



If You're Going To Blog, Blog It To Courseware

Presented by Steven J. Bell

Updated January 18, 2007

Resources for this presentation

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Presentation Abstract:

Do you already have a library weblog (blog) or are you considering using one to create awareness about library services and resources. That's great because a blog can be a powerful marketing and awareness tool. Now, how are you going to get your user community to read the blog. Realistically, the library's weblog is unlikely to be perceived as so vital that students and faculty will choose to follow it regularly by bookmarking the blog site or otherwise visiting it regularly. This session describes how a library weblog can be integrated into campus courseware (e.g., Blackboard, WebCT). Using software that converts blog content into HTML code the library weblog output can be directly added to students' course sites. You'll want to learn more about RSS and news aggregators, two technologies that are vital to understanding how to create, use, and maximize a blog's value, as well as the RSS to Javascript software that makes integration into the courseware possible. I also present the results of a survey conducted to assess the value of a library blog for keeping students aware of library resources and services. Does a library blog make a difference? It can when it's integrated into your campus courseware?

Blog Directories That Will Lead To Library Blogs (for examples)

http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/links/index.php?title=Welcome_to_the_Blogging_Libraries_Wiki
Index to blogs from a variety of different libraries, Academic, Public, Special, etc.

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~CYBERSTACKS/RSS.htm> Links to Library blogs and their feeds, collected by Gerry McKiernan, Science and Technology Librarian and Bibliographer, Science and Technology Department, Iowa State University Library

<http://blogbib.blogspot.com/> An annotated bibliography on web logs & blogging

<http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html> Directory of Library and Librarian Blogs

http://dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Weblogs/ DMOZ listing of library weblogs

<http://directory.edufeds.com/> College and University RSS Feeds (see sub-section for academic libraries)

RSS and Feedburners

Low Threshold Applications

<http://zircon.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/Ita/archives/Ita44.php>

See #44 - Integrating RSS Feeds Into a Course Site

Also: #36 - Using An Aggregator To Capture RSS Feeds (has links to other RSS tutorials)

Feed2JS - <http://feed2js.org>

Video Tutorial on Integrating RSS Feeds Into WebCT (Bucks Country Community College)

<http://www.bucks.edu/distance/info/tutorials/rss2webct/rss-feeds.html>

RSS/Library Blog Student Survey - found at: <http://intercom.virginia.edu/SurveySuite/Surveys/rssfeedsurvey/index2.html>

Anyone is welcome to use the questions in the survey.

Steven Bell's Web Resources

Steven Bell's Keeping Up Web Site: <http://staff.philau.edu/bells/keepup>

NOTE: E-newsletters such as ResourceShelf, LISNews, and others mentioned can all be found on the "library" section of the Keeping Up Web Site, as well as more information on web page change detection services.

Kept-Up Academic Librarian: <http://keptup.typepad.com/academic>

Primer on RSS and New Aggregators (step-by-step how to – has link to other RSS tutorials):
<http://staff.philau.edu/bells/rss.htm>

Primer on TOC (table of contents) Alert Services: <http://staff.philau.edu/bells/tocalert.htm>

Course Management Systems Resources: <http://staff.philau.edu/bells/cmsresourcepage.htm>

News Aggregators

Highly Recommended If You Are New to Bloglines:

Bloglines for Librarians in Three (and a half) Steps: <http://joy.mollprojects.com/myprojects/rss/quickrss.html>

Bloglet (news aggregator): <http://www.bloglet.com>

Bloglines (news aggregator): <http://www.bloglines.com>

Bot-A-Blog.com (news aggregator): <http://www.botablog.com>

Feedster (my feedster) (news aggregator): <http://www.feedster.com>

Google Reader: <http://www.google.com/reader>

Articles from Steven Bell

Where the Readers Are: If You're Going To Blog Why Not Blog It To Courseware.

Library Journal NetConnect Supplement October 15, 2005

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6269278.html>

For further reading on the value of library web logs you may access a pre-print version of Steven Bell's article, "Wasted Words: Is a Library Weblog Worth The Effort". This article has been accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of *Reference Librarian* from the Haworth Press (this will be a special issue on library blogging). You can find a PDF version of this pre-print at: <http://staff.philau.edu/bells/webpresent.html> (look under the "presentations" section for the TCLC 2005 link).

Keeping Up: Using E-Resources For A Personalized Professional Development Program.

Educause Quarterly 26(3):53-55, Fall 2003.

Do I Detect A Change: The Ins And Outs Of Web Page Change-Detection Services.

Library Journal Net Connect (supplement): 42-43, Fall, 2002.

To Keep Up, Go Beyond: Developing A Personal Professional Development Plan Using E-Resources Outside The Bounds Of Library Literature. *College & Research Library News* 61(7):581-584, July/August, 2000.

Quick Survey Results

During the spring 2006 semester I tested this technique in 50 different courseware sites. At the end of the semester I asked students a series of questions to gauge their use of the blog postings, and general knowledge and use of RSS-related technology. Here are some key findings:

50% actually read at least one blog posting

25% reported finding at least one blog posting provided useful information

80% reported that the blog postings did not interfere with their use of the course

15% attended an event or took some action as a result of reading a blog posting

10% read or use blogs

X% prefer email from the library while X% prefer postings in courseware

25% knew what an aggregator was but only X% reported using one

5% indicated they would voluntarily subscribe to a library blog

What I Learned About Library Blogs

I found that even among a population of tech-savvy students there is little knowledge of RSS and aggregator technology. This raises some questions about the current trend for libraries to create blogs. Did the library determine if the user community wants, needs, or can even take advantage of a library blog? Is a blog the optimal technique for communicating with users? I believe that a library blog may have some merit but that in academic environments for it to have much chance of being read, it is a good idea to feed the postings into courseware.

Tips For A Successful Library Blog

I believe there are three key success factors that contribute to the sustainability of a library blog:

- 1) Regularly updated content – so that readers will depend on and expect new daily content
- 2) Good Content – Sounds obvious, but will your users follow a blog that offers stories on schedule changes, new books, and policy reminders? Probably not. Give them ideas and information that keeps them coming back.
- 3) Can be maintained in 15-20 minutes daily. Blogs can involve considerable work. The last thing you want is spending any more than is necessary. With good content it can be updated frequently.