Look familiar? Perhaps you’ve stumbled across a similarly styled, time-stamped entry as you’ve browsed for news of the latest political scandal, library book challenge or similar Internet factoid. If so, you have already encountered the phenomenon of “blogging.”

Jorn Barger coined the term “weblog” in December of 1997. However, according to Rebecca Blood, the inaugural weblog can most likely be credited to Mosaic’s “What's New” page, which appeared from June 1993 to June 1996.

Today’s blog continues to follow in this tradition, albeit in ever more interesting circumstances and increasing numbers. The Globe and Mail estimated that over 500,000 blogs have come into existence, with 41,000 new blogs created in January 2002 alone. There are numerous historical essays for the curious to peruse, but as they say, the rest is blogging history.4

Blogging 101

Cameron Barrett’s essay “Anatomy of a Weblog” broke ground by attempting to define the components of a successful weblog.5

Blogs may be generalized to mean regularly updated web pages, consisting of an online journal of news, interesting links, opinions and nuggets of information. Entries are dated, categorized and archived to enable readers to find their way around the site and to maintain a knowledge bank for future reference. Creators range from a single writer to a community of contributors – anyone may publish a weblog from a celebrity to the kid next door. Unlike other forms of publishing, the only editor to oversee the production is the one to whom the creator has given power.

All the same, why blog?

Motivations for writing a blog vary, but most bloggers share one trait:
Blogging Software

Considering starting your own blog? There are a number of software programs available for use, and more are being developed. The most popular platforms include Blogger, Moveable Type, Radio Userland, Greymatter and PHP Nuke. An excellent list called “Blog Software” is available on Al Macintyre’s radio weblog at radio.weblogs.com/0107846/stories/2002/10/03/blogSoftware.html.

More on RSS

News aggregators come in both online and downloadable flavors. NewsIsFree and Syndic8 are two popular online services that assemble RSS feeds into a single site. Users can customize the service to incorporate their favourite feeds and display them in a number of formats. If downloading software onto your system isn’t a problem, you may prefer a program like Amphetadesk or Feedreader, which may allow for more flexibility to suit your tastes.

A good definition of Rich Site Summary can be found at: searchwebservices.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0, id26_gci813358,00.html.

A list of RSS readers is available at: blogspace.com/rss/readers.


Blogging in the library world

It makes sense that our profession, grounded in the value of information sharing, would be seduced by weblogs. Sites such as Library Stuff (www.librarystuff.net), Peter Scott's Library Blog (blog.xrefer.com) and librarian.net (www.librarian.net) are samples of blogs that chronicle the trends and events shaping modern librarianship. The collegial spirit is alive and well in blogs such as Blake Carver’s LISnews (lisnews.com), which actively solicits readers to register and post worthy items. Most sites even provide connections to related blogs.

There are also blogs covering narrower librarian-oriented topics. PDA enthusiasts may follow The Handheld Librarian (handheld.lib.blogspot.com) – “Librarians sharing news, applications, and ideas of interest with others working with handheld computer technology.” David Bigwood’s catalogablog (catalogablog.blogspot.com) offers cataloguers a place to discover findings on “cataloging, classification, metadata, subject access and related topics.” Guy Aron hosts eprintblog...

The almost fanatical zeal of bloggers in their areas of interest can mean that their blogs are excellent sources of up-to-date information. For example, Peter Suber’s FOS News (www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html) is one that tracks the “free online scholarship” movement currently occupying the minds of many librarians. And Gary Frost’s blog (www.futureofthebook.com) covers current issues in the “preservation and persistence of the changing book.” A blog can become your current awareness best friend.

Blogging @ your library?

Blogs can serve libraries in a number of ways. New resources, research tips or event calendars can easily be posted, allowing library patrons to check the blog and use the comment option to provide feedback. Consider the following examples of library weblogs:

In the public library
• Parents’ advisory weblog: advises parents of additions to the children’s library, along with reviews, news and other relevant tidbits. Parents can provide feedback and opinions on new acquisitions, along with purchase suggestions.

• Children’s book review weblog: allows children to post reviews of picture books, stories and novels they’ve read. Young readers can safely share ideas and comments with others while developing their writing skills and becoming familiar with the library’s web site. Spin-off blogs might include a book club.

• Virtual book club/readers’ advisory weblog: provides news of the latest books, CDs, DVDs, etc., and gives patrons the opportunity to post reviews and comments, as well as suggestions for the collection, to the blog forum.

In the academic library
• Faculty/departmental advisory weblog: facilitates communication with instructors, researchers and grad students in a department or faculty with customized content on acquisitions, library news and current information in their area of interest.

Or more generally
• Suggestion box weblog: Libraries might find virtual suggestion boxes are an innovative way to reach users. Suggestions could be displayed anonymously, with responses and ideas posted for others to build on.

• Services weblog: Not all weblogs have a comment function. Weblog versions of FAQs and calendars could be updated with ease, with news and information about reference services, hours of operation, events and so on.

But we digress: subject blogs

Subject or discipline-specific blogs offer librarians a means of tapping into the findings of others who monitor their research areas. Blogs are a fantastic tool for highlighting resources or late-breaking news. The Open Directory Project lists several subject-specific blogs that are good examples, including Nanoapex.com (nanotechnology), Nodalpoint.org (bioinformatics) and www.weblogg-ed.com (education).

Blogging pitfalls

The number one challenge each blogger faces is time. Basic blogging software is relatively easy to master, but tweaking and customizing your site can quickly eat away the hours. Add the time invested in monitoring new sites and creating new entries, and you may soon find you’re spending more time in front of your keyboard than you planned.

There can be costs involved as well. If you wish to run your weblog using software with added bells and whistles, you will need server access that can support this functionality. If you’re happy with free hosting packages, you may have to live with ads. To avoid ads, users can check
out the new hosting co-operative LISHost.com, which offers “books, bytes and bandwidth” for attractive rates and with library blog-friendly service.

Finding the time to keep up

The reproduction rate of blogs is growing exponentially, and you could find that keeping up drowns you in information. One coping strategy involves gathering your news in an RSS, or Rich Site Summary aggregator. RSS allows creators to easily distribute their blog postings as an XML feed to other web pages. Voilà – instant content distribution! Also, the RSS feed can be gathered into an RSS news aggregator so that readers can view content from multiple blogs in a single place.

The future

Blogging and weblogs have arrived. They have morphed and expanded from simple, online diaries into sites about news and current events, editorials and opinions, subject-specific interests, library applications, and beyond. This article just touches the surface of this burgeoning movement. We invite you to join the fray, and explore a new way to communicate with your peers, colleagues and friends.

Books on Blogging

Essays and articles on weblogs seem to appear almost daily online, in journals and in newspapers. Books on blogging are a newer phenomenon, evidenced by the publication dates of these titles:


Geoffrey Harder and Randy Reichardt are public service librarians at the Science & Technology Library, University of Alberta. You can find their weblogs at www.blogdriverswaltz.com and www.podbaydoor.com.

Notes