

7 BLOGITO, ERGO SUM

Trends in Personal Publishing

It's easy to write poorly, but it's hard to write poorly every day . . . It's hard to write every day.

Rebecca Blood, pioneering blogger

When in doubt, tell the truth.

Mark Twain

Chapter Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

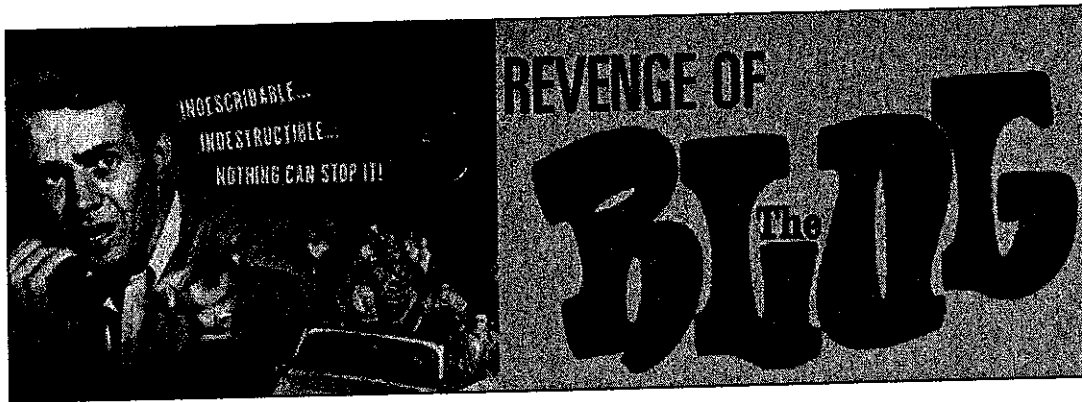
- identify the principles of personal publishing;
- understand the blog format and why it has proliferated;
- describe blogging's roles in journalism;
- harness good blog-writing practices.

Introduction

The democratization of the tools of publishing by the Web has been nothing less than revolutionary in terms of its effects on and implications for society, culture and mass media. "Citizen journalism," personal publishing, including blogging, and desktop publishing are re-shaping media and re-defining roles and job descriptions throughout journalism and communication. This chapter focuses especially on blogs, the most popular format or dimension of personal publishing, a format that has brought the cost of writing for the Web to the vanishing point. As part of the broader trend toward participatory, networked grass roots journalism, blogs are influencing how products are introduced, how political campaigns are run and even how wars are fought.

Weblogging and Webloggers: A Brief History

Because of the many ways blogs are employed, there is a great deal of confusion about the term and just what it is supposed to mean. A **weblog** or **blog** is simply a Web page or site for frequently updated posts, or entries, that



Graphic for a conference on blogging at Yale University, November 2002.

typically are arranged or presented in reverse chronological order, so that new entries always appear on top. Other common attributes of blogs include archives, permalinks (or hyperlinks to specific posts, which, when clicked, usually present accompanying comments beneath the post), time stamps and date headers, tags (key word identification), and blogrolls (hyperlinked lists of and to other blogs, usually presented as a sidebar to the blog's main content). Blog posts typically connect their readers with source materials that were used to write or that are referenced in the post, a connective tissue that also serves to provide layers of information and to build credibility. If, for example, a blogger is commenting on a speech, it would be customary to provide or link to a complete transcript of the speech or to an audio recording or podcast of the event, making it transparent to the reader where fact leaves off and where opinion begins.

The term "blog," however clunky and unfortunate, means nothing more than the collection of the few attributes described above. As such, the "blog" is a value-neutral medium or media format for publishing online. A blog is not necessarily a personal diary, though many blogs are used for this purpose. Most blogs are single-voice narratives made up of mostly brief posts that blend fact with personal opinion, but there is nothing about the form that predicates these norms.

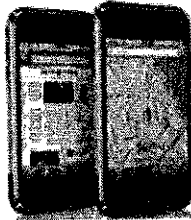
Perhaps the easiest way to conceptualize blogging is to think of the activity as nothing more (or less) than writing. Ink pens are used for all sorts of purposes, from signing checks to journaling to drafting manuscripts for the next great novel. As a technology, there is nothing about the ink pen that makes it more or less capable of producing exquisite literature or pure drivel. A blog is no different.

The content and purposes of blogs vary greatly—from links and commentary about other Web sites, to news about companies, people and ideas, to diaries, photos, poetry, mini-essays, project updates and even fiction. In this chapter we are more interested in those blogs that are dedicated to news, information and issues rather than those deployed to relate personal events and private thoughts. In other words, we will focus more on blogs like

What qualifies as true innovation?

April 3, 2008

The article, "Diffusion of Innovations" (Rogers and Singhal), began with these words: "What is diffusion?" I would like to start instead with the question, "What is innovation?" I ask because I think many of us are a bit quick to confer such high status to mere evolutionary progress, to incremental advances, to mostly consumer products that, in fact, fall far short of being truly innovative.



Is the iPhone, for example, truly an innovation? Does it, or has it, in fact transformed the way we communicate? Who we are? Our understanding of telecommunications and Web use? (Hint: No, no and no.)

The hybrid corn seed was truly an innovation. What about Facebook? The bionic eye?

In communication, as the article pointed out, we are interested in diffusion as a "communication process, independent of the type of innovations that are diffused." This is why, just for funsies, that we are the department of communication and not the department of communicationS, because it is a process.

Think through, then, what has to be true for some thing, some new device or method or process, to be innovative. Next, think about how that device or method or technological innovation has changed how we communicate, the process of communication, perhaps even who we are.

Next, as you think about where you are on the adoption curve, consider the article's valuable point about adoption (or diffusion) as at least partly a social process, something we've really keyed on in Intro to Digital Communication. Think about how much social interaction, peer groups and influencers have impacted how and when you adopt a new way of doing something, especially online. In other words, how do your interpersonal networks influence what you buy, what you adopt, when to change how you do something? (These are rich questions given the fact that the Internet has become such a thoroughly social tool or enabler.)

Now the most difficult question and, therefore, the most important: So what? Are these innovations in the end progress? Are these new devices, methods and technologies taking us all to a better place, or merely to a different place? To prompt us: In the 1950s, it was wholeheartedly believed that technology would produce the three- or four-day workweek, that increases in productivity would yield vast amounts of found leisure time. We're working harder — and longer — than ever.

(My apologies for the difficulties most had in commenting to last week's post. I've checked around at WordPress.com and cannot find a systemic reason. Perhaps Berry's IT quirks have struck again. It does appear that changing your posting name and/or email however slightly does the trick.)

17 Comments | Uncategorized | Permalink
Posted by brian carroll

Typical blog post, with blue hyperlinks, indicated in this screen grab with a lighter tint; a link to comments below; a permalink to this particular post; and an authorship line identifying who posted.

16 Comments | Uncategorized | Tagged: COM 329, journalism, revenue models | Permalink
 Posted by brian carroll

Tags help blog readers and search engines find particular posts; they also help blog authors organize their content. The tags for this post are "facebook," "me media," "social networking" and "swarm behavior."

The Politico (<http://www.politico.com/>) and PressThink (<http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/>) than on personal diary blogs like Supermatt at LiveJournal (<http://supermatt41.livejournal.com/>).

The best blogs create for their readers a sort of "targeted serendipity," as pioneering blogger Rebecca Blood has called it, or a shared point of view and information and sources a reader perhaps did not even know he or she wanted to see. At the very least, blogging is an exercise of expression, making one's views public. Increasingly, though, blogging is also an expression of community, allowing individuals to communicate and congregate.

POLITICO BLOGS

Ben Smith on Politics
 Goldfarb's quarantine.



Glenn Thrush on Hill intrigue
 CREW calls for criminal probe of Ensign.



Shenanigans on Gossip
 "And you're still alive?"



Michael Calderone on Media
 Murdoch's British papers probed.



The Scorecard on Campaigns
 GOP challenger to Toomey?

