

Blogs: digital diaries?

Tom Roper

*Our Hidden Lives: Publishing
Everyday Diaries 17th November
2004*

Our Hidden Lives: 17th
November 2004

I shall cover...

- The evolution of blogs
- The demography of blogging
- Why people blog?
- Public and private blogs
- Authority, provenance and authenticity in blogs
- Archiving and preserving blogs

My education in blogging

- Professional:
 - current awareness service for medical educators using blog to deliver:
<http://www.roper.org.uk/bsms/index.html>
 - METRO project: <http://metro2.blogspot.com/>
- Personal: desire to inflict myself on the world:
<http://tomroper.typepad.com/>
 - Blogger
 - iBlog
 - TypePad

Blogging

- Blog=weblog (first used December 1997)
- In its purest form, a log of sites visited
- A definition: “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (Herring 2004)

The OED says...

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window displaying the Oxford English Dictionary entry for 'weblog'. The browser's address bar shows the URL: `http://athens.oed.com/cgi/entry/00319399?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=weblog&edition=3e&first=1&max_to_show=10`. The page title is 'Oxford English Dictionary weblog, n.'.

The dictionary entry for 'weblog, n.' is displayed on a yellow background. It includes a search bar at the top right with the text 'weblog' and a 'FIND WORD' button. The entry is categorized under 'Computing.' and has tabs for 'PRONUNCIATION', 'ETYMOLOGY', 'QUOTATIONS', and 'DATE CHART'. The 'QUOTATIONS' tab is selected.

The entry defines 'weblog' as:

1. A file storing a detailed record of requests handled (and sometimes also errors generated) by a web server.

Examples and citations for the first definition include:

- 1993 *comp.infosystems.www* (Usenet newsgroup) 4 Nov. (*title of posting*) Announcing getsites 1.5, a Web log analyzer.
- 1995 *Computer Technol. Rev.* July 10/2 The Key creates a log—the WebLog—listing everyone who has accessed software from a particular Web site.
- 1998 *Boston Globe* (Electronic ed.) 19 Oct., The server Web logs..indicated..which computers were hitting his site, the number of visitors, and the time they retrieved his page.
- 2002 *Network Computing* 21 Jan. 60/3 We were interested in seeing the most viewed products... Was chicken-wing sauce viewed more often than steak sauce...? We got a good, diverse group of actual Web log data.

2. A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary.

Examples and citations for the second definition include:

- 1997 J. BARGER *Lively New Webpage* in *alt.culture.www* (Usenet newsgroup) 23 Dec., I decided to start my own webpage logging the best stuff I find as I surf, on a daily basis... www.mcs.net/~jorn/html/weblog.html. This will cover any and everything that interests me, from net culture to politics to literature etc.
- 1998 *Village Voice* (N.Y.) 8 Sept. 33/3 Jorn Barger's Robot Wisdom WebLog..might not be pretty, but it's one of the best collections of news and musings culled from the Web—and updated daily.
- 2000 *Independent* 23 Oct. II. 9/1 A weblog is simply a site where you post your thoughts whenever the muse strikes.
- 2002 *Times* (Electronic ed.) 14 Jan., There is a way to be stupendously well informed... Scour the highlights in..weblogs.

At the bottom of the page, there are navigation links: 'LIST BY ENTRY', 'LIST BY DATE', 'ENTRY MAP', 'SIMPLE SEARCH', and 'ADVANCED SEARCH'. There are also buttons for 'PRINT', 'MAIL', 'HELP', and 'SIGN OUT'. A subscriber notice at the bottom right indicates 'SUBSCRIBER: Stanford University'.

Some landmarks

- First blog: 1996?
- Hosted blogging 2000:
 - Pitas
 - Blogger
 - Groksoup
- 9/11, Iraq war, 2004 election

More hosted services

- Livejournal: <http://www.livejournal.com/>
- Opera journal:
<http://my.opera.com/community/journals/>
- Diaryland: <http://www.diaryland.com/>
- Other factors:
 - better faster more powerful internet access
 - RSS and aggregators/newsreaders

Demographics

- 2%-7% adult US Internet users maintain blogs
- 11% of Internet users have read blogs or diaries of other Internet users
 - (Pew Internet & American Life Project)
- 4 million blogs listed on Technorati
- One forecast: 10.3 million by end of 2004
- Churn: 2/3 of blogs not currently maintained (Perseus Blog Survey)

Demographics (2)

- Early bias towards people employed in computing and allied sectors
- Young: 92.4% in Perseus survey aged < 30 years (n=4,120,000)
- And 44% male, 56% female authorship
- Audiences: nano-audience

What are blogs (1)?

- Herring et al:
 - Journalism
 - Filter
 - Knowledge blogs
 - Self-expression

What are blogs (2)?

- Possible analogies:
 - Diaries
 - Commonplace books
 - Pamphlets
 - Letters
 - Posters
 - All of the above and more
- “All human life is there”

Taxonomy of blogs (Amy Gahran)

- Link-only
- Link-blurb
- Brief remarks
- List-style postings
- Short articles
- Long articles
- Series

To illustrate...

- <http://www.pepysdiary.com/>
- <http://tomroper.typepad.com/>
- Paul Hollands:
 - <http://minnesota.ncl.ac.uk/fuzzybuckets/>
 - <http://minnesota.ncl.ac.uk/smalladventures/>
 - <http://minnesota.ncl.ac.uk/paulhasmostlybeen/>
- <http://tscott.typepad.com/tsp/>

How easy is it?

- Let's make one now
 - <http://www.blogger.com>

Anonymity/pseudonymity/provenance/authority

- All blogs are by definition public, expect those protected by technical barriers
- Anonymity/pseudonymity
 - <http://belledejour-uk.blogspot.com/>
- Authority: fake presidential sites

Archiving and preservation

- How useful will blogs be to students of the future?
- How to preserve them?
- Crash of weblogs.com
- Particular challenges:
 - Comments/trackback
 - Link rot

The blogger's world view (by Hugh at gapingvoid.com)

