

Drinking from the Firehose — Blogs are Making Me Feel Old!

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I'm beginning to think it's time to turn this column over to someone under the age of thirty since I am not sure I can convince anyone that I have anything meaningful to say about new technology. Blogs aren't new anymore and here I am, just now talking about them. How embarrassing!

When **Michael Gorman** published his now infamous piece, "Revenge of the Blog People" in the Feb. 15, 2005 issue of *Library Journal*, he inadvertently opened the doors to a torrent of derision. That's too bad, since that was not his intention, I'm sure. But considering all the new technology that has taken hold in the last few years (super-duper cell phones, various other hand-helds such as Ipods and Blackberries, Wikis, blogs, etc.) this is not surprising. My goodness, simple email is now considered passé these days!

In my attempts to understand the "blog people" **Gorman** talks about, I did find plenty of sites and read many of their comments. It's all a little boring though, which is why I know I must be growing old because none of this particularly excites me. I just get tired thinking about it!

As far as I can tell, Web logging is just another way to arrange thoughts and ideas on the Internet. Okay, that's cool. Set up a blog or set up a Website, whatever works for you. Blog software is certainly easier to learn to use. I suppose I could have a blog too. I could take my "Drinking From the Firehose" column and develop it as a blog and you could read my musings every hour or every day or however often you wanted to do so. You could even reply. Wonderful. But for who is this a good thing? I have kept a diary in my past, and I might keep one in the future, but I have never kept one publicly. When I sit down to write this column, I have already thought about the subject for months — yes, months, before I set words to screen and I actually do research on the topic beforehand. I don't think most bloggers are doing this kind of preparation most of the time, although some of them are fabulous thinkers and writers. This was a point I think **Michael Gorman** was trying to make. Opinion pieces have their place in the world but they are not necessarily serious scholarship. I have a lot of respect for good thinkers and writers, regardless of whether or not they keep a blog. There are some really useful and interesting blogs out there. But what is the long-term value in terms of scholarship? Does anyone care about that? Is this technology better suited for news feeds and the like? Many libraries are using Web logs to roll out announcements of new services, and all kinds of other organizations use them for press releases and public service announcements. That makes sense to me.

However, should an opinion column from a journal morph into a blog? That is a question I asked a colleague of mine recently and we agreed that this is an interesting question. We decided we needed to think about this some more and we might write a more in-depth paper or do a presentation on the topic. Stay tuned.

So there are lots of interesting blogs and they span the gamut in terms of topics — just like Websites do. Blogs have all the problems and pitfalls any Website might have. For example, they might be badly designed, contain factual errors, be completely out of date or just not be accessible anymore. And frankly, in some cases, the content is not interesting to anyone except the person writing the blog.

In looking at blogs about librarianship, there are dozens and dozens to choose from. Some are rather mainstream and others are definitely on the edge. It is possible in many cases to set up an RSS feed in order to get the new content delivered to your email. I have the **ALARSS** feed coming to me, thanks to my membership in that organization. (I didn't actually ask for it, but now that I'm getting it, I actually like it.) I am thinking about doing this for a number of other publications and/or blogs, but I am still shopping around right now and talking to friends who are already reading blogs. Why should I read the thoughts of certain people? Maybe because they are kindred spirits and reading (and even responding to) their thoughts could spur me towards some creative direction I had not thought possible. It could be not only stimulating, but also inspiring. Instead of being bored, I could be renewed if I only took the time to read a few blogs.

On the other hand, I could inundate myself with yet more digital drivel. No doubt we are all being bombarded with enough information as it is. I already follow a handful of electronic lists (remember those?) and I even serve as the editor of one. The whole question of whether listserves are a dying format is in our face right now. Should e-lists migrate to blog technology? Maybe — I don't know yet, but I do know that it might be something worth examining. After all, the content of most e-lists resemble blog content in many ways. This needs to be considered.

There are a couple of places to look for blogs — **Google**, of course. But for specific types of blogs you might try **Technorati** — www.technorati.com/.

For library-related blogs, librariansindex.blogspot.com/ is useful. There are blogs for all kinds of off-beat librarian groups — bad girl, butt kicking, barbarian, body building, eclectic, flaky, hip, glamour, leather, modified, naughty and well-dressed librarians, just to name a few. Not all of these are live sites right now but they are listed and I love their names.

There are individual librarians who are well known for their blogs. Just to name a few of possible interest to **ATG** readers:

Peter Suber — known for his Open Access site: <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html>

Michael Stephens — **Tame the Web**: <http://tametheweb.com/>

T. Scott Plutchak — **It Gets Lonely Out Here**: <http://tscott.typepad.com/>

Krafty Librarian: <http://kraftylibrarian.blogspot.com/>

Library Juice: <http://libraryjuicepress.com/blog/>

Pop Goes the Library: <http://www.poppoesthelibrary.com/>

Shifted Librarian: <http://www.theshiftedlibrarian.com/>

Blake Carver has a list of "10 Blogs to Read in 2006" if you want to look at that: <http://features.lisnews.org/features/06/02/21/1328204.shtml>.

I am probably missing some really interesting blogs here by only listing a couple of these — in fact, maybe one of my favorite colleagues has a blog and somehow I don't know it! No telling! So if I did not mention your favorite blog here, email me at <cookei@appstate.edu> and tell me what it is and why you like it and why I am an idiot for not knowing about it.

Of course, many of our professional organizations have news logs, like the **ALA** feed I get every week. A good one for academic librarians that seems to be pretty general and not at all connected with a particular publication is the **Kept-up Librarian**: <http://keptup.typepad.com/academic/>.

I must admit after poking around on the Internet looking at all these blogs, I can think of a couple of interesting uses for them. I know people blog during and after conferences, making observations and evaluating presentations they've just attended. This technology makes instant-

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neous assessment possible. But this assumes you carry your laptop or other device around, which many of us do not. Perhaps we all will someday, but we're not there yet.

I will continue to think about this and maybe I'll find the time to read some of this stuff. And who knows, maybe "Drinking From the Firehose" and other *ATG* columns will transform themselves into the blogisphere somehow someday!

Many thanks to **Georgie Donovan** and **Glenn Ellen Starr-Stilling** for sharing their blog-reading habits with me; to **Allan Scherlen** for ideas about columns vs. blogs; and to **T. Scott Plutchak**, whose blog was the first I ever read! 