

Library Blog proposal **“Bits, Bytes, and Books Blog” (tentative title)**

“Adding a blog to your library’s web site can add currency and freshness. It can also encourage patrons to return. At its best, a blog can transform your site into a dynamic learning community where everyone shares knowledge” (Carver, p.32).

“Libraries can serve diverse groups of users with blogs. Imagine academic staff members sharing news in their subject area, such as links to book reviews, or notices of conferences, or links to papers posted on the web” (Carver, p.32).

What is a blog?

According to Matisse’s Glossary of Internet Terms (<http://www.matisse.net/files/glossary.html>) a blog is

“a journal that is available on the *web*. The activity of updating a blog is "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger." Blogs are typically updated daily using software that allows people with little or no technical background to update and maintain the blog.

Postings on a blog are almost always arranged in chronological order with the most recent additions featured most prominently.”

How will our Library use a blog?

- To publicize and promote library events, programs, resources, and services (eg. Cultural events, new databases, URLs for educational web sites, new books in the library etc.)
- To form new ties with the community by providing an online presence directed at inviting users into both the physical and virtual Library space.
- To “collect, categorize, and make information accessible” in a virtual environment to augment what we have always done in the physical Library environment (Carver, 30).
- To involve students, faculty and community members in what goes on at their Library by using a direct, immediate and affable form of communication to illustrate our interest in keeping them informed and engaged.
- To convey a sense of how the Library is relevant to the staff, students, and community through an example of our technological sophistication and to establish the Library and College as “early adopters” of cutting edge technology and communication tools.
- To promote our Library to as a hub of community, education, and technology to outside observers such as other libraries, law makers, and prospective students.

- To pave the way for further developments in the area of remote access to Library services.

What are some examples of Library blogs?

- College of DuPage Library Weblog: <http://www.codlibrary.org/blog/>
 - The College of DuPage is a community college in Illinois that uses a free software package called Movable Type (<http://www.movabletype.org>) to power their blog locally.
- TRICO Library News: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/mt/blog/>
 - The TRICO Library News blog, which provides news from the libraries at Bryn Mawr, Haverford and Swarthmore), also uses Movable Type.
- Free Public Library of Springfield Township: <http://fls.blogspot.com/>
 - The Free Public Library of Springfield Township in Wyndmoor, PA uses a free service called Blogger (www.blogger.com) to host their blog.
- Moraine Valley Community College: <http://www.morainevalley.edu/lrc/blogs.htm>
 - The Robert E. Turner Library at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, IL also uses Movable Type to power their blogs.

What are the advantages of developing a Library blog?

- Works toward accomplishing Goal 7 of the Library's Strategic Plan, to "publicize and promote the Library as the academic center of the community," by providing the Library with an online presence to augment our physical one.
- Extends our "technologically sophisticated environment for learning and discovery" into cyberspace (Library vision statement).
- Will be a means of outreach to patrons who have less opportunity to physically access the Library, including distance learning students and homebound community members.
- Will provide another forum for librarians to "instruct in the use of resource materials in a variety of formats" and "provide general interest materials for enrichment" (Library mission statement).
- Is a free and easy way to advertise and promote the Library and College, to communicate more directly with our patrons, and to keep pace with other cutting edge libraries and colleges.

What are the challenges in developing a Library blog?

- Some types of blogging involve computer programming.
- Programming the blog will use IT staff time and library staff time.
- Some types of blogging software will use College server space.
- Involves updating content daily and minimal troubleshooting.

- Requires the development of standards for content, including who will be authorized to post and how we will present opportunities for feedback.

What are the technical logistics of developing a Library blog?

Blogs must be hosted on a web server in order to be available for viewing to the public. The most important choice to make in terms of technical logistics is how we will host the blog. There are three ways to do it:

- Host the blog locally using free software such as Movable Type, which allows for more control over format and content;
- Host it remotely for a fee through a service such as Typepad, which will give us similar but lesser control at a cost;
- or host it externally for free through a service such as Blogger or LiveJournal, in which case we will be very limited in our control over the formatting of the blog or the presence of ads but will not have to pay a fee, utilize any server space or be required to program any software.

What are the differences among some popular blogging software packages?

Movable Type

This software packages is open source and can be downloaded freely off the Movable Type website. According to their “Frequently Asked Questions” (<http://www.movabletype.org/faq.shtml>) page, Movable Type is “an application that installs on your web server, providing you with a personal publishing system for creating weblogs or news pages. Movable Type is flexible and is appropriate for use by technically adept power users or businesses with customization needs.” It’s developed by a company called Six Apart and was originally created by the co-founders of Six Apart, Benjamin Trott and Mena G. Trott.

