



Blogging and the Media Specialist

MEDIA MATTERS

By Doug Johnson

Doug Johnson has been director of media and technology for the Mankato (Minnesota) Public Schools since 1991. He is a veteran author whose works have appeared in books, journals, and magazines. Johnson serves on ISTE's board of directors and as a volunteer columnist for L&L.

Have you noticed that the Web is undergoing a transformation? Are terms like blogs, wikis, podcasts, and RSS feeds now a part of your and your students' vocabularies? If they aren't, they should be. These forms of communication and information management are part of what Tim O'Reilly describes as a shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0: a movement from the Web being a static means of one-way, mass communication to an interactive, personal communication medium. (*Editor's note:* Find O'Reilly's and other articles listed under Resources at the end of this column.)

The next two Media Matters columns will focus on a single aspect of the Web 2.0 movement: Web logs, or blogs as they are more commonly called. In this issue, I look at the definition of a blog, show you how to find blogs to read, give ideas to help you keep up with them, and present a short list of professional library media and technology-related blogs. In the May 2006 issue, Frances Jacobson Harris, library media specialist at University Laboratory High School, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will describe how she and others use blogs as a means of communication in the library media program and will share her observations about how students use blogs.

So What's a Blog?

A blog in its most generic sense is a Web site that is updated on a regular basis, displays the content in reverse chronological order (newest entries first), and allows, even invites, reader response. See "Writing with Weblogs" by Glen

Bull, Gina Bull, and Sara Kajder (*L&L*, September 2003) and EDUCAUSE's *Seven Things You Should Know About Blogs* for good overviews. Although text remains the primary means bloggers use to communicate, these sites increasingly include text, audio (podcasts), and video clips. Anything found on a Web page can be found on a blog. For example, Will Richardson at Weblogg-ed (<http://www.weblogg-ed.com>) makes some interesting observations about using blogs for "connective writing," pushing the envelope about the definition of a blog.

A blog requires little, if any, knowledge of HTML coding. Many no-cost sites allow the creation and hosting of a blog. Popular blog sites include Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>), Livejournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>) and Xanga (<http://www.xanga.com>). Edublogs (<http://edublogs.org>) and Blog Meister (<http://epnweb.org/blogmeister>) are specifically designed to support use by educators.

Blogs got their start as personal journals, often with highly political overtones. But increasingly, blogs are replacing e-zines and static Web sites as a means for organizations to communicate with members and customers on a more formal basis. Some K-12 schools have replaced their regular Web sites with blogs that are easy for multiple authors to update.

Finding Blogs of Personal Interest

There are two basic ways of locating blogs of interest (among the 20+ million existing!): using a search engine or finding links to other blogs on blogs themselves.

Three popular specialized blog search tools are Technorati (<http://www.technorati.com>), Google Blog Search (<http://blogsearch.google.com>), and Bloglines (<http://www.bloglines.com>). In their current forms, I've found these tools to be rather inefficient.

Another means of finding blogs of interest is to examine the "blogs I read" or "blogroll" section that is a common part of many blogs. If you find a particular blog interesting, there is a good chance you will like the blogs the writer of that blog reads.

Keeping Up with Blogs

It's easy to find a large number of blogs that have interesting and useful content. But it's time consuming to bookmark and check each blog on a daily basis for updates, especially when updates to most blogs are made irregularly. An RSS (Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication) feed aggregator (e.g., Bloglines) can help.

RSS is programming code in a Web page that allows readers to "subscribe" to the site, and be alerted when additions have been made.

Most blogs include an RSS feed that aggregators recognize. Bloglines, a simple, free, online RSS aggregator becomes a blog reader's one-stop shop for organizing blogs and checking for blog updates. After adding the URL for a blog to your "feeds," a single glance at this Web site will show whether a blog has been updated. The new entry can either be read in Bloglines itself, or the reader can click through to the actual blog site itself. A very good tutorial is available.

Recommended Blogs

Although blogs tend to come and go, some are updated more regularly than others, I've found the following to have interesting and current content.

Increasingly, blogs are replacing e-zines and static Web sites as a means for organizations to communicate with members and customers on a more formal basis.

School Library Media

Alice in Infoland (Alice Yucht):
<http://aliceinfo.squarespace.com/blog/>

The Blue Skunk Blog (Doug Johnson):
<http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/blue-skunk-blog>

Deep Thinking (Diane Chen):
<http://deephinking.blogspot.com>

The Free Range Librarian (Karen Schneider): <http://freerangelibrarian.com>

Infomancy (Chris Harris):
<http://www.schoolof.info/infomancy>

Infosearcher (Pam Berger):
<http://www.infosearcher.com/>

Librarian in the Middle (Robert Eiffert):
<http://www.beiffert.net/wordpress/>

The Neverending Search (Joyce Valenza):
<http://joycevalenza.edublogs.org>

School Library Journal Blog (Amy Bowllan): <http://www.schoollibrary-journal.com/blog>

Ed Tech

The Committed Sardine (Ian Jukes):
<http://homepage.mac.com/iajukes/blogwavestudio>

Education/Technology (Tim Lauer):
<http://tim.lauer.name/>

Kaffeeklatsch (Kathy Schrock):
<http://kathyschrock.blogspot.com>

Neat New Stuff (Marylaine Block): <http://www.marylaine.com/neatnew.html>

Pedersondesigns (John Pederson):
<http://pedersondesigns.com>

The Savvy Technologist (Tim Wilson):
<http://technosavvy.org>

Teach and Learn Online (Leigh Blackall):
<http://teachandlearnonline.blogspot.com/>

2 Cents Worth (David Warlick):
<http://davidwarlick.com/2cents>

Weblogg-ed (Will Richardson):
<http://www.weblogg-ed.com>

For an interesting view of librarian bloggers worldwide, look at the Frapper Web site (<http://www.frappr.com/blogginglibrarians>). And add yourself if you are a library blogger.

In the role of "information expert," school library media specialists should know about blogs and use them professionally. They are an increasingly popular source of information and a popular communication tool for students and adults. They can be a powerful tool for media specialists to communicate with staff and students. And they bring with them their own special set of safe, ethical, and appropriate use issues.

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Resources

O'Reilly, T. (2005). *What is Web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software*. Available: <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>

Bull, G., Bull, G., & Kajder, S. (2003).

Writing with Weblogs. *Learning & Leading with Technology*, 31(1), pp. 32–35. Available: <http://www.iste.org/ll/> (Scroll to the bottom of the page and use the Search L&L feature.)

EDUCAUSE (2005). *Seven things you should know about blogs*. Available: <http://www.educause.edu/LibraryDetailPage/666?ID=ELI7006>