The utility of Blogs as a Tool for Online Services of Small Libraries

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Abstract

The way and circumstances have changed in the COVID-19 era. It is why effective and reliable online library services has become essential for every library, but providing online services especially for small libraries is relatively difficult and blogs have emerged as an effective tool for online services by small libraries. The present paper explores *the concept, types of blogs, some of the major open source blogging tools and its utility in library services.*

Keywords: Blogs, Weblog, Blogging, Blogger, Microblog, Wordpress

1. Introduction

In recent years the interest in blogging has increased in every field related to human activities and it is also being adopted by libraries as a tool to provide their services online. The word blog is an abbreviation for web log. The term 'weblog' was first coined in 1997 by John Berger, but the word 'blog' in current use was coined by Peter Merhloz (Chinese dmtivar) in 1999 by shortening the word weblog to 'Blog'. After this, based on the same word, 'Blogger.com' was created, which was actually a blogging tool developed by Pyara Lab, San Francisco and is currently owned by Google. It was only after this that the revolution started in the field of blogging and the blog became accessible to the general public, because there was no longer a need to learn any kind of programming to write a blog.

A blog consists of text, hypertext, images and links (to other webpages, videos, audios and other files). A weblog or blog is a type of website in which text, images, media, links and data are arranged hierarchically (in reverse chronological order) i.e. older pages and posts are at the bottom and newly published posts and pages are displayed at the top. A blog can be written by an individual or a group. On this, bloggers publish their opinion on a particular topic and the blogger can be associated with a particular field. As far as the library blog is concerned, the services provided by the libraries are presented in an online format. According to Schiano et al.(2004), Weblogs or blogs can be described as a form of personal, easy–to–manage websites with content presented in reverse chronological order.

Weblogs or blogs can be described as individual, easy-to-manage websites in which the posts contain content presented in reverse chronological order.

2. Objectives of the study

- To explain the concept and development of blog;
- Develop a general understanding about the different types of blogs;
- Discussing about some of the major and popular open source software that can be used by libraries to create blogs free of cost, and
- Discuss the usefulness of blog as a tool for online library services.

3. Types of Blogs

Types of blogs can be divided into several categories such as: on the basis of the subject area of the article, on the basis of usability, on the basis of presentation, on the basis of blog technology etc. In general, blogs can be divided into the following types:

(i) **Personal Blog:** Personal blog is like an online diary which is published on the web by blogger. In this type of blog, the blogger shares his personal views. Therefore, this type of blogs can attract a few readers apart from family members, relatives, friends, office workers. Such blogs are also being written by the library professionals.

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(ii) Group Blogs: Library blogs are similar blogs and such blogs (group blogs) are written by more than one person, then such blogs are called group blogs. Group blogs affect a large number of readers and their traffic is also much higher than personal blogs. These types of blogs are written on more than one topic. All types of library services are posted in library blogs.

(iii) Micro-blog: Micro-blogs provide facility to write articles in short, the best example of micro-blogging site is twitter. Twitter allows its users to write only 140 characters. It is called micro blog and the act of writing it, is called microblogging. Apart from Twitter, platforms like Facebook, Tumblr etc. are providing this service. It is used by libraries to communicate library services to their readers/followers. This strengthens the connection of the library with the readers/followers.

(iv) Business Blog: For many business groups, organizations, NGOs to keep their employees up to date such as membership clubs, groups, organizations etc. to share new information, meeting information, business reports etc. use this type of blog. This type of blog is limited to employees only and no one else can see it.

4. Some Open Source Blogging Platforms

Following are some of the major open source blogging platforms :

(i) WordPress: WordPress was developed on 27 May 2003 by Matt Mullenweg and Mike Little as e2bmis. The software is later released under the HSA2 license. Its features include a plug in architecture and a template system, referred to as themes within WordPress. WordPress was originally created as a blog-publishing system, but supports other web content types as well. This includes more traditional mailing lists and forums, media galleries, membership sites, learning management systems, and online stores. WordPress is used by 42.5% of all the websites. This is the most popular blogging tool used for library blogs.

(ii) Blogger: Blogger is a free service from Google for its users to develop a blog for their business as a personal diary or platform. It was developed on 23 August 1999 by Pyara Lab, San Francisco. It is working under Google since 2003. It offers a limited number of free domains to the customers. It is very helpful for providing library services as many library services can be made accessible to the user. Blogger is becoming increasingly popular and the biggest reason is its ease of use along with its features.

(iii) Wix: Wix is a free website builder that is fully managed from the front-end. The main feature of this platform is that it comes with drag-and-drop options, so you don't need to handle anything in the back-end. The design is very intuitive and modern, which can be used by both beginner blogs and advanced blog creators.

