

Library Blogging Workshop

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SOHLIN

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Handout + presentation slides are online at:

- <http://blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/sohlin/blogs.pdf>
- <http://blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/sohlin/handout.pdf>

Intro to Blogging

- Started as changelogs, "What's New" pages & Linklogs
- 1997 Dave Winer launched Userland
- 1999 Pyra Labs launched blogger.com

What is a Blog?

- Blogging software = content management system
- Website powered by blogging software = blog
- Each story = post
- Most recent post at the top of the page
- Posts display reverse-chronologically
- A link for every post = permalink
- Older posts = archives
- Every post is categorized = tags or categories
- Every post has a discussion forum = comments

Bloggng Technology

- **Hosted blogs**
 - Remotely hosted
 - Examples: blogger.com, wordpress.com
 - URL will be "blogspot.com" or "wordpress.com"
- Advantages:
 - Free & easy!
 - Don't have to worry about installation
 - Support & troubleshooting
 - Little/no technical know-how required
- Disadvantages
 - Not on your server
 - URL different from rest of your site
 - Limited ability to customize design
 - Limited ability to add functionality (e.g. plugins)
- **Installed blogs**
 - Installed on your server
 - Examples: MovableType, WordPress
- Advantages
 - Software & content on your server
 - Can customize design, layout, etc.
 - Add as much/little functionality as you'd like (e.g. plugins)
 - Your site/URL
 - WordPress is open source

- Disadvantages
 - Need some in-house IT know-how
 - Need time
 - Support & troubleshooting is up to you (online resources are good)

Examples

- **Hosted:**
 - Wasilla Public Library: <http://wplak.blogspot.com/>
 - Wendt Library Blog: <http://wendt-library.blogspot.com/>
 - Newark Library Blog: <http://newarklibrary.wordpress.com/>
- **Installed:**
 - University of Waterloo: <http://blogs.lib.uwaterloo.ca/maplibrary/>
 - Bethlehem Area PL: <http://bapl.org/wordpress/>
 - UCLA Biomedical Blog: <http://blogs.library.ucla.edu/biomedical>

Ask yourself these questions when choosing blog software for your library:

- Do you have access to your web server?
- Do you have IT know-how and/or support from IT?
- Does your server meet the requirements of X blogging platform?
- Does your institution have web guidelines/standards you need to meet?
- Does an off-site URL matter to you?
- Do you want your blog to do X, Y & Z?

Why start a blog for your library?

- Share news & events
- Reach out to your users
- Chronicle the library
- Give your library a human voice
- Syndicate, syndicate, syndicate

Health Library Blog Examples

- Hardin Library News <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/hardin/>
- Science @Charles Darwin <http://science.blog.library.cdu.edu.au/>
- Medical Research Library Reno <http://libforum.downstate.edu/reno/>
- Ask Sassy Systems <http://sassysystems.blogspot.com/>
- K-State Libraries <http://ksulib.typepad.com/talking/>
- UCSD Libraries <http://tinyurl.com/2fc5vc>
- University of Medicine and Health Sciences (UMHS) <http://iuonlibrary.blogspot.com/>
- National Network of Libraries SC region <http://nmlm.gov/scr/blog/>
- University of Michigan Dentistry <http://mblog.lib.umich.edu/dentlib/>
- Health Sciences Library, Stony Brook <http://www.ibiblio.org/secretlibrary/ilib/>
- Saskatchewan Medical Education Blog http://blogs.usask.ca/medical_education/
- Royal Free Hospital Library Blog <http://rfhlibrary.blogspot.com/>
- University of Rochester Medical <http://bibbynews.wordpress.com/>
- Juravinski Cancer Program <http://jcponcology.wordpress.com/>

Some "best of breed" library blogs

- SJCPL Blog <http://www.libraryforlife.org/blogs/lifeline/>
- Williamsburg Regional Library <http://bfgb.wordpress.com/>
- Ann Arbor District Library <http://www.aadl.org/>

- Plymouth State University <http://library.plymouth.edu/>
- K-State Libraries <http://ksulib.typepad.com/talking/>

Getting buy-in for your blog

- **The admin sell:**
 - Blogs are free/cheap
 - Blogs are easy
 - Little overhead required in money & time
 - Gets the library up to speed with new tech
 - Make sure to show the utility of the blog (i.e. what are you going to use it for? Why is it the best tool for the job?)
 - Blogs are great ways to reach out to user
 - Mention how you will assess success
 - Explain, show examples
- **The staff sell:**
 - Blogs are easy
 - Little overhead required in money & time
 - Gets the library up to speed with new tech
 - Make sure to show the utility of the blog (i.e. what are you going to use it for? Why is it the best tool for the job?)
 - Explain, show examples
- **The IT sell:**
 - ... really depends on the software you're using
 - Might need little/no help from IT (hosted)
 - Might need installation & support from IT (installed)
 - Get admin on board first!
- **Consider something like Learning 2.0**
 - Show & tell
 - Opportunities for hands-on exploration
 - Give staff time to play
 - Low-threat
 - PLCMC <http://plcmcl2-about.blogspot.com/>
 - McMaster <http://macetq.blog.lib.mcmaster.ca>

Advice for writing good blog content

- Be human
- Be authentic
- Admit when you've made a mistake
- Ask for feedback
- Respond to feedback

Blog Design Best Practices

- A minimal header
- Have an "about" page
- Make use of your sidebar space
- Use your sidebar space wisely!
- No ads
- Look up & use general web usability guidelines
- Educate through design
- Consistency through branding

Advice for marketing your blog

- **Content**
 - what are you marketing?
 - content should speak for itself!
 - don't market if you're slim on [fresh] content
- **Staff**
 - staff buy-in is key
 - do your staff read the library's blog?
 - staff members are grassroots marketers!
- **Traditional marketing**
 - how do you promote a new service?
 - got a newsletter? e-mail account? business card?
- **Use that website!**
 - if you build it, they might not come
 - a link is not enough
 - put that home page to good use!
- **Pimp your feed!**
 - Decide on a syndication policy
 - Tell your users what that policy is!
 - e.g. <http://library.mcmaster.ca/php/blog.php>
 - Push that feed: department pages, partner pages, course management systems, etc.

Blogging "best" practices (not all of these will be applicable to all of you!)

- Make sure you have a clear mission. Your blog's purpose & scope will dictate content.
- Know your audience – don't make any assumptions about them and make sure you contextualize information for them.
- Be human! Use humour where you can, don't speak on behalf of "The Library" and don't use the third person or passive voice – these do not make for compelling reading!
- Share authorship with multiple members of staff (if you can). Pick staff that are enthusiastic and enjoy writing (you don't want blog posting to become a chore for anyone).
- Blogging is a 2-way street! Open up comments, engage your users. Have a comment policy to help you deal with flammers & spammers and invite the community to self-moderate where possible.
- Check out what other libraries are doing with their blogs and steal their ideas! Use <http://blogwithoutalibrary.net/links> for ideas.
- It's not hard to make your blog visually appealing – use Creative Commons licensed images from Flickr, videos from YouTube, etc.
- Once you have good blog content, get your headlines on other pages on your website (using the RSS feed and Feed2JS).