Blog: A Tool for Online Library Services

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Abstract

"Blog" a new online tool is being effectively used by various libraries across the world to update users regarding library resources and services. The paper highlights on types of blogs, blogs in library case, Aim or Purpose of Library Blogs , how to start a Library Blog a blog with suitable examples, Outreach Services ,Problems of Blogs , areas in which it can be best implemented. Blog is a welcome and easy tool to be used in the libraries to provide various modern library services and expose electronic resources especially it is a best place to expose thought, aim and vision of the library.

Keywords: Web blog, Library Blogs

1. Introduction

A blog is a frequently updated online personal journal or diary. It is a place to express you to the world. A place to share your thoughts and your passions. Really, it's anything you want it to be. For our purposes we'll say that a blog is your own website that you are going to update on an ongoing basis. Blog is a short form for the word weblog and the two words are used interchangeably.Blogs are a relatively recent Internet Event, dating from the late 1990s. Blogs began as primarily personal diaries, they have now morphed into powerhouses of opinion and information, as they are ideal for publishing rich information on any topic, no m atter how big or how small. Blogs are used to consolidate resources that may otherwise be shared through an excessive number of e- mails to advocate a position or personal points of view, to cover areas of interest too small for print publishing and for news and commentary or any topic or area that requires frequent updating. As the users and the uses of blogs have multiplied, they have begun to take on different forms and shapes to meet a wide variety of needs. However, the basic definition for a blog has remained the same. "A Weblog is a Web page that provides frequent continuing publication of Web links and/or comments on a specific topic or subject (broad or narrow in scope), often in the form of short entries arranged in reverse chronological order, the most recently added piece of information appearing first. An example in the field of library and information science is LISNews.com, which accepts postings from its readers.

Terminology

As so often happens in the English language, many derivatives of the word blog have been created. One who participates in the activities of maintaining a blog is known as a blogger and the activity of keeping a blog is known as blogging. So we could say that the blogger blogs in his blog, but that might cause your English

teacher to weep. We are going to use these terms with alarming frequency, so make sure you understand what they mean before you go on.

Blog (noun) – a journal or diary that is on the Internet.

Blogger (noun) – a person who keeps a blog – Bloggers are revolutionizing the way news is shared.

Blog (verb) – to write a blog – I am going to blog before breakfast this morning.

Blogging (verb) – the action of writing a blog – Blogging is my way of sharing my passions with the world.

2.Types of Blogs

There are various types of blogs, and each differs in the way content is delivered or written.

1. By Media Type: A Blog comprising videos is called a vlog, one comprising links is called a linklog, a site containing a portfolio of sketches is called a sketchblog or one comprising photos is called a photoblog. Blogs with shorter posts and mixed media types are called tumblelogs.

2. By Device: Blogs can also be defined by which type of device is used to compose it. A blog written by a mobile device like a mobile phone or PDA is called a moblog.

3. By Subject: Some blogs focuses on a particular subject, such as political blogs, travel blogs, fashion blogs, project blogs, legal blogs or dreamlogs. A blog can be private, as in most cases, or it can be for business purposes. Blogs, either used internally to enhance the communication and culture in a corporation or externally for marketing, branding or PR purposes are called corporate blogs.

4. Aim or Purpose of Library Blogs

The aim and purpose of setting a blog in the library is basically to provide information on the following aspects:

- News or Information for Users
- Links to recommended Internet resources
- Book Reviews, Information about new books
- Entertainment and amusement for users
- News or Information for Librarians
- Research Tips

5. Starting a Library Blog

One of the special features of the blogs is that much blogging software is either free or inexpensive to use. One can have free account at a service like Blogger, Live Journal. Before starting a library blog one should make it clear the type of audience the library is serving, whether blog is a right tool for reaching the users? What key messages the library wish to send? What is the purpose of the blog? Also one has to think of the sufficient number of target users to make a blog worthwhile. What are the characteristics of the users? Will they appreciate short, newsy updates? Next one needs to decide on the content and scope of the blog. What are the key messages that the library wants to convey? Whether the library wants to promote awareness of services and new resources to draw users attention to the library or to encourage the use of virtual services? or the library is looking for a way to be more interactive with certain groups of community, such as researchers, faculty, students, children etc. who might participate online but not face to face? Once the target audience, key messages and purpose of the blog, toolkit requirements are decided, narrow down the field of dozens of

blogging tools to a few by answering three questions.

    a. Would the library want to install blogging software locally on a desktop or on web server?

    b. What type of security is necessary? will the blog be available to anyone or willing be password protected will there be mandated quidelines for content to stay within the organization's firewall?

    c. What features is the library looking for in the blogging toolkit.