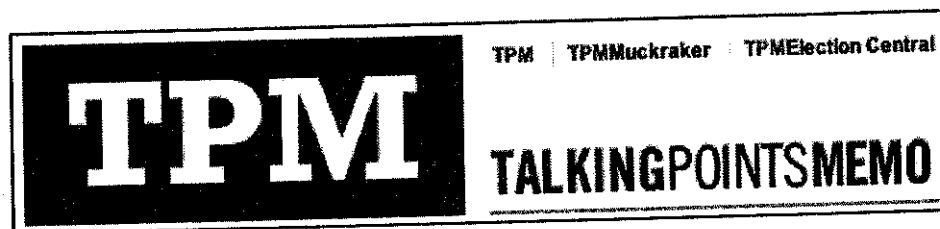


The (Blog) Major Leagues: A Quick Overview

Talking Points Memo

In December 2002, Joshua Micah Marshall's "The Talking Points Memo" got a great deal of attention for raising questions about then Senate majority leader

Trent Lott's views on race. In doing so, TPM (<http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/>) legitimized blogging as journalism, or at least established that blogging and the mission of journalism are not necessarily at odds or mutually exclusive. Both bloggers and traditional journalists have debated since whether or when and under what circumstances blogging can be considered journalism.



In the wake of Lott's statement on national cable television that the United States would have been better off had Strom Thurmond been elected president in 1948—Thurmond ran on a segregationist platform—Marshall revealed a history of what could be described as racist statements made by Lott. The Mississippi senator previously compared court rulings in 1981 upholding affirmative action programs at colleges to the dating ban between black and white students at Bob Jones University, according to TPM.

After a full weekend of silence, during which only TPM blogged on the subject, mainstream news media picked up on Marshall's analysis, piecing together Lott's record. The media coverage fueled a national debate that ultimately led to Lott's removal as majority leader, but not before the surreal: Lott appearing on BET to apologize to the nation's black community. Lott's capitulation or, more accurately, Marshall's attention to an overlooked political story, proved a watershed moment for blogs, which were still considered by many at the time as a minor league publishing option.

It is important to note that Marshall politically is on the left, and that he is candid and transparent about this political orientation. He began publishing TPM in November 2000 during the Florida presidential election vote recount. He also is dedicated to a form of watchdog investigative journalism that is vanishing as ever-larger media companies stress entertainment and the sale of advertising over service to the public interest. TPM has found a loyal audience—in fact, several loyal audiences. TPM launched its second site, TPMCafe.com, in 2005 and TPMMuckraker.com and TPM Election Central in 2006.



Josh Micah Marshall

Though Marshall is proud to be a blogger, he also believes that what he and his dozen or so reporters do is journalism. TPM, after all, is credited with investigative reporting on the firing of eight U.S. attorneys, reporting for which TPM received the Polk Award for Reporting. Importantly, TPM's coverage of the U.S. attorney scandal utilized crowdsourcing, or the wisdom of the crowds. TPM pursued tips from readers, synthesized the work of other news outlets, provided its own original reporting and solicited and received the help

of thousands of readers in sifting through piles of documents released by the Bush administration. "There are thousands who have contributed some information over the last year," Marshall told *The New York Times* of TPM's crowdsourced U.S. attorney coverage.

In 2006, when watchdog groups that monitor federal spending wanted more information on nearly 2,000 pork barrel projects buried in a Congressional spending bill, they listed the projects on the Web and asked readers to do some research. Readers did, and information began pouring in. Similarly, also in 2006, Porkbusters.org enlisted readers to find out which senator had blocked legislation that would create an online database of federal grants and contracts. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., were uncovered in a matter of days. The wisdom of the crowds was leveraged to shine more light into the dark places of government.

Memogate

On the political right, it was self-avowed conservative bloggers that first called into question the authenticity of four documents presented by Dan Rather of CBS News on *60 Minutes* purporting to be from President Bush's commanding officer in the Texas National Guard. The documents described efforts to get preferential treatment for the future president. Bloggers pointed out that, given the equipment on which the memos were composed, they couldn't possibly have been written in the early 1970s, as alleged on the news show.

Just hours after *60 Minutes* aired, a man with the user name Buckhead posted a comment on Free Republic (www.freerepublic.com). The poster observed that the CBS memos, which had been posted online, had been typed in a proportionally spaced font that was unlikely to be found on or from a 1972-era typewriter. A blog called Power Line (www.powerlineblog.com) and written by three lawyers reprinted Buckhead's speculations, along with comments from readers who claimed knowledge of IBM typewriters, fonts and superscripting. A reader who had been a Navy clerk/typist and another who had been an Air Force personnel manager weighed in on military typewriters, paper sizes and procedures. Power Line's initial post quickly listed 605 trackbacks, meaning that 605 other online sites linked to the blog's analysis. Again, crowdsourcing generated smarter coverage than any one reporter likely could have produced.

CBS News and Dan Rather stuck to their story. Rather stated on air:

The story is true. The story is true. I appreciate the sources who took risks to authenticate our story. So, one, there is no internal investigation. Two, somebody may be shell-shocked, but it is not I, and it is not anybody at CBS News. Now, you can tell who is shell-shocked by the ferocity of the people who are spreading these rumors.

(September 10, 2004)

The story was not true as reported, and CBS News ultimately admitted this, making the episode an important point on the timeline of blogs. For one, the episode pitted traditional or mainstream news media against new media, specifically blogs, and blogs won the day. A few days after *60 Minutes* made its claims, a former CBS executive vice president, Jonathan Klein, sneered at CBS's critics who claimed the old memos had to be modern forgeries written on a computer: "You couldn't have a starker contrast between the multiple layers of check and balances [of professional journalists] and a guy sitting in his living room in his pajamas writing," Klein told Fox News on September 10, 2004.

Bloggers became reporters of a kind. Thousands of blogs picked up the story. Type designers, computer workers and former military clerks joined the debate. Mainstream news media other than CBS News joined in as well. Professional journalists interviewed document experts, who raised the same questions as the bloggers. Then CBS's own experts revealed that they had never bothered to authenticate the memos. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted, many mainstream journalists were reading the blogs to track the discussion and find sources.

"The Internet has empowered ordinary citizens to become fact-checkers and analysts. People with a wide range of experiences can collaborate online, sharing knowledge, sources and ideas, and challenging each others' facts," wrote the *Chronicle's* Joanne Jacobs ("The Way It Is Today Isn't How It Was: If the Facts Aren't Right Bloggers Are All Over It," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 26, 2004, available: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/09/26/INGAG8T2FT1.DTL>).

Bloggers as Journalists

In the first decade of the 21st century, blogging as a journalistic form caught on. Traditional media's big newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, all have blogs. The Associated Press and CNN launched their first blogs for the Democratic National Convention in July 2004. *The New York Times* prominently used live blogging during the presidential primary season in 2008.

MSNBC's "Hardball" with Chris Matthews uses the blog format for a star-studded group blog, *Hardblogger*, that includes posts from NBC News' Andrea Mitchell, former San Francisco mayor Willie Brown, former Howard Dean campaign manager Joe Trippi, and conservative pundit Pat Buchanan (<http://hardblogger.msnbc.msn.com>). One of the blogosphere's most read group blogs is *The Huffington Post*, launched by former California politician Arianna Huffington (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/theblog/>). From beginnings in celebrity news, the blog has evolved and matured into a sort of online newspaper specializing in politics and political commentary, boasting as of mid-2008 approximately 1,500 bloggers and 4 million visitors per month.

The Caucus

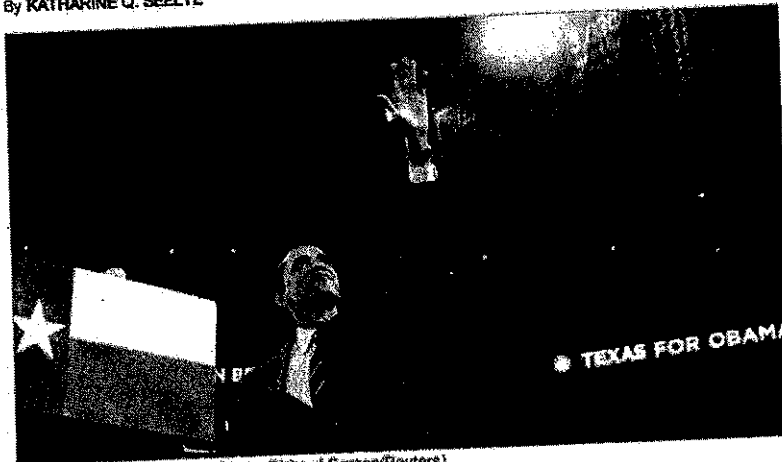
The New York Times Politics Blog

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February 19, 2008, 11:37 pm

Hello Wisconsin!

