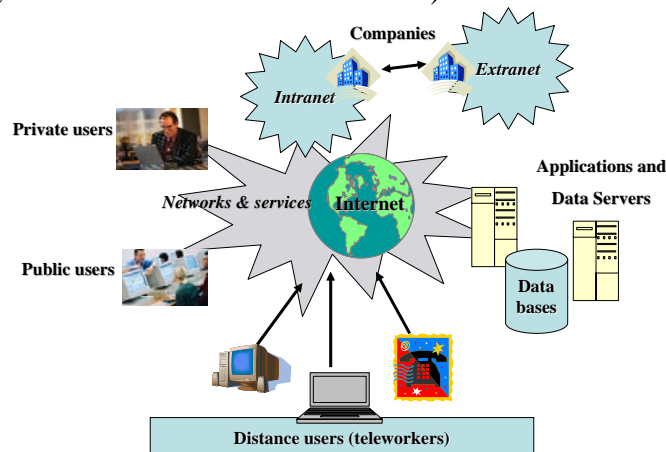

Figure 1. Main configuration of the information society

Ever since the beginning of the year 2001, a few institutions and many teachers have included blogs within their online pedagogical strategy. During this period, the technology on which the weblog (blog) was based evolved to a very high accessibility and easiness in use so that the technological barriers that prevented its putting into practice disappeared. The blog and the technology associated to it prove to be commencement of the most important technological development in the science of online teaching and learning ever since the appearance of learning management systems - LMS (Learning Management System).

This development gained an even higher importance due to the dynamics of communication born with the help of blog technologies. While traditional learning systems (LMS) save and present the entire information centralized and hierarchically fundamental, being limited within this system of organization, blogs are distributed, global, open and independent.

While these possibilities are extremely important aspects about the base of forming a blog, without any doubt, the highest development in this aria is the visual and object representation and the birth of the digital identity and of an XML language known as RSS. By using the nowadays blog technology, individual people have the extremely easy possibility of representing themselves online, RSS allowing the users to subscribe to a web page and to create a new content within that one. This may be achieved either by using an application similar to an e-mail inbox, known as a place of summing the information, either by using a web environment that may be described as being „an in-

formation collector".

RSS language was at the base of the birth of a completely new system of communication and interaction with information. Asynchrony online communication takes place within University learning system, by e-mail or informative lists, a comparison between them being next presented.
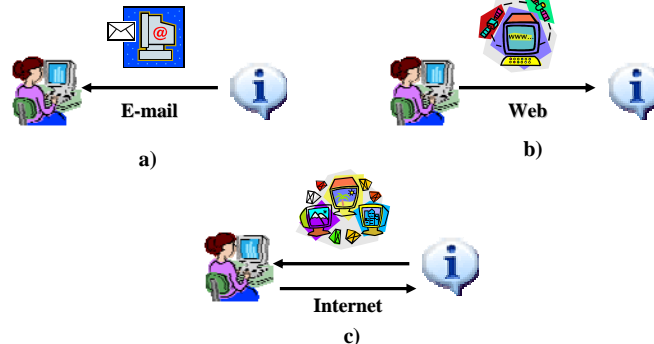

Figure 2. Blog Suport

By *e-mail*, presented in figure 2.a, the control of the communication channel is entirely made by the one who generates the subject of discussions. As a result, the e-mail discussion groups may be characterized from time to time as being a war of information with anti-social tendencies and the feeling of being disturbed by the others. More than that, the information conveyed is transitory and is not saved in a certain place, except individual bodies (e-mail inboxes of users), this having a limited value in order to be taken into account in a global communication system.

Informative lists presented in image 2.b differ from email due to the fact that the user has to visit the web page in order to access information. In this case, information of the same nature is saved in private location and the user may refer to it by posting comments on the website. As a result, users may express themselves with respect to the existing information by deliberately visiting the web page that hosts it.

RSS, illustrated in image 2.c differs from email or informative lists due to the fact that the user may choose where to receive the information from and in most of the cases, how much information will reach him/her (information summary, only new titles or the entire content). The publication of own informative materials allows users to communicate only with the ones he/she selected, giving control of the process to both participant parties. More than that, most of the systems based on RSS have systems with stand-alone applications that are in the computer of users or web applications; for the user, only the checking of newly arrived information is necessary.

As a result of these attributes, blogs are used with educational purposes, with different roles, as an extension and some times as a replacement of existing communication systems. This included the connection of various universities in view of expanding the information area and facilitating the change of experience, informative bulletins and of online communication.

In the traditional learning management system, the content and the participants are generally segmented in specific areas such as: informative lists, learning modules and chat discussion environments, synchronized (figure 3). Participants may communicate in specific areas through informative lists and interact with the information located in separate areas. Practically, participants are concentrated on the informative lists and their content. Within the online studying environments based on blogs, the information content appears as being integrated with links, comments and other related information. The communication between participants is centered on each individual, being a sum of information, comments, individual blogs and afferent hyperlinks to each user.

In business terms, the blog may be best defined as an opportunity, either by promoting or consolidating an image by communicating with others. Blogs have exploded and will continue to rapidly de-

velop because they make public uncensored opinions. Most companies do not realize the power of influence that blogs have, almost never answer to the problems raised by blogs and do not use blogs as a marketing instrument or public relations.
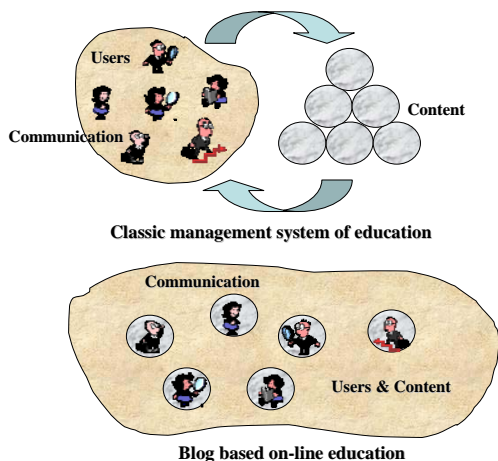

Figure 3. Blog Environments

Internet users who write blogs prefer to be directly contacted and to discuss with the employees of companies. Half of those who have opened an internet blog make public at least once a week, information about various companies, their products and employees. The nature of the internet makes highly unpredictable the evolution of a message posted on a blog: it is possible that the information might get lost in the virtual space just as it is in the same way possible that many other „internet surfers" to agree with this and forward it.

The monitoring process of blogs may indicate potential communication problems of some companies but also the way in which

the public perceives a certain situation. The message is clear enough: companies must evaluate and follow blogs depending on their importance, taking into account certain aspects such as the audience level and its structure, but also the credibility associated to the respective blog, its capacity as an issuer of opinions. Blogs should be taken serious as an instrument of communication for companies.

The most difficult part is tied with the language used in the relationship with bloggers that have clearly shown that do not want answers in stiff, corporate manner to the issues raised, just as that they do not want to be dealt with as some figures in a statistical report.

Reference

[1] *eEurope – An Information Society for All*, Progress Report, For the Special European Council on Employment, Economic reforms and Social Cohesion – Towards a Europe based on Innovation and Knowledge, Lisboan, 23-24 march 2000

[2] Bausch, P., M. Haughey, et al. (2002). We Blog: Publishing Online with Weblogs. Indianapolis, Wiley.

[3] Blood, R. (2002). The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog. Cambridge, MA, Perseus Publishing.

[4] Blood, R. (2002). We've Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture. Cambridge, MA, Perseus Pub.

[5] Powers, Shelley. Editor. (2002). Essential Blogging. Sebastopol, Calif., O'Reilly.