Depending on the situation, using a remote blogging service might be the ideal solution. If web developers are overburdened, a remote hosted blogging service that allows setting up a blog site by filling out a registration form may be just a thing. If it is planned to install blogging software locally, one will need to select software that runs either on library's webserver or on desktop computers and use a supported programming language like PHP, Perl, Java, Coldfusion, etc.

Blogging software developers have been quick to add new features and functions to help bloggers. As a result there are dozens of features to choose from. Here are a few popular ones to think about:

Archives: Can the blog automatically create daily, monthly, or yearly archives? What schedule works best for your blog? If you have lots of entries each day, you'll probably want daily. If content is sparse, then monthly or yearly archives would work better.

Categories: Do you need categories? Will blog readers want to browse by broad topical areas such as health, sports, or cooking?

Search: Will site visitors want to search the archives of old posts?

Community Tools: Do you want content to be posted by many people? Do you want to let readers leave comments and create a personal profile?

Subscription Lists: Will your readers want to come to your site each day to read your posts, or would they prefer to receive a daily digest delivered to their mailboxes?

Headline Syndication: Will you want other Web sites to be able to show your headlines? Or will you want to reach individuals who use RSS newsreaders to monitor news? RSS files are a truly wonderful way to syndicate your content and spread the word about the content at your site. For example, a public library's headlines could be shown on a city's Web site or on those of dozens of associations and organizations. A corporate library's RSS feed could show up in a companywide news-and-events area as well as on departmental or task-based pages. To find out more about RSS feeds, check out the list of RSS Resources.

Design: See how easy it is to customize the design so you can make it match your library site or add a new "skin." Last but not least, to get a blog off the ground you need a talented writer. You need to find a library staff member who is passionate about words and can write succinctly. Brevity is important. At the onset of blogging, it's useful to develop a set of standard editorial conventions to keep the blog consistent over time. Consider the name of your library—will you use an acronym or always spell it out in full? Are headlines entered with title case? Like any other publication, quality is an essential ingredient for success.

How Blogs Can Help with Marketing
There are dozens of ways that libraries are using blogs already. The most obvious application is for library news, which you need to be able to update frequently and easily. Blogging software helps make this job easy enough for anyone to do it. Here are other ways to use blogs to your advantage:

Promote Library Events: Create a blog that promotes library events and programs. Reach out beyond the visitors to your regular Web site. Set up an RSS feed for your blog and alert

everyone in your community that they can include your headlines on their sites or can use an RSS newsreader to see what's up at the library. E-commerce sites try to turn each visitor into a repeat customer. Libraries can try this too. Put an e-mail subscription form on the blog site and encourage visitors to sign up. This type of permission-based marketing is your chance to send library news straight to the user's in box on a regular basis. It's an opportunity to invite visitors to come back to the library or its Web site over and over again.

Make your blog stand out from the crowd by including some special content that captures readers' interest. For example, include a "quote of the day" from a famous literary work, run a trivia quiz each Friday, or share an interesting fact about your community each week. Some libraries keep lists of "interesting questions and answers" that could be shared. Don't be afraid to develop a unique voice for your blog, whether it's that of a friendly helper that explains mysteries or an authoritative approach that focuses on giving "just the facts."

Support Your Dedicated Users: An obvious hit with most library visitors is finding out what new books, videos, CDs, or DVDs have been added to the collection. Think about setting up topics on your blog for each genre: mysteries, horror, science fiction, romance, and so on. In an academic library, prepare special alerts about new resources and Web sites for particular departments or colleges.

Engage Your Community: Post new book reviews and book award lists. Invite comments and suggestions. Create an online book discussion area by asking readers to recommend books to others.

Support Your Community: Librarians are always looking for ways to offer value-added services. Can you offer a special service with the blog and reach a new audience? A local election news blog that posts announcements about candidate Web sites, nominations, and meetings might be a natural project for libraries that are mandated to make local council minutes and agendas available to the public.