By KATHARINE Q. SEELYE



Barack Obama in Houston. (Photo: Richard Carson/Reuters)

Wrapup | 11:40 p.m.: Wrapup: Mrs. Clinton heads back to New York tonight and there probably aren't too many people who want to be on that plane ride, unless they are the Houdinis of politics. Her presidential bid is handcuffed, in a locked treasure chest, under the ice. Will Ohio and Texas let Mrs. Clinton come up for air?

Those states just got harder tonight. Mr. Obama has now won nine states in a row, by impressive margins. The Clinton campaign may have planned it this way (right), but could they really have thought they could absorb

nine consecutive losses? Were they in any way prepared for Mr. Obama to cut into her base, particularly with blue-collar workers and women?

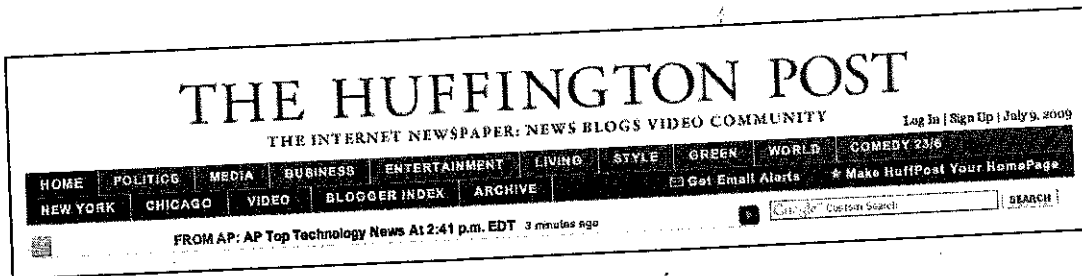
Negative attacks against Mr. Obama so far have not worked. Is there more of that to come? Will Mr. Obama stumble? Will Mr. McCain's portrayal of him as an empty vessel end up helping Mrs. Clinton? It's hard to imagine a thematic overhaul for Mrs. Clinton or the emergence of a new and different person, but at this point, everything has to be on the table.

The next two weeks may reveal more about Mrs. Clinton than we have seen during her 15 years on the national stage.

11:33 p.m. | More From Ohio: Our colleague John Broder reports from Mrs. Clinton's event in Youngstown, Ohio.

11:03 p.m. | Mighty Fine Place to Be: Our colleague Jeff Zeleny reports on the scene from the Toyota Center in Houston.

Meanwhile, the networks are calling the Washington primary for John McCain.



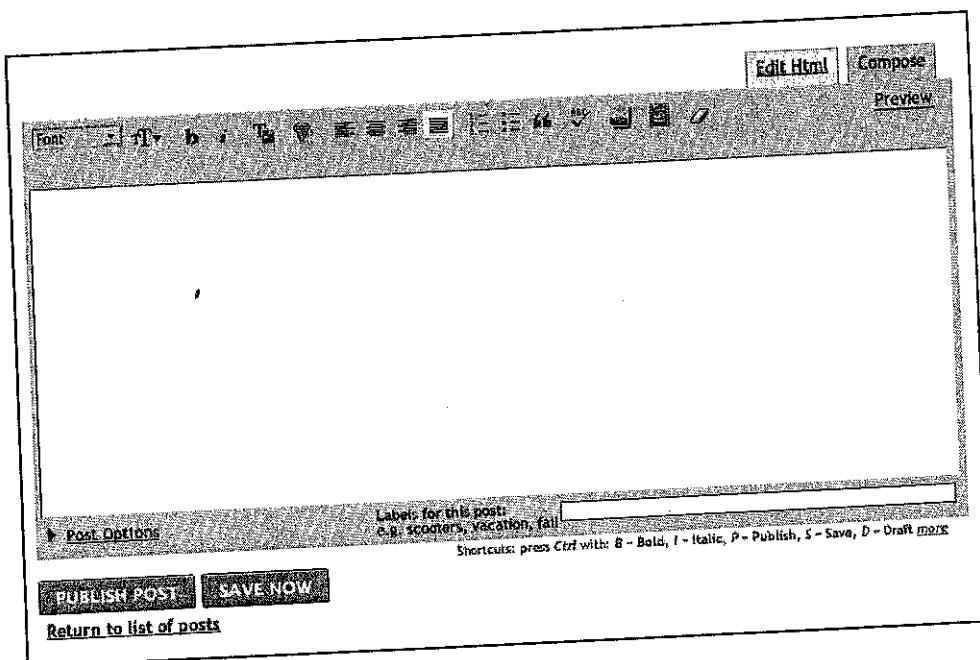
The most popular group blog as of mid-2009 was Engadget (www.engadget.com), a blog focused on the latest gadgets in technology.

Blogging Software

Behind the fast growth of blogging has been easy-to-use software that makes becoming a blogger a low- or no-cost exercise in a matter of a few minutes. One of the leaders of the blogging movement, Meg Hourihan, co-founded Pyra Labs to develop a blogging software now known as Blogger.com, which Google acquired along with the rest of Pyra in May 2003.

Blogger.com's software is one of a number that automate the blog publishing process and therefore eliminate the need for users to write any code or install any sort of server-side software or scripting. Once launched, Blogger.com's blogs use forms and a Word-like toolbar to make writing and submitting posts a simple exercise.

That anyone with a Google username and password can begin writing and publishing to the world from his or her own URL in a matter of minutes at no cost is momentous, on a scale similar to Gutenberg's liberating of knowledge with moveable type. While Web site publishing has long been available



Blogger.com's template box for writing and publishing blog posts.

to anyone willing to learn HTML coding or WYSIWYG design, the advent of blogging software has given tens of millions of individuals a simpler way to maintain Web pages.

Blogger.com, TypePad, LiveJournal, Greymatter, WordPress and Movable Type are some of the more popular blogging software tools. Some, like Blogger, are remotely hosted, while others, such as MovableType, are installed on the user's own computer. Those who become bloggers can be HTML novices or experienced Web designers, first-time writers or professional authors.

The Blogger v. Journalist Debate

Is anyone with a blog a journalist? Is anyone with a camera a photographer? What happens to journalism when every reader can also be a writer, editor and producer? These are but some of the questions long debated in both the blogosphere and in journalism, and still no clear consensus has emerged. The blogger-journalist dichotomy clearly is a false one. Many journalists blog; many bloggers do journalism. Key distinctions, then, include the methods or processes employed and the purpose or goal of the content.

Where an information-gathering process includes what Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) call "the discipline of verification," and where the purpose is service to the public interest, then blogging could be said to be journalism. Where one or both of these is absent, the blogger would be hard pressed to claim to be doing real journalism. Original reporting that has been corroborated, fact-checked and verified, reporting that seeks to inform a self-governing electorate, be it on a blog or anywhere else, must be called journalism.

Most blogs have a different mandate than does journalism, however. Most blogs are dedicated to some form of commentary or opinion. To the extent a blog lacks original reporting, it is removed from the primary enterprise of journalism. For most bloggers, a high value is placed on the act of expression, on providing in the aggregate a diversity of voices. Also important in the blogosphere are writing or publishing with speed, offering transparency of sourcing and of the opinions that influenced the writing, and decentralizing information and knowledge. For journalism, by contrast, great value is placed on providing a filter for information, editing the content, fact-checking, ensuring accuracy and fairness, setting the agenda and centralizing news dissemination. In some cases, then, the value sets of the blogosphere and of journalism are in tension, if not conflict. The vetting and editing process typically used in print, for example, comes at the expense of speed and of single-voice authenticity, hallmarks of the blogosphere.

