

Blogs

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INTRODUCTION

A blog (shortened version of Weblog) is an online journal usually displayed on a Web site that contains entries listed in reverse chronological order. Blogs combine text, images, hyperlinks, and in some cases, audio to provide information on a specific topic. Blogs are used for a variety of purposes, primarily as self-publishing online diaries and Web journals, but they also serve as news sources for social, political, and cultural interests.

BACKGROUND

Debate exists over the genesis of the blog form, but in the late 1980s, the first model for the concept may have been online bulletin boards. Unlike listservs, bulletin boards maintained a series of threaded messages that were later archived. Readers that had access to the bulletin board could post additional messages and comments to the primary message or even threads of the discussions. Individuals seeking previous postings on a given topic could then search through the thread or board archives. Some people believe that these features established the basic structure of a blog. Yet, others believe that blogs evolved from individual personalized Web sites that presented diary-like journals and essay like comments on current events. The rise of self-publishing content on personal Web sites provided Web writers the opportunity to share their musings with an online audience. Tweney (2002) suggests that Justin Hall's *Links From the Underground* (1994) can be considered one of the earliest blogs whereas Rebecca Blood (2002) cites Mosaic's "What's New" page (1993-1996) as the "progenitor" of blogs since it was updated daily and allotted public access. Some of the other early blogs were developed by Jesse James Garnett (*Infosift*), Cameron Barrett (*Camworld*), and Dave Winer (*Scripting News*) which is considered one of the longest running blogs.

The actual term "Weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger (1997) in his blog *Robot Wisdom* and two years later, Cameron Barrett's article entitled "Anatomy of a Weblog" gave the concept of we-blogging a public forum. Werbach (2001) suggests that the collective use of the word "Weblog" to categorize online journal sites occurred around 1997 and soon thereafter the shortened version "blog" became the mainstream term. Although the first bloggers appeared to be an underground Internet community, *The New York Times* (2001) did a feature on new media for an article about emerging technologies and introduced the blog, *Lemonyellow* to public focus. Soon, as with any other new Internet fad, the list of new blog sites began to expand causing many of the veteran bloggers to distinguish themselves from the novices. To maintain separation, veteran bloggers began to create "blogrolls" and blog neighborhoods which established specific protocols for acceptance into the established community. Even today, blog writers have formed Webring groups around blogging software. In some instances, blog tribes have organized to secure associations and build cooperatives within the community.

Most of the early blogs were individually created by hand and required a good knowledge of programming and Web design. Blood (2002) cites Andrew Smales as the creator of the first open source Web-based tool for public application. Smales's created an application form template which enabled individuals unfamiliar with blog programming to simply write their entry and post it. Soon, more and more novices began to create blogs on a wide range of topics. The "blogosphere" expanded even more when Pyra produced Blogger in 1999 to provide even greater ease for public users to create blog sites. By 2000, there were over 100,000 blogs. Additional software applications for blogging appeared (for example, User Radioland, Moveable Type, Live Journal) and continue to emerge. By 2003, blog software and blogging-related peripheral tools had generated an entire new market for the tech industry.

Since blogs were now being viewed as valuable resources for gathering current information, they began to rival other traditional news sources. As a result, traditional press services began to investigate how to integrate blogs into their reporting. In 2000, Editor Chris Alden of the British *Guardian* was the first journalist to integrate the blog form to expand distribution of news reports and related information. The success of the Alden's venture, in turn, positioned the blog as a "must-use" tool for journalists and other press corps. Blogging directories such as Brigitte Eaton's Eatonweb Portal and indexes such as Blogdex were developed in an attempt to organize the increasing number of blogs. Beebo's Weblog Ratings examined blog traffic and rated the most common links referenced in blogs. Reference sites on blogging tools were developed to decipher the differences between applications and by 2003, several blogging search engines began to appear to help online readers locate blogs by topic area. As blogs entered into mainstream culture, an entire dictionary of terms associated with this communication tool gave credibility to blogger jargon. In response to the blogging trend, publishing houses began marketing books on how to create blogs and how to use blogs at work and in education. Even libraries joined into blogging using the tool for increasing the outreach of book chats and other user services. The popularity of blogging was reinforced when in 2004 (Wikinews, 2004), *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* cited "blog" as the word of the year.

FOCUS

Perhaps the primary success of the blog as an Internet tool has grown out of its ease of design and use. Most blogs are set up as an electronic journal and include the title of the page, the main content (or body of the post), the post date, and a permalink that provides future access when the link is placed in the archives. The sidebar section on most blogs which lists various links to Web sites and other blog sites was first introduced by Cam Barrett who had integrated the feature to alert his readers about new blogs he was reading. Permalinks provide a unique URL to each post on the blog so that when the post is transferred to the archive, it can still be accessed. This feature avoids the problem of broken links and helps maintain an active archive. The dated postings, the sidebar section of links, and permalinks

are the most standard features of every blog. Newer features include blogrolls and trackback (or pingback) functions. Blogrolls are listings of other blogs read by the author of the primary blog. Often bloggers try to provide links to other blogs related to the topics of their blog. Political blogs will link to individuals that support or promote their platform. The trackback feature is a system tool that lets one blogger know if another blogger has linked to a posting. Pings serve as search tools that locate recent posts of offsite blogs to help gather information on a topic or updates on information related to the subject of the blog. Some commercial blogs provide post scheduling to let readers know when posts will be written. Other blogs make use of news aggregators or RSS feeds which allow the blogger to pull in additional links and information for updates as well.

Since blogs have gone commercial, a number of providers have developed systems to eliminate the need for users to know how to do programming and Web design. Web applications allow new bloggers to use the software without having to maintain a server. Open source and free Web-hosted sites enabling anyone to set up a basic blog has also contributed to expanding the blogging community. Fee-based blogging sites offer more security and additional features as well as technical support. Security features such as captchas require people to register to the blog site so that the blogger can identify who is posting to the site. The blog owner can then moderate who has access to post or read on the site. In addition, individually purchased applications allow individuals to establish their own blogging communities. In 2003, Dave Winer established a blog project at Harvard (*Weblogs at Harvard Law*) with the Berkman Center for Internet and Society to establish an intellectual community for bloggers at the university. Students and faculty have access to set up blogging sites to discuss topics of learning. Winer's venture brought rise to the idea of blogging as an educational tool. Soon, blogging would venture into the corporate sector as well.

The varied use of blogging tools dictates their form. As with any application, blogs can take on several different formats. Blood (2002) cites three basic forms of blogs: basic blogs (short form journals), notebooks (longer posts that resemble short stories and provide more focused content), and filter blogs (short quips or links that serve as feeds for information). Some blogs resemble combinations of these three forms, but most

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