

Blogs

Introduction

A Weblog (also known as a web log or a 'blog') is a web application on which dated entries are posted on a webpage on a particular topic. Weblogs can vary in form from sites maintained by one individual to multiple contributor weblogs where information is posted by approved contributors after editor approval: many weblogs allow the creation of a community of interest based on the particular topic of the blog. A 'blogstorm' or 'blog swarm' happens when there is an explosion of interest, or posting of opinions and information around a particular subject. Weblogs were originally set up by web professionals; today, most webloggers (or 'bloggers') do not need a technical background and sites can be relatively easily set up and maintained.

Detailed description of the process

Before setting up a weblog, consider what form is appropriate for your needs: according to Wikipedia there are 16 types of weblog, including the following:

- Personal weblog: online diary or journal posts written by friends connected.
- Thoughtful weblog: an individual's (or small group's) thoughts on a topic.
- Topical blog: concentrate on a particular specialised topic.
- News blog: a news compendium on a particular subject.
- Collaborative/collective/group blog: involves multiple contributors on a particular topic, although can be a selected group or open to anyone.
- Political blog: includes the watch blog in which an author(s) critiques what he/she/they see as consistent errors or bias in an online newspaper or news site.
- Legal blog: often referred to as blawgs, these sites discuss law and legal affairs.
- Directory blog: often collect numerous websites with interesting content on a topic.
- Corporate blog: employees post official or semi-official blogs about their work.
- Advice blog: sites that provide expert technical advice.
- Format blogs: sites with a specialist form of presentation, such as images or videos, or on a particular theme. Examples include audio, photography and video ('vlog') weblogs.

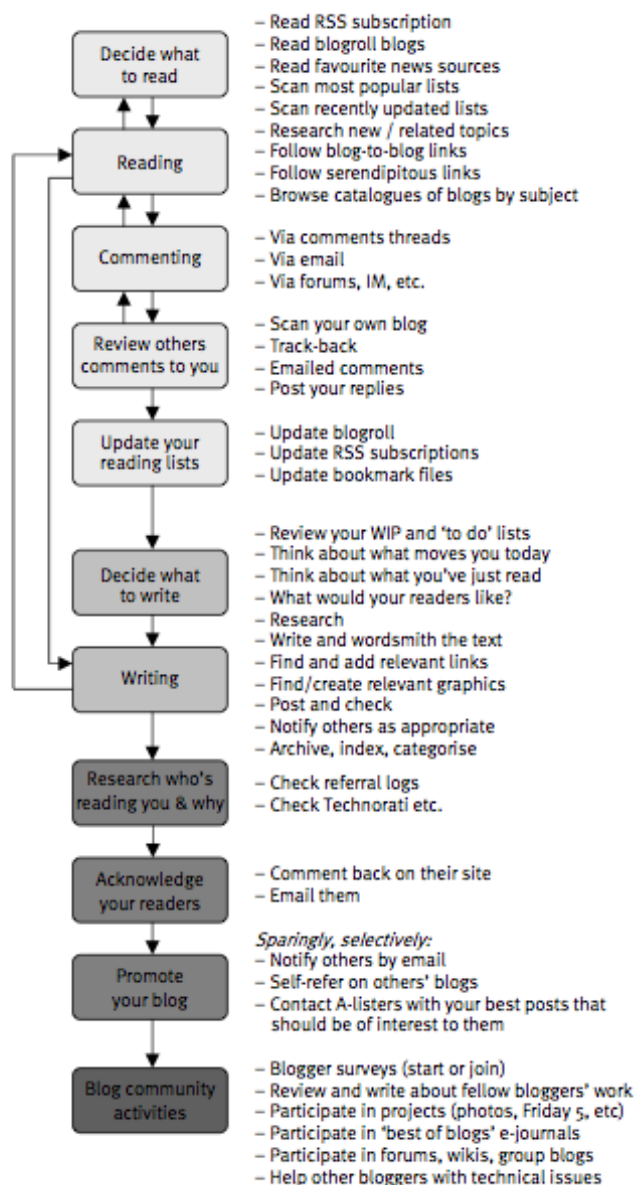
Browse through the range of software packages to select the most appropriate for you: a range of packages have sprung up including GreatestJournal, Pitas, Blogger, LiveJournal and Xanga (Wikipedia) and web hosting companies and online publications also provide blog creation tools such as Salon, Tripod and Bravenet. These provide varying levels of support and functionality, so select the package that best suits your skills and requirements. For more advanced bloggers, there are a range of server- side software tools to publish on their own website or a third-party site, or to host a group of blogs (see Wikipedia for further

details) such as Nucleus CMS, Movable Type and WordPress. Weblogs can also be programmed using PHP, CGI or other server-side software, which allow more freedom of creativity but can be more complicated to set up and maintain.