Blogging's priority usually is to publish, then to begin filtering; journalism's priority is to filter, then after and only after to publish. Blogging, then, can be seen as a thoroughly postmodern form of expression and pursuit, and postmodernism rejects objectivity as a goal or ideal. This rejection pits many bloggers against the guild of journalism, which still strives for objectivity, at least in its methods, if not in its products.

The filtering and editing in journalism is possible because of daily printing cycles and large editorial and production staffs. With large, capital-intensive printing presses and a prohibitively expensive distribution system, newspapers in fact require large staffs. Organized hierarchically, these staffs funnel the information out from a center. With the imperative to publish, then to filter, bloggers are as concerned with *unmaking* and testing public opinion as forming it. The ethos for news and information blogs, then, is based more on values such as immediacy, transparency, interconnectivity, and proximity to the events. As a heterarchy, diverse bloggers post, cross-link, blogroll, and track back to interact in a network pulling ideas and knowledge from the edges. This *networkedness* and resulting proximity to news are among the reasons U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials are tracking blogs and why China is looking for ways to block them.

An incident from the 2008 presidential primary might illustrate some of the tensions between the imperatives of most bloggers as contrasted with the mission of the professional guild of journalism. A supporter of Barack Obama attending one of his rallies in California, a rally not open to the public or to the media, found herself witness to what she immediately recognized as newsworthy commentary from the candidate. Obama referred to Pennsylvania's small-town voters as "bitter," as clinging to guns and religion, and as having antipathy to people "who aren't like them." The blogger deliberated for four days whether or not to publish what she had heard.

Declaring herself to be a "citizen journalist," 61-year-old Mayhill Fowler determined to publish the news, which she did on OffTheBus.Net, a cooperative news blog launched by Arianna Huffington of *The Huffington Post* and Jay Rosen, a journalism professor at New York University. Fowler's decision underlines how digital communication has changed campaign coverage in unpredictable ways. But it should not surprise. The democratization of publishing inevitably alters our political process. Obama perhaps did not think his remarks would reach beyond the ballroom; he did not know he was being blogged.

Fowler's claims to journalism notwithstanding, does her campaign rally post represent journalism? As an eyewitness account of remarks at a campaign event that most would agree was important to the race for the party nomination, Fowler's post must be considered an act of journalism. Does this make Fowler a journalist? As an avowed contributor to Obama's campaign (and Clinton's and even Fred Thompson's, as well), Fowler's standing at the rally presents some real problems were she to claim to be a journalist. Most journalists would never make public their political cleavages, nor would they attend as a supporter a political event that had been closed to the media. Fowler's four-day delay before publishing points to these problems or conflicts. A journalist would not have to weigh the pros and cons of publishing news in the public's interest, at least not in the circumstances the California fundraiser presented.

Objectivity as a Process Goal (Not a Product Goal)

Most journalists and journalism professors would agree that pure objectivity is impossible, at least as an attribute of journalism's products, the news. Striving for as objective a news-gathering process as possible, however, still is widely regarded as noble and good. Contributing to candidates clearly threatens and even mocks that objective process. The fact that Fowler has been criticized both by media and by her fellow Obama supporters points to this inherent conflict, bringing to life the biblical paradox of trying to serve two masters and, as a result, loving one and hating the other. As Rosen (2008) commented on the episode, "journalists, the pro kind, aren't allowed to be loyalists. But loyalists . . . may find that loyalty to what really happened trumps all. And that's when they start to commit journalism." This doesn't make loyalists journalists, however.

According to Friend and Singer based on the research of others, a journalist in American society is someone

whose primary purpose is to provide the information the citizens of a democracy need to be free and self-governing; someone who acts in accordance with a firm commitment to balance, fairness, restraint, and service; someone whom members of the public can trust to help them make sense of the world and to make sound decisions about the things that matter.

(Friend and Singer 2007: xvi)

Journalists, including online journalists, then do perform this *sensemaking* role. David Simon, a former reporter and a producer of HBO's *The Wire*, asked in *The Washington Post*: "In any format, through any medium—isn't an understanding of the events of the day still a salable commodity?" He asks if the Internet is so profound a change in the delivery model that "high-end news," or journalism that really matters, will become increasingly scarce, rare, exotic.

An operative term in this definition is "trust." To instill trust, traditional journalists agree to a code of ethics, however tacitly, typically one similar or identical to the Society for Professional Journalists' (SPJ's) Code of Ethics. The Online News Association also has a code, which was modified from SPJ's version for online, specifically for bloggers. As Friend and Singer write, "a code of ethics does not create ethical behavior" (2007: xx). Such a code can provide a compass, or a map of orienting philosophy to govern or guide behavior.

Where these codes of ethics have failed to prevent lapses in journalism, bloggers have brought checks and balances of their own, serving as a sort of watchdog of the watchdogs, a Fifth Estate to journalism's Fourth Estate. Bloggers routinely criticize journalism and mainstream news media for what they see as sloppy, erroneous and incomplete coverage and reporting. Journalism, therefore, provides these blogs with most of the fodder for the blogs'

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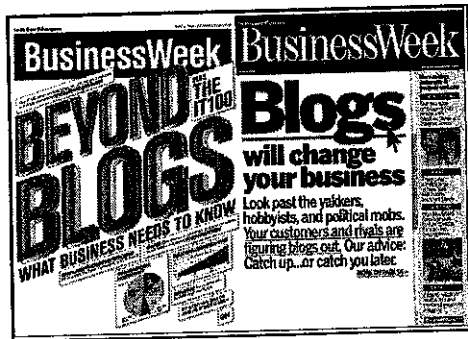
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posts. One 2006 study found, for example, that more than 95 percent of blogs are derivative, or are dependent on journalism's original reporting. Less than 5 percent, therefore, are involved in doing the legwork of journalism, the heavy lifting required of the discipline of verification.

Most blogs are utterly dependent on journalism. They react, in other words, comment on issues, events and people in coverage, and provide context and elaboration. These distinctions are not to belittle blogging; on the contrary, blogging has assumed important roles in building a vibrant, well-informed democracy. The distinctions are made to help us understand how the information landscape is changing, and how interdependent are the new media and traditional mass media ecosystems.

Corporate Blogging

The cover story for *BusinessWeek* magazine on May 2, 2005, read: "Blogs Will Change Your Business." Blogs indeed have changed business, and years after that article corporate America's embrace of them continues. According to the ePolicy Institute, 81 percent of corporations reported in late 2006 that they were either blogging or planning to blog. At about the same time, in the United States there were more than 5,000 corporate bloggers and about 10 percent of small businesses had already incorporated blogs into their marketing plans.



Two *BusinessWeek* covers, the one on the left from May 2008, the other from May 2005.

Blogs offer businesses the opportunity to build informal, lasting relationships with customers. As a new media academic told *The New York Times*, "There's a conversation going on out there about every company and every brand, and talking with people engenders better relationships." A quick search in November 2007 on the blog search engine Technorati for mentions of "Ikea," for example, turned up nearly a half-million blogs, and that was for instances in the previous 24 hours.

Tech specialists can make a Web site more visible, but bloggers can generate buzz. Ikea, again, is a good example, daily garnering hundreds of positive blog mentions. For small businesses, blogs can be particularly powerful in shining

CONTEXTS

a spotlight on a product or aspect of the business that deserves the attention. As a side benefit, the corporate blog creates additional inbound and outbound hyperlinks that in their aggregate also serve to raise a company's search profile with the big search engines.

Of course, it helps if you have something to say. This is the hard part. Anyone can start up a blog technically, but few can write well enough, with enough substance, to make it a worthwhile read over a sustained period of time. For a model of how to do it, how to say something worth reading, see Robert Scoble's Scobleizer blog (<http://scobleizer.com/>). He is a software engineer at Microsoft who blogs about technology, including Apple products, even admitting when the Mac folks do it better. General Motors vice chairman Robert A. Lutz has a blog, as does Jonathan Schwartz, chief executive officer at Sun Microsystems, and billionaire Mark Cuban (blogmaverick.com).