Tech support is available for the software, including a support forum, free upgrades and online documentation. The installation process does require a level of comfort with “installing and configuring a Perl script on a web server” (Movable Type “FAQ”). The core system requirements (<http://www.movabletype.org/requirements.shtml>) are:

- A web server with permissions that allow you to run custom CGI scripts
- Perl, version 5.004_04 or greater, configured for your web server
- An FTP program to upload the necessary files to your web server
- Any standard web browser on Windows, Mac OS, or Unix/Linux with Javascript and cookies enabled
- Support for the DB_File Perl (Berkeley DB) module **OR** the MySQL database & DBD::mysql

Disadvantages:

- Requires a certain amount of computer programming to install.
- Takes up space on the College's server.

Advantages:

- Can be completely internally controlled, from everything from choosing what URL to use down to the features of the site itself.
- Software is free and open source.
- Can be individualized to a great extent.

Typepad

Typepad is Six Apart's weblog service based on the Movable Type engine. For a fee they will host your blog and maintain the technical aspects of the software on their server. This service offers more support services, and requires less effort on the part of the IT department. Typepad comes in three flavors: Basic, Plus and Pro. The Basic service is \$4.95/month and includes "all the features you'd expect in your weblog, including the ability to display images, enable comments, and to assign your posts to categories." The Plus service (\$8.95/month) includes the ability to have up to three blogs per account, use of your own domain name, and pre- and post-dating of posts, among other features. The Pro service (\$14.95/month) is "the option for experts." With this service you can edit the HTML of your blog, have an unlimited number of blogs, invite other authors to contribute to your site, and archive your entries in multiple formats.

(<http://www.typepad.com/site/features/>)

Disadvantages:

- Service marketed towards individuals and professionals, not necessarily libraries.
- Provides less control than Movable Type.
- Costs a monthly fee.

Advantages:

- Requires little to no involvement from a programming perspective
- Offers similar features to those possible with Movable Type.

Blogger

This free service offers similar features to those included in Typepad Basic. Users can sign up for a free account and pick from among a limited number of formatting options. The blog would be hosted on the company's server, and the URL would look something like this: <http://mcccblog.blogspot.com>.

Disadvantages:

- Linking to an external site is necessary.
- Limited formatting options.
- Ad bar will always be present at the top of the page.

Advantages:

- Free service.
- Requires no programming involvement.
- Involves no internal server space usage.

LiveJournal

This is a combination free/fee-based service. The free service offers more limited formatting options. The fee-based service costs \$25 for 12 months, \$15 for 6 months or \$5 for 2 months. The features overview is located at <http://www.livejournal.com/site/about.bml>.

LiveJournal is a more sophisticated system than Blogger and offers a sense of community between its users. There is a search engine which can be used to find other bloggers with similar interests, and a community feature which allows bloggers to join team blogs on a topic of choice. The blogs are hosted on the LiveJournal server, and the URL would look something like this: <http://www.livejournal.com/~mcccblog> or <http://www.livejournal.com/users/mcccblog>.

Disadvantages:

- Linking to an external site necessary.
- Limited formatting options.
- Marketed mainly towards individuals for use on hobby or interest-related blogs.

Advantages:

- Free service.
- Requires no programming involvement.
- Involves no server space usage.
- No ad bar.

Conclusion

Developing a Library blog will benefit the Library and the College by providing an easy, affordable way for us to promote Library services and programs, to establish and strengthen relationships between the Library and students, faculty and community members, and to further the goals of the Library's Strategic Plan.

Hosting the Library blog on the College's server would be ideal because it guarantees our ability to shape and control the content and formatting of the blog with minimal expense and effort.

It is important that the College establish tangible evidence of its status as a proactive and innovative institution in order for us to remain a competitive member of the educational community and to move towards accomplishing our goals. The Library blog will contribute to that evidence.

References

Carver, Blake. (2003). Is it time to get blogging? *Netconnect*, p.30. Retrieved February 10, 2004 from EbscoHost.

Fichter, Darlene. Why and how to use blogs to promote your library's services. *Marketing Library Services*. Retrieved February 11, 2004 from <http://www.infotoday.com/mls/nov03/fichter.shtml>.

Resources

Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>)

College of DuPage Library Weblog (<http://www.codlibrary.org/blog/>)

Free Public Library of Springfield Township (<http://fls.blogspot.com/>)

LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>)

Movable Type (<http://www.movabletype.org>)

Open Directory: Reference: Libraries: Library and Information Science:
Weblogs: Organizational Weblogs
([http://dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library and Information Science/Weblogs/Organizational_Weblogs/](http://dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Weblogs/Organizational_Weblogs/))

Robert E. Turner Library at Moraine Valley Community College
(<http://www.morainevalley.edu/lrc/blogs.htm>)

TRICO Library News (<http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/mt/blog/>)

Typepad (<http://www.typepad.com>)