

Blogging

Posting news online is a complicated process — but blogging makes it easy.

In 1994, the first online journals (or Web logs) (or *blogs*) were launched. By 2008, an estimated 184 million bloggers were blogging around the globe, with new blogs born every minute. Are they all worth reading? Of course not. Do most blogs just make noise and feed egos? Absolutely.

But with enough skill and diligence, blogging — especially journalistic blogging — can play a major role in news delivery. In fact, blogs are reshaping journalism in several key ways:



- ◆ **Increasing immediacy:** Blogs let reporters dispense information easily, instantly and often. This, in turn, feeds the appetites of loyal readers hungry for the latest news.
- ◆ **Simplifying storytelling:** They're often just a series of dispatches, but blogs convey huge amounts of data without requiring you to write long, traditional news "stories."
- ◆ **Empowering citizen journalists:** From big global disasters to small local events, blogs provide forums where ordinary citizens can share their insights, their expertise, their passions and concerns. ▼

AT A GLANCE: THE JOURNALIST'S GUIDE TO BLOGGING

What are blogs?

If you think of most Web sites as fancy restaurants with big menus, blogs are fast food. They're where bloggers post brief blurbs, blow off steam or provide links to some *really cool stuff* on other sites.

Who creates blogs?

Anybody and everybody. Blogs provide a fast, easy way for you to post material online without any technical training or fancy coding.

But for now, let's ignore the billions of bloggers babbling about their proms and pet poodles and focus on blogs with real journalistic value, which usually fall into two general categories:

◆ **Blogs by individual journalists,** where a writer or editor expands his or her news coverage — and name recognition — by posting material *beyond* what's in ordinary news stories: updates, analysis, rumors and offbeat tidbits.

◆ **Beat blogs,** where a team of reporters working the same beat pool their posts to provide a steady stream of news and notes on one

specific topic: say, sports reporters blogging about the Yankees. Or a City Hall blog by a team of police, court and government reporters. Or, as we saw on the previous page, postings by an entire newspaper staff as a school shooting unfolds.

Blogs also help journalists establish a dialogue with readers, don't they? Sure. Blogs let reporters discuss their stories, respond to rumors and solicit ideas from readers. Editors can explain the decision-making behind controversial stories, columns and editorials. In each case, users are invited to debate, correct facts, even provide content for future publication.

How is blog-writing different from traditional newswriting? Blog entries are shorter, faster reads. The writing style is usually more conversational, more informal. There's slang (and on occasion, yes, even obscenity) that's seldom allowed in traditional media.

In order to post quickly — from the stands of a football game or from an airport in the middle of

the night — bloggers usually post their entries unedited. And that can create copy-editing problems.

Blogs raise ethical questions, too. For instance, how much opinion can a reporter express on a blog before she compromises her journalistic objectivity? To protect a publication's reputation, can bosses prohibit reporters from writing their own personal blogs at home?

Most journalists seem to distrust ordinary bloggers. Why is that? Many journalists are bloggers, but very few bloggers are journalists. Few bloggers do actual reporting; many confuse facts with opinions, posting unedited screeds that are untrustworthy, even libelous.

As Rebecca Blood, author of "The Weblog Handbook," said of bloggers: "Their commentary, done with integrity, can be a great source of accurate information and nuance, informed analysis, but it will never replace the journalist's mandate to assemble a fair, accurate and complete story that can be understood by a general audience."



THE LANGUAGE OF BLOGGAGE

Blog: A Web journal or log that's frequently updated with entries appearing in reverse chronological order (i.e., newest first). A *blogger* is someone who writes a blog — in other words, someone who *blogs*.

Blogosphere: The collective online community of bloggers.

Post: A blog entry
Host: The company that provides the Web address, template and tools for your blog.

Comments: Remarks that users add to a blog post. Some say that without user comments, a blog just isn't a real blog.

Thread: A series of related comments.

Troll: A disruptive commenter who tries to stir up trouble.

Spam: Unwanted comments or advertisements sent to your blog.

Permalink: A link to a permanent Web page where a particular post is archived after new updates have bumped it out of view.

Beat blog: A blog written by a reporter (or team of reporters) that focuses on a specialized topic, like local crime, sports or politics.

RSS: Short for "Really Simple Syndication," a format that lets Web users subscribe to "feeds" from blogs or Web sites. Every time you add a new post to your blog, RSS delivers it automatically to your subscribers.



Microblogging: A form of blogging where bloggers post extremely brief updates, up to 140 characters long. Twitter is a popular microblogging tool that delivers short posts, or *tweets*, over the Web or via cell phone.

Video: A video blog consisting mostly of short interviews and other video clips.

BLOG BITS: THE KEY COMPONENTS OF A TYPICAL BLOG

Every beat-related blog uses a slightly different format, but some basic elements are now becoming standard. Here's a look at a fictitious-yet-typical blog that a local education reporter might produce:

Branding: Smart bloggers combine a distinctive name with a stylish logo to create a memorable *brand* users will remember.

RSS feed: Click here and you'll receive blog updates automatically.

Blogger bio: Who's writing this blog? Here's a quick profile, with a link for sending her email messages.

Archives: If you want to read older posts, these links will take you to blog entries organized by month. (Prolific bloggers often organize their archives by the week.)

Categories: Here's another helpful way to organize old blog entries: by *topic*.

Blog roll: It's helpful (and courteous) to link to your favorite Web sites, those you often use as sources, and any other useful sites relevant to your topic. Besides, if you send visitors to *them*, they may link more visitors back to *you*.