Building New Ties: Are you trying to reach a new area of your community? What about offering a blog in another language to provide short entries on upcoming programs and new resources? Perhaps you are trying to reach out to teachers in order to market library services and to make sure that school visits work effectively for the library and the schools. What about starting a blog-style newsletter that's just for teachers? You can focus on special services for teachers, programs for schools, new research resources, book lists, and seasonal Web sites of interest. Some blogs allow you to have extended entries and include feature articles. Promoting your library's services, resources, and programs online can be a lot easier with the help of a blog. A great library blog requires three ingredients: inspiration, motivation, and dedication. Inspiration is that "ah-ha" moment when your new marketing idea meshes perfectly with a blog as the delivery vehicle. Motivation is the energy to put good ideas into practice and helps launch the new blog. Dedication is what comes next. It's the hard work that keeps the blog updated with pithy, lively posts on a constant basis. Blogs can be very effective tools for reaching online audiences.

6. Library Application

Blogs can be useful in the library and information centers to promote the following services in the library. **6.1 Outreach Services**

Building a community of library users depending on the type of users library can post information e.g. teens, students, neo-literate etc. Many other outreach services can be planned /executed using blog e.g. library can facilitate linking between online book stores and users for personal purchases of library users. It is observed that book vendors do give higher discount, if users are ordering from specific blog/site.

6.2 Dissemination of Information

Useful in dissemination of information to the library users such as information about new

websites, service notices, announcements, updates, event information etc. Current awareness service can be delivered very efficiently using blogs. For example new additions list can be posted on page with RSS enabled features; users will get only entries matching to their requests on their blogs and don't need to visit library pages for this purpose. All the users can subscribe to RSS feeds of specific section and library can keep posting information at one place thus avoiding mass mailing. Blogging enables instant delivery of information being published to all RSS feed subscribers in a respective area. Also, if any changes or corrections need to be done, it is possible to do at only one place.

6.3 Library Administrator

Thoughts from library staff encourage openness, transparency, and add a voice to the library. Blogs provide platform to all staff members to express / share / contribute more on various professional issues. Information about training, conferences, tacit knowledge on tools, etc captured / measured easily using library blog.

6.4 Community Building

Librarians benefit from sharing of best practices and experiences. Blogs are a timely way to offer advice and commentary on current library issues. Blogs also provide facility to reader to post his/her opinion or experience. Sharing of experience, views from different users (across globe) builds strong community of user base. Learning and sharing becomes very easy and effective using Blogs.

6.5 Library Resources

Blogs can be used to highlight new and valuable resources added into the library. Blogs even work as web page and provide access to various free / subscribed electronic resources. Same area can be used for collecting feedback, providing training tips, sharing experience, rating

information products etc which finally result in better utilization of library resources

6.6 Fast communication

Blogs are useful to facilitate communication between the project team, who are working on projects n the institutions/libraries. RSS enabled information publishing provides easy way of communication

between RSS feed subscribers / users of blog. Any information published will be automatically collated on individual blogs/pages. Similarly, blogs can be used for collecting inputs from different sites / sources without any additional repetitive efforts.

6.7 Marketing of Library

There is increased awareness about return of investment in all types of libraries including corporate, special, academic and public libraries. In few cases fund / budget is being allotted to libraries on the basis of inputs of library to organization for the development. Many libraries keep providing valuable services but reach of those services is limited to few users. If user base is increased, display of library services as well as inputs for organizational development too increases. For such things librarians need to market library services (Lending, Reference, CAS, SDI, etc), resources (Collection of books reports, A/v Material, e journals, databases, etc), expertise (especially information searching and repackaging skills), database searching etc to the users. Effective marketing of all the above is possible from blogs, which removes time and geographical barrier. Promoting library services through blog is most economical and creative way. Sharing of resources also becomes extremely easy as well as it promotes sharing of resources within users without coming to the library.

7. Problems of Blogs

There are some of the following problems may due to the use of blogs, hence library staff have to be careful about these aspects:

a. Copy right issues related to information being published on a blog

b. Secrecy of information. security

c. Use of blog as anti-publicity tool against a person/institution/country or anything which is

 harmful to everyone, any group, or public.

8. Conclusion

Blog is a welcome and easy tool to be used in the libraries to provide various modern library services and expose electronic resources especially it is a best place to espose thought, aim and vision of the library. However, this tool can be best used only when library professionals try and apply it in their libraries. This kind of new tools being given as the gift of Internet need to be learnt and applied then only libraries can add value addition to their services and show their existence to the world.

9. Suggestion

- Update the Library blog & web browsers so that students can access the newer blog services and UC Davis and other sites that require.
- Blogging software developers have been quick to add new features and functions to help bloggers.
- A Library blog is a very valuable online tool of library services, so the library made it easier to access the users. Bloggers very much need this service.

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