1. On my Qik channel. I'll do frequent live Qik videos. I'll try to Twitter when interesting ones are about to start.
2. On my Twitter feed. I frequently Twitter from the road about what we're doing and experiencing, plus I can answer your questions there.
3. On my FriendFeed. Even better place to talk with me. My Twitters, photos, and other things, show up on FriendFeed within minutes of me doing them and this is the best place to talk with me. I probably spend 80% of my time there, so watch this to see the best stuff.
4. Another important feed to watch is my "Likes" feed on FriendFeed. This is totally different than #3 and is YOUR stuff that I've "Liked." If you want to see if there's some value to FriendFeed this is a good place to lurk and it's where I track the top news items.
5. On my Flickr feed I'll post photos. My Nokia phones can get photos up within seconds of me taking them.
6. I'll be participating in the chat room on my Kyte.tv channel — the chat room there is better because it stays up permanently and I can participate in it via text, audio, or video.

Part of a post on Robert Scoble's blog, scobleizer, showing the myriad ways Scoble keeps in touch with his readers—Qik videos, twitter posts, Friendfeed updates, Flickr photo sharing and Kyte.tv channel chat. Other ways he pushes content include Google's "Shared Items," a FastCompany.com social network and an RSS feed (see below).



As an unfiltered, conversational, personal, transparent and interactive media format, blogs are powerful tools in establishing a dialogue with customers and clients. Blogs are humanizing, which remedies one of the chief problems of businesses, bureaucracies and organizations in projecting any sort of humanity. The corporate blogs mentioned above do a good job creating a dialogue by providing writing that is candid, simple, concise and often amusing. Humor and wit are important arrows in the blogger's quiver. Successful corporate blogs do not try to sell anything, at least not overtly, and they don't preach or teach. They speak plainly and transparently, and therefore build trust.

Media's Embrace of Blogs

In addition to the reasons businesses are utilizing blogs, news organizations are looking to them to accomplish what is more difficult in print or broadcast. These news organizations have deployed blogs in order to:

- **Connect with audiences, and therefore build trust.** News organizations like MSNBC, *The Dallas Morning News*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the *Houston Chronicle* and others are using blogging as one of many channels through which to flow editorial content. Blogs help to make these organizations more accessible, answerable and transparent.
- **Provide context, notes and content that cannot make it into the publication or onto the broadcast.** Blogs make room for content that does not neatly fit into traditional media.
- **Follow up on ideas and opinions that emerge first in the blogosphere.** Blogs are a way of tapping into this new, networked media ecosystem.
- **Build community.** Readers become active partners rather than passive consumers. Blogs can give readers a stake in the process and its product, increasing loyalty and understanding along the way. News organizations underestimate word-of-mouth referral power in the new media ecosystem at their own peril. Hyperlocal newspaper and Web site *Chi-Town Daily News*, for example, aims to have a citizen journalist/blogger in each and every Chicago neighborhood, or 75 in all. The newspaper wants to combine community activism with the journalistic principles of accuracy and objectivity to more deeply connect people to neighborhoods.
- **Give reporters and writers, who by nature love to write and to express themselves, another avenue for that expression.** The challenge in this area has been to find ways to incent and reward this expression at a time when newspapers and local TV news stations are in fiscal crisis.

Certainly blogging is here to stay, and traditional media are being forced to respond, to adapt and to co-opt. Blogging is emblematic of broader trends

Journal: Muhammad trial journal

John Allen Muhammad stood trial in Virginia Beach in the sniper spree that terrorized the D.C. area last fall. Kerry Sipe, online news coordinator for *The Virginian-Pilot*, reported live from the Beach courts complex, through Muhammad's conviction and death sentence. E-mail Sipe at kerry.sipe@pilotonline.com
 >> [Full sniper trials section](#)



Read the journal forward starting at ... [Day 1](#) | [Day 2](#) | [Day 3](#) | [Day 4](#) | [Day 5](#) | [Day 6](#) | [Day 7](#) | [Day 8](#) | [Day 9](#) | [Day 10](#) | [Day 11](#) | [Day 12](#) | [Day 13](#) | [Day 14](#) | [Day 15](#) | [Day 16](#) | [Day 17](#) | [Day 18](#) | [Day 19](#) | [Day 20](#) | [Day 21](#) | [Day 22](#) | [Verdict](#) | [Day 23](#) | [Day 24](#) | [Day 25](#) | [Day 26](#) | [Day 27](#) | [Sentence](#)

Entries 1 - 10 of 609 | [Next](#)

See Sipe's blog at <http://home.hamptonroads.com/guestbook/journal.cfm?id=53>.

toward participatory, grass roots media and personal publishing. Not surprisingly, journalists see opportunities in blogging for a type of commentary, immediacy and intimacy impossible with or through other forms. Two examples of this adoption trend are a blog by *The Virginian-Pilot* covering the Malvo-Muhammad sniper trials in Virginia and a blog at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* written by the reporter who covers Microsoft for the newspaper.


The Virginian-Pilot's Kerry Sipe blogged throughout the sniper trials from the media room in the Virginia Beach municipal center. He tracked everything from jury instructions and testimony to John Allen Muhammad's mood. Connected to the courtroom through closed-circuit video and the rest of the world through a wireless Internet connection, he published posts that went immediately online via his newspaper's Web site. The judge barred video coverage of the proceedings, so Sipe's minute-by-minute updates gave readers the closest thing they had to real-time news.

Sipe is the *Virginian-Pilot's* online news coordinator and one of a number of writers using a blog to report the news. Along with Sipe's unfiltered copy came an unfiltered experience, which raised the "Is it journalism?" question early on. This kind of reporting leaves the burden of assessing the news to readers, a job many say they would prefer to take on.

It is also important to note that Sipe's blog was just one part of the *Virginian-Pilot's* trial coverage. Blogs are not necessarily replacing other forms of journalism, but they are adding a new, unique layer of coverage. Other *Virginian-Pilot* writers covered the story in more traditional ways.

A blog launched by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in 2003 accomplishes a very different purpose. Written by Todd Bishop, the blog is a daily extension of an important Seattle beat covering software giant Microsoft.

The print edition and traditional Web site are still the proper places to break news, according to Bishop, but he says the blog gives him space to follow up on print stories with information that perhaps does not require a full story. His blog also has become a place to give readers valuable context. "After writing a story about liability for software flaws," he said, "I posted an entry



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BLOGS

Todd Bishop's Microsoft Blog


Business and technology reporter Todd Bishop supplements the Seattle P-I's regular Microsoft coverage with this online journal.

MAY 8, 2008

Next up: A Microsoft-Google antitrust fight?

Microsoft's Yahoo bid is over, but the aftermath might prove just as interesting. And it looks like Google could play a significant role.

During its tussle with Microsoft, Yahoo tested a search-related advertising alliance with Google in an attempt to boost its profits and fend off Microsoft's unsolicited offer. Under the arrangement, ads from Google's lucrative system were delivered alongside Yahoo search results.



BLOGGER BIO
Todd Bishop:
 P-I reporter

CONTACT INFO
 Have a news tip or a comment? E-mail me or call directly, 206-448-8221.

MSFT: DAILY TREND

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FEATURED COMMENTS

See Bishop's blog at <http://blog.seattlepi.nwsourc.com/microsoft/>.

that gave readers access to a lot of the material that helped me understand the issue and put the story together."

Bishop's posts have helped him collect sources for future stories, people he says he would not have found without the blog. One reader emailed him in response to a post about Microsoft's software patching strategy; that reader turned out to be the person responsible for patching his own company's PCs. The next time Bishop covered the issue in print, he contacted his new source for comment.

How to Write for Blogs

Bishop's blog provides a good example of how blogs can be employed effectively by journalists. First, note that he does not use the blog to merely dump onto the Web what has already appeared in print. Instead, Bishop uses his blog to post new, complementary content that expands on or builds off his stories for the print edition. In his role as a reporter on the Microsoft beat, Bishop may come across new insights or angles on previously published stories or brief news items that don't necessarily warrant a full story in print. Bishop can post that information on his blog, instead, to provide continued coverage of a running story or issue and to invite comment from his readers.