Latest tweets: As a supplement to their blog posts, some bloggers post short, beat-related Twitter tweets throughout the day — anecdotes or observations that aren't worth a full blog post. We'll see if this trend catches on (or if it creates a trivia overload).



Sept. 20, 2009 2:35 p.m.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Aethia Holly was a biology teacher for 12 years at Lincoln High School. For the last 10 years, she's been education reporter for The Bugle Beacon in Bozoville. (Contact)

ARCHIVES
September 2009
August 2009
July 2009
June 2009
May 2009
April 2009
March 2009
February 2009
January 2009
December 2008
November 2008
October 2008

CATEGORIES
Administration
Awards & honors
Campaigns
Communities
Events & deadlines
Jobs
Media watch
Parents/parenting
School life
Teachers & teaching

BLOG ROLL
Bozoville Bugle
Bozoville School Board
Chalk Talk
Parents United for Public Education
PrincipalSkinner.com
TeacherSPACE
This Year at Bozoville
Young Bozovillers

LATEST TWEETS FROM @skoolz
Just finished lunch at Melman Middle School. Great chili dogs today! And Miss Thomson's math students are brilliant!
2:19 AM Sept. 20 from web

Announcement on Melman P.A. system: "Don't miss the special 40th-birthday cake for Mr. Gibbs today in the lunchroom at noon."
1:07 AM Sept. 20 from web

USA Today unveils its high-school All-American soccer team Friday. Will Erika Lake make the list?
9:07 AM Sept. 20

Sept. 20, 2009 2:35 p.m.

Principal Skinner interviews football coaching candidate

Principal Seymour Skinner spent about two hours this morning talking and touring with Jim Soxx from Lincoln High School in Chesteron, a biology teacher who's a finalist for the Springfield High football coaching position vacated by Linus Crimmage.

At Tuesday's school board meeting, Skinner said he was interviewing all three job finalists this week and expects to reach a decision by mid-October.

Post a comment View comments (3) Permalink

Sept. 20, 2009 11:04 a.m.

Third-grade class publishes a book of their own poetry

After three long months of work, it's finally here: "Rhyme Time With Mrs. Grimes," a book of illustrated poems produced by Violet Grimes' third-grade students at Eagle Elementary School. The 48-page paperback book will be available from the Eagle Elementary School PTA and from families of the students. Proceeds from book sales will help purchase sex-education filmstrips for viewing at the Eagle faculty kegger next month.



Post a comment View comments (3) Permalink

Sept. 19, 2009 4:55 p.m.

Novi cheerleading captain falls and breaks ankle during practice

Robin Fox, cheerleading captain at Novi High School, broke her ankle during a practice yesterday and will miss the rest of the football season.

The accident occurred during a toe-touch basket toss when Fox's partner, Lorrie Diebert, stumbled and dropped her stunt strap. "I feel just awful about it," Diebert said. "My uniform got all dirty."

Post a comment View comments (3) Permalink

Sept. 19, 2009 1:32 p.m.

Attention, all 10th-graders! Scholarship deadline approaching

Tuesday is the last chance for students entering their sophomore year of high school to apply for the Promise Scholarship program, which pays for five years of tuition four years of both tuition and housing after students graduate from high school.

To qualify for the program, students must enroll during their eighth-, ninth- or 10th-grade year. The scholarship program won't accept applications for the 2011-2012 school year until after June 30, so student who plan to

Post: Here's a typical blog entry for a reporter on the education beat: a bold headline followed by a couple brief paragraphs of text. This is the blog's latest entry, so it landed on top when the writer filed it a few minutes ago, pushing older entries down the page.

Time and date: Every post needs to contain the date and time. In some cases, this shows when a post was updated.

Photo (or video): Blog entries benefit from added images, video or audio — and posting them is easy.

Links: Embedded links in the text let users connect directly to relevant Web sites.

Comments: Smart bloggers encourage users to post comments, and they respond to those comments as often as necessary. To avoid disrupting the layout, comments usually move to a separate page.

Corrections: If you publish something inaccurate, you not only need to fix it — you also need to note that the information was corrected. That's why bloggers strike through their errors instead of deleting them entirely.

QUOTED

"Blogs are a wonderful way to engage with the readers who are the most passionate about your subject matter. I've covered Oregon's legislature off and on for 25 years now, and I feel like more of a celebrity than ever inside the Capitol because so many people read my blog."

Jeff Mapes, blogger/reporter who writes the "Mapes on Politics" blog for The Oregonian (oregonlive.com)

"By being a blog author and a blog reader, I'm able to find individuals to help with my stories more quickly than ever. Even for journalists who don't blog, staying on top of some key blogs that fit into your beat, or even just knowing your way around the blogosphere, is as vital a skill nowadays as knowing how the World Wide Web works."

David Akin, Canadian political reporter and blogger for "David Akin's On the Hill"

"I think of us as journalists; the medium we work in is blogging. We have kind of broken free of the model of discrete articles that have a beginning and end. Instead, there are an ongoing series of dispatches."

Joshua Micah Marshall, founder of Talking Points Memo, the first Web-only news outlet to win the George Polk Award for investigative journalism

"I am astounded daily by what I learn in the blogging community. As a journalist, I have always suspected that many of my readers know more than I do. . . . Hardly a day goes by when readers don't tell me something I don't know or I don't find a new angle to a story."

Mike Wendland, technology reporter, who produces a blog called "PC Mike"

"For bloggers, it's all about trust: Blog responsibly, and you'll build a reputation for being a trusted news source. Don't, and you won't have a reputation to worry about."

John Hiler, editor of Microcontent News