(iv) Weebly: Weebly is another website builder that you can use not only to blog but also to sell products or showcase your portfolio. It is somewhat similar to Wix and offers editing features with drag-and-drop elements. If the user wants to add a certain button, they can simply drag it into the page and customize it. The same happens with photo galleries, slide shows and any other multimedia.

(v) Medium: Medium is a multi-purpose platform dealing with a wide variety of topics, where any account holder can write. Unlike most other free blogging sites, the big advantage of Medium is that your articles will be disseminated to a wider audience as this platform has several million readers per month and the number grows every year.

(vi) Ghost: Ghost is another WordPress-like blogging platform. Ghost software can be downloaded for free, but many of its services require paid hosting. Digital Ocean (https://www.ghost.com) is a great service that supports Ghost, it's affordable and gives you tons of cool features to get started with Ghost. The downside is that installing Ghost is not as simple as WordPress.

(vii) Tumblr: Tumblr is one of the original free blogging sites on the web. It's a little lighter than the other platforms on the list. Unlike the rest of the platforms, which are mostly built for publishing purposes, here it is more oriented towards multimedia or social media-like content. Starting a blog with Tumblr is easy - you can just sign up and then you're allowed to start posting.

(viii) Joomla: Joomla is similar to WordPress but its terms and conditions are not as clear when considering the free blog sites available. Like WordPress, this software is free but requires hosting and a domain, as in the case of WordPress, we recommend Bluehost because it is both very cheap and reliable (and WordPress includes a free domain). In general, Joomla has a flexible interface that can be used not only for blogs but also for more complex websites (you can choose from a variety of templates and extensions to add custom functionality).

5. Utility of blog in library services

Blogs are proving to be an effective tool for libraries to provide their online services and the use of blogs for library services is increasing due to the following features:

(i) Hierarchically Organized Entries: A weblog or blog is a type of website in which text, images, media, links, and data are arranged hierarchically (in reverse chronological order), i.e. older pages and posts are at the bottom and newly published posts and pages are displayed above. With this, the readers can easily get acquainted with the new services of the libraries. Previous blog entries are usually organized by date, although some software also allows readers to browse by category.

(ii) E-Library: Providing e-resources is the most important and highly demanded service among the online services provided by libraries. To provide e-resource, the help of blog is being taken by the libraries, in which it is very easy to organize and also it is user friendly. The readers can easily access the e-

resources provided by the blog from the computer as well as the mobile. Electronic libraries are those libraries, in which the collection of documents is in electronic form such as a database of text, audio-visual, graphics. For the learning of electronic library, there is a great need of resources like computer, mobile, internet etc. Users can access electronic library services from anywhere, anytime.

(iii) Library Website: Nowadays most of the libraries are developing their own websites, through which most of the services of the library can be accessed. A blog is also a website that can be easily created and does not require knowledge of coding and hypertext languages. Readers can easily view and use the services of the blog on their computers and laptops as well as on mobiles also.

(iv) Formal education, distance education and e-learning: Nowadays the use of smart phones has increased significantly and users are more able to use their mobile phones and its applications. Libraries can help promote distance education, formal education and research activities in e-learning environment by making information resources ubiquitous through blogs and users can also access library services through laptops/mobile devices.

(v) Very easy to update: Libraries can easily update their services on the blog and it does not require much effort.

(vi) Search functionality: The blog facilitates readers to use a specific word (key word) to search their collection and through this readers can also get the services of the library who are not regular readers of that library. This increases the popularity of the library and its services.

(vii) Feedback: Users can provide feedback on library blog posts, which makes it easy to get user's feedback. Thus the blogs are extremely useful for readers' suggestions and quick responses.

(viii) Notification service: Through the library and information center blog, the concern library and information centers can disseminate their new services, programs, arrival of new documents, renewal of books, input-output, notification, messages etc. to the users.

(ix) Library directory and other: Through blogs, libraries can easily make library directories, library tutorials, etc. accessible to the user. Apart from this, there is a link to the web OPAC, display of the library list, creation of chat room for the employees, comment section for the readers in the blog as well as the facility of RSS feed in the blog which the user can subscribe.

5. Conclusion

In the modern digital environment, there is an emphasis on the use of new technologies by librarians to increase their awareness about their library programs, services and to increase the reach of the users, fortunately the blogs are pioneers in these techniques. Through blogs, libraries can make their services available online as well as provide modernity in services. Blogs have proved to be a boon for small libraries because most of the big libraries are developing their own websites, through which most of the services of the library can be accessed, whereas it is a difficult task for small libraries to develop their website and afford recurring cost of maintenance and development. A blog is also a website in that can be easily created and does not require knowledge of coding and hypertext languages. Readers can easily view and use the services of the blog on their computers and laptops as well as mobiles. There are many open source blogging platforms available nowadays, so that librarians can easily create a blog for their library without any cost and can make their services easily available online. Thus blog is proving itself as an effective and important tool for online library services.

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