A journalist's blog also is an ideal repository for information that has been edited or cut out of a story to fit the available space in the newspaper or on the broadcast. An observation, an anecdote or extended quoted material from that edited version can be posted on the blog, which should be a relatively simple exercise because the writing has already been done. This is not to say,

however, that long, unexpurgated interview notes should be dumped online; blog writing typically is brief. By linking to the printed or aired story, addenda on the blog can extend the coverage.

In addition, writing in a conversational tone, one not unlike that used for email, leverages online's capacity for interpersonal communication, or communication very different and much more personal than mass media deliver. Most blogs are by a single author, so tone becomes all-important. As Bishop demonstrates, a blog allows the writer's individual voice to come through unfiltered.

A journalist's blog can be used to aid reporting by soliciting information. If you cannot make it to a public meeting or event, for example, posting can notify your readership community of the event and let them know why you think it might matter. Perhaps someone in your readership can attend the meeting, ask questions and even provide some reporting on what happens. Asking readers to post their reactions to the event or meeting gives readers ownership of the coverage and can strengthen the bonds of the community. Of course, the obligation to check facts remains for the journalist, even when presenting news gathered by blog readers.

A journalist's blog also can be used to pose questions to the readership. Open questions that identify concerns about a particular issue or event can build community and inform reporting over the long term. Using a blog in this manner can also help the journalist to gauge the readers' interest in certain issues and to determine which stories to continue reporting on, resisting the daily print impulse to write and publish a story and then move on without following up.

Community-building is an essential element of successful blogging that represents a tremendous opportunity for journalism. Bloggers should actively think of ways to engage readers, to begin and continue conversations, and to create and sustain loyal audiences. One of the most powerful ways to build community is to foster communication and interaction between readers themselves. Some of the best conversations can be started with very brief blog entries that ask for input and reactions. Of course, starting the conversation is only half the battle; a good blogger will also continue to facilitate the conversation by getting involved, steering the line of inquiry, responding to posts and participating. This level of involvement is alien to print journalists, who are accustomed to reporting, publishing, then moving on to the next story without much, if any, interaction with readers.

Applying the Blogging Basics

Three hallmarks of most good blogs: First, they are updated frequently, at least once every day or every other day, depending on the audience and the nature of the subject. A fast-moving story, like the sniper trials, might lend itself to several updates per day, as information comes in. Regardless of the topic, however, the blog should be frequently, regularly updated, which is the reason for the simplicity of blogging software in the first place. Second, most blogging

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software automatically puts the most recent post at the top, or in reverse chronological order, so readers do not have to scroll or hunt for the latest information. Last, good blogs tag posts, or identify them with key words that can be used to find related posts. A post on blogging, for example, might be tagged with the key words "blogging," "writing" and "personal publishing." For similar reasons, the post's headline should spur interest and invite reaction. Particularly with RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds delivering your headlines in competition with a host of others, the headline should arrest and inspire.

For blog posts, think about the key words that convey the meaning of your content. Consider how the content might be indexed in a book or found by Google. As Chapter 4 discusses, headlines online should be intuitive, not cryptic, vague or leading. Simply by reading a headline the reader should be able to grasp what the post is about. However, writing plainly or directly does not mean producing the merely banal or simple labels: "Baby Pandas! Baby Pandas!" Leave these banalities to CNN.com.

Online readers do not like to read long columns of text unless the content is extremely compelling. A better way to get a series of complex points across is to create a list of key points that readers can scan, along with a description of each point. This will also help you structure your thoughts in a way that seems more lucid.

- | |
|---|
| 1. Avocado
Misconception: I shouldn't eat avocados because they're high in fat.
Why They're Good for You |
| 2. Coffee
Misconception: The only thing you get from drinking coffee is being awake.
Why It's Good for You |
| 3. Mushrooms
Misconception: Mushrooms are a low-calorie food with little nutritional benefit.
Why They're Good for You |
| 4. Peanut butter
Misconception: This creamy spread is an indulgence best enjoyed occasionally because it's high in fat and calories.
Why It's Good For You |
| 5. Eggs
Misconception: Eggs are high in dietary cholesterol, so they don't belong in my diet.
Why They're Good for You |

Each item in the list links to explanatory text, "Why They're Good for You." This list is easily scanned, placing the explanations just a click away.

As these tips on headlines and lists demonstrate, the principles of good Web writing discussed in the preceding chapters apply when writing for blogs, too. Layering content, making it scan-able and breaking information up into easily read chunks, and linking to relevant material elsewhere on the Web are things for which blogs were designed. For blogs, layers can include headlines and subheads, links to source material and, as is shown above, to related posts both internal and external to the blog.

If you are thinking about presenting something in long form, consider summarizing it on the blog instead, then linking to the longer piece in .pdf or .doc form for those readers who wish to read more. This both promotes scanning and provides layers for drill-down. A few ideas or examples of list-worthy information:

- Components of a bill or law
- Requirements for submitting or applying for something
- Aspects of a candidate's background
- Details of a legal decision
- Supplies needed for a project
- Ingredients for a recipe
- Product features
- Sub-sections of a long or multi-page article
- Directions on how to create or complete something.

Live Blogging

The simplicity and low or no cost of blogging, as well as the spread of wireless Internet connectivity in many cities, have fueled an interest in live blogging, or blogging while a news event is taking place. Live blogging provides a near real-time and, therefore, visceral account of the event, usually from a single point of view, that of the individual blogger. Because it is "live," this exercise in blogging adds to the already difficult enterprises of reporting and writing the pressures of immediacy.

Here are some tips for successful live blogging an event, conference or convention:

- First, relax. Take a deep breath. Write a short post that introduces the event and identifies who you are and why you are writing.
- Key in your notes as unfinished sentence fragments, then go back when you have time and flesh out the narrative.
- If you are covering a speech or panel discussion, provide the transcript if possible. It's tedious, but the transcript provides a great resource for those who could not attend.
- Write a short blurb about a part of the event you couldn't get to and link to someone who did. This leverages the wisdom of the crowds.
- Once the event is over, post a retrospective, a more comprehensive commentary on what you saw and heard. Put the event, or your take on the event, in context.
- Post your blurbs just to get them online, then go back and clean up your copy. Live blog readers understand the nature of posting quickly.
- Know that the biggest challenge is paying attention to the event while writing at the same time. You can take advantage of this challenge by focusing your writing and your attention, placing you in the middle of

the stream of events washing over you. What you live blog today can become the basis for a more analytical piece tomorrow.

- Know up front that you will probably annoy someone near you. Clacking away on a keyboard really can be obnoxious. Planning where you sit can help, as can congregating with other bloggers and keyboard clackers.
- Consider special tools for live blogging, including the CoverItLive blog software (www.coveritlive.com) or twitter (www.twitter.com), which breaks up blogging into 140-character bursts.

Corrections

Mistakes are an unfortunate fact of life, whether your writing is appearing in print or online. Print journalists typically don't have the option to make a correction directly in the article they've published. Instead, they make their corrections in subsequent issues of the newspaper or magazine, often in a small "Corrections" box toward the front of the publication. Online, however, a writer has the option to make a correction or a change directly to the story they have posted. The option to erase mistakes in the entries has caused some concern for blog writers about how corrections or changes should be handled. In the blogosphere, it is considered bad form to delete anything, including and especially reader comments.

With the premium that is placed on transparency online, deleting posts or reader comments erodes credibility. In certain cases, for example, when statements or comments that are libelous or invade privacy are posted, they should and must be taken down from the site. In most cases, however, striking through the old or incorrect information, and then providing the correction next to it, perhaps in a different font, is the best practice. This method offers maximum transparency, clearly showing readers what has been changed in post. If necessary, you can add a note to the bottom of the post or in parentheses to explain why the change was made and perhaps credit the person who pointed out the error.