A list of questions to ask yourself when evaluating weblog software includes (Blood, 2002):

- Can you easily identify how to create and delete an entry?
- Can you easily change the way the site looks?
- How do you add the name of your weblog to the page?
- Does this service offer clear instructions?
- Is it easy to find help when you need it?
- Do you need to read the instructions before you can actually use the service, or are many of the available functions easily understandable just by looking?
- Are there user forums where you can ask questions?

Figure 17: The blogging process



The format of your weblog should match the purpose for which it is intended: formats vary from simple bullet lists of hyperlinks to article summaries with user-provided comments and ratings. Features common to many blogs include 'blogrolls' (list of other blogs that are linked separately from any article) and feedback comment systems or 'threads' (a comment system which allows users to post their own comments). Not all blogs have comment systems, and some have a closed commenting system which requires approval from the blog owners.

It is important to ensure that links are not lost from weblogs, and many sites archive older entries and generate a 'permalink' for individual entries, a type of a type of Uniform Resource Locator (URL) designed to refer to a specific information item and to remain unchanged permanently, or at least for a lengthy period of time (Wikipedia). Permalinks became 'the first – and most successful – attempt to build bridges between weblogs'. You can also use a 'track-back' facility so that blogs refer to each other.

Example: Blogging in international development

According to the authors of the first World Bank foray into blogging, blogs have a role to play in the international aid system.

'Blogging improves the quality of debate. For instance, an article in the Washington Post, "The Rise of a Market Mentality Means Many Go Hungry in Niger" in August 2005 drew furious responses from bloggers. That's nothing new, of course: people have always read newspaper articles and grumbled to their spouses over the breakfast table. The difference is that now commentators can find each other, track the debate, air their differences and discover more about the facts behind the story. Blogging technology makes it easy to collect comments and see who is citing your ideas. Readers are able to chase the debate across the internet at the click of the mouse, and contribute to it themselves – no matter if they are a CEO in New York or a student in a Nairobi internet café. Meanwhile, new research and opinion-forming analysis is quickly disseminated and discussed – and the number of new blogs is doubling every five months or so. This changes the terms of the development debate, too. If you typed "World Bank Blog" into Google in the summer of 2005, you'd have found that the most popular result was "WorldBankPresident.org", a free-standing site dedicated to discussing the successor for then- President James Wolfensohn and criticising the Bank's selection methods. This apparently independent site was regularly checked by many Bank staff as well as journalists seeking a convenient way to read all the gossip. Next blog down was Friends of the Earth's "World Bank blog", documenting their protests and the reasons behind them at the World Bank's spring meetings.

A backroom effort, followed by a campaigning site: the World Bank itself was nowhere to be found. The World Bank, and other development organisations such as UNDP and DFID, will have to work with this new technology, as many large corporations are trying to do. But the playing field is much more level than it was even a year ago. Being a big organisation counts for very little in the booming world of blogs – what counts is quick, relevant content. And if the playing field is being levelled within the developed world, just wait until the developing world starts to play the game. It's already happening: during this summer's Live8 campaign, some African bloggers started to complain that the concerts were irrelevant, patronising, or worse. Even just a couple of years ago, such dissenting voices from Africa would never have been heard. Huge sites, such as Harvard's Global Voices Online, are gathering together the

output of “bridge bloggers” who read local blogs and comment in English. Some countries, such as Iran, have vast blogging communities; others are tiny but growing very fast.

It has never been easier for journalists to pick up voices from the developing world – or even for you and us to do so from our desks. People all over the world are talking, but only now can we hear what they’re saying.’

Sources and further reading

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog>