

Blogosphere¹: exploring the new killer app for librarians

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“Bloggers are turning the hunting and gathering, sampling and critiquing the rest of us do online into an extreme sport. We surf the Web; these guys snowboard it. Bloggers are the minutemen of the digital revolution.”²

In the electronic environment, government information librarians are increasingly faced with three, no, four, important questions: how to collect electronic documents, especially those ever-growing fugitives? How to let users know about the library’s collection and services? How to communicate with users and other librarians? And most importantly, how to answer the above three questions in the midst of committee work, research, reference, and instruction, AND have time for lunch before 3pm?

The answer to some of these questions may be found in the blog, the Internet’s newest and fastest growing phenomenon. According to www.zdwebopedia.com, the term “blog” is short for “Web log, a Web page that serves as a publicly-accessible personal journal for an individual. Typically updated daily, blogs often reflect the personality of the author.” Blogs are basically online diaries or current awareness services consisting of short, frequently updated posts in chronological order by most recent post. Blake Carver, Web Librarian at Ohio State University and founder of the blog, *lisnews.com*, defines a blog as, “...a tool to collect, categorize, and make information accessible.”³ A typical blog entry can contain one or more links and text describing and/or commenting on the item of interest. See the end of this article for an example of a blog post. Along with up-to-the-minute updates, blogs include archives of older posts, and, on the more technically advanced ones, space for a newswire (note to self: write a future Tech column on RSS!) and can be maintained individually or collaboratively. In other words, blogs are the Swiss Army Knives of the web: listserv, bulletin board, newswire, directory, Usenet, collection bin, all wrapped into a visually pleasing, well-organized web layout.

The blogging software consists of three basic pieces: a web page generator, a database to store the posts, and a web-accessible form so that the blogger(s)—“person who blogs”—can add posts at any time. In addition, users can post comments and suggest other items of interest, making the blog an online community of information sharing. Updating one’s blog is extremely easy—knowledge of code is definitely NOT a prerequisite to being a blogger! The blogging software can be hosted outside of the library (see below for an incomplete list of blogging services) or can be downloaded onto and hosted at the library’s web server.

Blogs range from the professional to the arcane to the perverse and have names like *LISNews*, *Voidstar: a pointer to nothing*, and, *Brain Flotsam*. At first glance, blogs seem

¹ Definition of a blogosphere: <http://www.microcontentnews.com/resources/glossary/blogosphere.htm>

² Jenkins, Henry (March 2002). Blog this. (Digital Renaissance). *Technology Review*, 105(2) p91.

³ Carver, Blake (Winter 2003). Is it time to get blogging? *NetConnect*, p.30.

to be a fun toy for surfers with too much time and bandwidth on their hands, but a closer look reveals that a blog can be an extremely powerful tool for the librarian. Whether one uses his/her blog as a current awareness service (for one's department or library), as a collection development tool to collect websites or electronic documents of interest for later integration into one's library catalog or database of web resources, as a tool to aid in bibliographic instruction, or as a site to post library news to faculty, staff, and patrons—or all four at once!—the blog can aid the librarian in his/her quest for ever better collections, outreach, instruction, and time management. Its uses are only confined by the blogger's imagination. How often can you say that something is fun AND useful?! So go ahead and blog your heart out.

Examples of blogs:

- Catalogablog: <http://catalogablog.blogspot.com/>
- David Fletcher's Government and Technology Weblog: <http://radio.weblogs.com/0110120/>
- H2Ooro lib blog: <http://www.waterborolibrary.org/blog.htm>
- Librarian.net (<http://librarian.net/>)
- Library Stuff: <http://www.librarystuff.net/>
- LISNews: <http://lisnews.com/>
- Resource Shelf (Gary Price): <http://resourceshelf.freepint.com/>
- Rogue Librarian: <http://www.roguelibrarian.com/index.html>
- The Shifted Librarian: <http://www.theshiftedlibrarian.com/>
- /usr/lib/info: <http://usrlib.info/>
- Voxpolitics: e-democracy tidbits and crumbs: <http://www.voxpolitics.com/>

Blogging software:

- Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>) (free blog hosting with ads, for-fee hosting without ads)
- Greymatter: <http://www.noahgrey.com/greysoft/> (free to download)
- LISHost: <http://www.lishost.com/> (low-cost hosting service)
- LiveJournal.com: <http://www.livejournal.com/> (free but with low-cost paid account to help the administrator cover hosting costs)
- Moveable Type: <http://www.moveabletype.org/> (free to download)
- Radio UserLand (<http://www.userland.com/>) (\$39.95 off-the-shelf)

Blogging information:

- Libdex Index of library weblogs: <http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html>
- Microcontent News: Online magazine for weblogs, webzines, and personal publishing: <http://www.microcontentnews.com/>

Sample blog post from LISNews: <http://lisnews.com>



The screenshot shows the LISNews.com website header with the logo and navigation links. The main content area features a yellow banner with the title "Libraries under attack". Below the title, it states the post was made on Wednesday, March 26, 2003, at 06:04PM and has been read 0 times. The text of the post discusses the impact of public libraries on Japanese authors, mentioning a decline in book sales and a petition for a public-lending-right system. A small graphic of a computer monitor with a book icon is also visible.

*Used with permission from Blake Carver, lisnews.com.

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