I found something on one of the new Microsoft blogs that raised a question. This what I read: Pitchfork is looking for some new ~~lackeys~~ interns. Was that a real correction? Or was the blogger sharing a little joke, telling us that he considers interns to be lackeys, even though it's not right to call them that? It's like the teenager who says: "Hi loser, um, I mean, Dad."

An example of strikethrough correction.

If something has to be corrected, a blogger has several options:

- Include a note at the bottom of the original post with the new information.

- Include the new information in the post while striking through the old or incorrect information (and displaying the strikethrough).
- Write a new post with the updated or corrected information, a post that links to and refers to the original post.
- Delete the problematic post and replace it with the updated, corrected information.

Internet users have shown that they will reward a willingness to be transparent, to be forthcoming, candid and open. They seem to place more trust in those they perceive as having nothing to hide. Bloggers have taken the lead in capitalizing on transparency by disclosing their personal politics and biases, regularly providing links to original source material to allow readers to judge the material for themselves, engaging in public conversations with readers that invite critique, and admitting and correcting errors quickly when they make them. All of these transparent activities help build trust.

Blogging Ethics

Most print journalists follow the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, which communicates certain professional, widely shared ethical standards. Some critics of blogging, including those from the journalistic community, often point to the fact that bloggers do not share such a set of professional, standardized ethics. This critique has inspired some bloggers to develop sets of ethics that build upon the SPJ code, but that also recognize some things unique to blogs, recognizing that bloggers are proudly individualistic. Rebecca Blood codified her relatively short list of good blogger behavior in her book, *The Weblog Handbook* (2002: 114–20):

- 1 Publish as fact only that which you believe to be true. If a statement is merely speculation, it should be so stated.
- 2 If material exists online, link to it when you reference it. Readers can judge for themselves, and a founding principle of blogging is exercising freedom of expression and the marketplace of ideas. Online readers "deserve, as much as possible, access to all of the facts," Blood writes.
- 3 Publicly correct any misinformation. Typically entries are not re-written or corrected, but later entries should correct inaccurate information in those earlier posts. Inaccurate and erroneous information on other blogs also should be corrected in the spirit of the greater blogging community's responsibility to one another and to its readers.
- 4 Write each entry as if it could not be changed; add to, but do not re-write or delete any entry. "Post deliberately," Blood advises.
- 5 Disclose any conflict of interest.
- 6 Note questionable or biased sources.

A reading of Blood's list and of the Society of Professional Journalists' code reveals more similarities than differences (see: Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp). Excerpted, the SPJ code calls journalists to:

- **Seek Truth and Report It:** Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.
- **Minimize Harm:** Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.
- **Act Independently:** Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.
- **Be Accountable:** Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Both Blood's and the SPJ's codes espouse:

- publishing the truth;
- supporting arguments with credible sources;
- being accountable;
- spending time writing as though changes could not be made;
- disclosing conflicts of interests, articulated by the SPJ as acting independently.

While a graduate student at the University of North Carolina, Martin Kuhn devised a widely distributed code of ethics for bloggers that is general enough to encompass most forms of blogging. His code seeks to:

- Promote interactivity:
 - Post to your blog on a regular basis.
 - Visit and post on other blogs.
 - Respect blog etiquette.
 - Attempt to be entertaining, interesting, and/or relevant.
- Promote free expression:
 - Do not restrict access to your blog by specific individuals or groups.
 - Do not self-censor by removing posts or comments once they are published.
 - Allow and encourage comments on your blog.
- Strive for factual truth:
 - Never intentionally deceive others.
 - Be accountable for what you post.
- Be as transparent as possible:
 - Reveal your identity as much as possible (name, photo, background information, etc.).

- Reveal your personal affiliations and conflicts of interest.
- Cite and link to all sources referenced in each post.
- Promote the human element in blogging:
 - Minimize harm to others when posting information.
 - Promote community by linking to other blogs and keeping a blogroll.
 - Build relationships by responding to emails and comments regularly.

Of course, problems will persist. Anonymous comments, particularly those that threaten or that include potentially libelous information, are of grave concern, in part because they invite censorship and regulation. And any code of ethics is voluntary, as much a distillation of existing organizational values as a prescription for behavior. Lawyers who violate their profession's ethics can be disbarred. Physicians can be prohibited from practicing medicine. But journalists? Writers? Bloggers? Except where a job is at stake, shame is really the only punishment for an ethical breach.

Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia, began soliciting recommendations for blog behavior at http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Jimbo_Wales_to_lead_development_of_%27code_of_conduct%27_for_bloggers, while *Web 2.0's* Tim O'Reilly did the same at http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2007/04/draft_bloggers_1.html. Here is Wales's start (he is still developing and refining his list):

- 1 Responsibility for our own words
- 2 Nothing we wouldn't say in person
- 3 Connect privately first
- 4 Take action against attacks
- 5 (a) No anonymous comments OR (b) No pseudonymous comments
- 6 Ignore the trolls (or those wishing harm)
- 7 Encourage enforcement of terms of service
- 8 Keep our sources private
- 9 Discretion to delete comments
- 10 Do no harm.

These ethics codes are not trivial. Cyberbullying is a growing problem, as *The New York Times* reported in April 2007. "Menacing behavior is certainly not unique to the Internet. But since the Web offers the option of anonymity with no accountability, online conversations are often more prone to decay into ugliness than those in other media," according to the article (Brad Stone, "A Call for Manners in the World of Nasty Blogs," *New York Times*, April 9, 2007). Anonymous speech has become such a problem online that Congress has considered amending Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which gives ISPs and newspaper Web sites immunity for non-moderated discussion and chat.

The "Tagosphere" and Really Simple Syndication (RSS)

Blogs and Web sites have multiplied so quickly that tools to track, search and identify (or tag) them have proliferated, as well. These tools and sites, known collectively as the "Tagosphere," help users find, retrieve, save, share and otherwise organize the Web. Examples include Technorati, which tags and compiles taxonomies of the blogosphere, and Furl.net, which enables users to save and retrieve Web pages and makes recommendations on what other pages a user might want to visit. A few others:

- Kaboodle.com: for shopping sites
- Reddit.com: where users can post any Web link and other users can vote on its value
- Wink.com: for links that other users have identified as useful or interesting
- Stumbleupon.com: for saving and searching users' favorite Web pages; users can join groups to discuss and share pages by topic or interest.

The screenshot shows the NewsTrust website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links for Home, World, U.S., Politics, Business, Sci/Tech, Media, All Topics, and Help. Below the navigation bar, there is a featured topic section for "Health Care" with a photo of pills and a featured story titled "Thought Rationing" by Jonathan Chait. To the right of the featured story, there is a "Sign up with Facebook" button. Below the featured story, there is a "Most Recent" section with a list of news stories, including "Interactive map: Health care costs vary widely across U.S." and "Transportation Stimulus Gives Short Shrift to Cities". To the right of the news stories, there is a "Most Trusted" section with a list of user reviews, including "3.9 3 reviews" and "3.7 See Reviews". At the bottom right, there is a "Our Reviewers" section with a grid of user avatars.

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4.8

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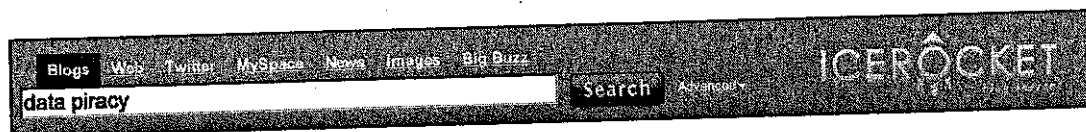
NewsTrust (www.newstrust.net) asks readers to evaluate news stories using traditional principles of journalistic quality; the evaluations are published on the site.

Bloggers can also use RSS (automatic news) feeds to follow new developments on a beat or issue without having to visit a hundred different Web sites. NewsGator, Newstrust and other aggregators pull together RSS findings, meaning you only have to look in one place to see all the latest updates on your issue or area of interest. Aggregators bring you these feeds virtually as soon as they are published.

It is easy to generate RSS feeds from the sites you want based on your search criteria. First, set up your search feeds, using a feed reader such as Newsfire or Google Reader. Create a folder for your issue or area, such as "data privacy." At Technorati, enter the search query "data privacy" to get a series of results. In the top right corner of the Technorati results page you will see a "subscribe" button. Once that is clicked, you are sent to a feed page displaying the latest blog posts that match the search query. Copy the URL of that page from your Web browser's location bar. Switch back to your feed reader, tell it you want to add a new feed, and paste in the URL, saving the feed in the folder named "data privacy." Duplicate this process for other online resources for fresh content on that topic. The result might still be a lot of content to scan, but scanning a feed reader is faster than searching site by site.

Some feed reader options (all of them free):

- Bloglines (www.bloglines.com)
- NewsGator (www.newsgator.com)
- Sage (sage.mozdev.org), for the Firefox Web browser
- Safari: The default Mac OS X web browser comes with a built-in feed reader
- Icerocket (www.icerocket.com)
- BlogPulse (www.blogpulse.com).



Feed search engines, such as Technorati (www.technorati.com), are the best way to quickly learn what's new online, as opposed to what's available. They help you stay abreast of blogs and niche news sites, breaking news, and any online resource that publishes feeds, aggregating millions of feeds.

For blog readers who like to access content via their mobile phones, there are services that will convert blog posts into mp3 audio files. BuzzVoice.com is one example, a service that also converts news stories to audio files.

The Top Ten Steps to Better Blogging

Last, here are ten practical steps or good habits that can produce a good blog.

Step 1: Write every day. In arguing for frequent, regular blogging, Rebecca Blood wrote that “it’s easy to write poorly, but it’s hard to write poorly every day . . . It’s hard to write every day” (Blood 2002: 28). Write frequently and regularly, and your writing will surely grow stronger from the practice.

Step 2: Schedule your blogging time. Like the formation of any new habit, blogging requires planning. Determine when in the day or night you can consistently blog, and then stick to that time. Some prefer to write early in the morning, coffee in hand, with energy reservoirs at their maximum. Others prefer the reflection of late evenings, after the day’s events have played out. The point isn’t when, but to have a scheduled time to write each and every day.

Step 3: Be authentic. A jazz music deejay in Greensboro, NC, daily signed off his broadcasts with the call to, “Be yourself so you won’t be by yourself.” The best blogs have an authentically human voice that is distinctive, even idiosyncratic. Don’t worry about pleasing everyone from the start. Instead, start blogging by writing for an audience of one (yourself), which will help you cultivate this authenticity, transparency and voice. The networked and Google-searched nature of the Web will connect your area of interest or expertise with readers who share a similar point of view and/or interest. Sites like Google, Technorati, Digg, Reddit, Del.icio.us, Stumbleupon and Slashdot will pick up on what you are posting and make your writing known to larger and wider audiences.

Step 4: Carve out a niche. The best bloggers focus on specific interests—the narrower the topic, the better—leveraging their own expertise and experience in the area. Larry Lessig, for example, is a Stanford law professor specializing in intellectual property law. His widely read blog, Lessig 2.0, at www.lessig.org/blog, focuses on IP law and the open source movement, though he comments on other subjects, such as pop music and technology. Readers can count on his blog to keep up with the major news and events in intellectual property law as it relates to digital media and digital content.

Step 5: Be curious and take lots of notes. Not every thought is blog-worthy, so keep a notebook or temporary file of your musings, thoughts, ideas, links and articles of interest—anything that might inform your blogging. When you keep your daily appointment to write, you can relax knowing you have a file or folder of goodies to get you going rather than having to stare at an empty template post box and write from scratch a pithy and provocative post.

Step 6: Engage. When you get comments, react to them. Encourage them. Affirm your readers and continue the conversations your posts have begun. This is about community-building, which was discussed in the previous section.

Participate on other people's blogs, include their blogs on your blogroll, and link to others' posts when appropriate. The blogosphere operates on the principle of reciprocity, so make sure you are creating plenty of social capital by being interested and engaged with the ideas of others in your blog circle or community. If you are not prepared to engage at this level, there really is no point to starting up a blog.

Step 7: Learn the software. You don't need to become an expert or a coder, but you can devote an "upgrade day" every few weeks or so to learning more about the software you're using to power your blog. Look into features like RSS feeds, spam filters, YouTube video hosting and photo hosting to upgrade your blog. On upgrade day, you could also spend some time tagging or re-tagging posts to better organize your content and to make it easier for others and for you yourself to find specific posts. This is a good time to check for broken links, too.

Step 8: Promote yourself. Don't be shy. Market your blog. Simple steps to reach more readers include registering your blog with Technorati, which indexes and provides blog search; registering with the major search engines, including Google; and setting up RSS feeds of your site to have your content delivered to anyone who wants to subscribe. Google Analytics is a free tool any blogger can use to see how people are finding you and what terms they used to locate your blog, which can inform how you tag content and what headlines you write.

Step 9: Break up the text. Your writing may be Pulitzer-worthy, but your readers will still need some visual relief. Make sure you follow the basic graphic design and layout principles covered in previous chapters. Boldface, lists, photos, graphics, cartoons, breakout diagrams and illustrations can elaborate your post and break up what otherwise might be an overwhelming storm of words. Most blogging software packages make it easy to add a photo or graphic to your post.

Step 10: Be ethical. Hold to a code of ethics. An old adage advises that the best time to plan what you would do with a lot of money is when you don't have any money, because when you are flush with cash your values can quickly change, based on your appetites. Similarly, planning ahead for ethical challenges by adopting a code of ethics will allow you to have a set of a carefully deliberated priorities, goals and values to turn to in times of crisis, when decisions about content need to be made quickly and resolutely.

Chapter Assignment

- 1 Live blog something—an event, a trip, a conference or a meeting. Take your readers there. We are looking here for immediacy, vicariousness, texture, reflection, a sense of what happened and what you thought about it. Think of this assignment as visceral, immediate, on-site reporting from a particular point of view—your point of view.

Live blogging means merely blogging while the event is happening, using multiple brief posts to give your readers an account of that event. Hyperlink where appropriate. There is no minimum or maximum for the number of posts; you likely will find a rhythm.

Length: minimum of approximately 700 words, but feel free to blog on.

Real world example 1: *USA Today's* entertainment reporter, César Soriano, attended Star Wars Celebration III in Indianapolis April 21–24, 2005 and blogged about it: http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/2005-04-20-star-wars-blog_x.htm.

Real world example 2: ESPN's live blogging of Roger Clemens's testimony before Congress on steroid use in baseball: http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/blog/index?entryID=3243182&name=congressional_hearings.

Online Resources

Weblog Communities, Software, and Platforms

Blogger

<http://www.blogger.com/>

Greymatter

<http://www.noahgrey.com/greysoft/>

Ikonboard

<http://www.ikonboard.com>

Movable Type

<http://www.movabletype.org/>

WordPress

<http://www.wordpress.org>

A Few Good Blogs

The Committee to Protect Bloggers

<http://committeetoprotectbloggers.blogspot.com>

Developed by Curt Hopkins, director.

Consensus at Lawyerpoint

<http://bpdg.blogs.eff.org/>

Blog by Seth Schoen, connected to the Broadcast Protection Discussion Group.

Jonathan Dube at the Media Center

http://www.cyberjournalist.net/the_weblog_blog/

E-Media Tidbits

<http://www.poynter.org/tidbits>

Group-authored blog through the Web site of the professional journalism education organization the Poynter Institute.

Romenesko

<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45>

Commentary by Jim Romenesko of the Poynter Institute.

Scobleizer

<http://scobleizer.com>

Technology-focused blog by Robert Scoble.

The Shifted Librarian

www.theshiftedlibrarian.com

Librarian and information science blog by Jenny Levine.

Social Media.Biz

<http://www.socialmedia.biz/>

J.D. Lasica's social media blog.

Talking Points Memo

www.talkingpointsmemo.com

Political commentary by Joshua Micah Marshall.

The Volokh Conspiracy

<http://volokh.com/>

Law blog by Eric Volokh.

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