

Bloggging (and citizen journalism) for Editors – ACES 2006

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What has changed since 2005?

- Many more papers have blogs
- Citizen, or participatory, journalism is gaining more of a toehold
- Video blogging
- Podcasts are fairly common
- Content is fully on the way to atomizing

What hasn't changed?

- Too many newspaper blogs still don't link outside
- Copy editors still not sure where they fit in
- Still haven't figured out a good way to make money off these
- Debate about whether separate rules for accuracy and accountability

A blog is

A digital publishing system.

- Unit is post, not story, each post has own URL
- Most recent first
- Easy to post; requires little technical knowledge
- Usually a built-in "feed"

A system of accepted practices

- Link liberally to others
- Infuse your own personality
- Be transparent about your biases
- Swarming accuracy
- An ethic that values merit over status

What's this "feed" thing?

RSS – The "headline" service that lets others monitor what you are posting

It's also the power behind podcasting, which is really just an RSS feed with special coding to point iTunes or whatever to where your new MP3 file is.

Most blog software creates a feed automatically. RSS feeds can be valuable to monitor trustworthy sites (or competitors).

You need an RSS "reader." Firefox has it built into the browser; Microsoft promises it in the next version of Internet Explorer. Or you can use 1) a separate piece of software you keep running in the background or 2) a Web-based service.

RSS readers

NetNewswire (Mac): <http://ranchero.com/netnewswire>

Amphetadesk (Mac, Win, Linux): <http://disobey.com/amphetadesk/>

WinRss (Win): <http://www.brindys.com/winrss/iukmenu.html>

FeedReader (Win): <http://www.feedReader.com>

Aggregators (On the Web. You just log in to your account.)

Bloglines: www.bloglines.com

NewsisFree: <http://www.newsisfree.com/> (and the feeds come with cool "newsmaps")

PubSub: <http://www.pubsub.com> (2,300 items a minute recently)

Free or low-cost blogging services:

blogger.com
spaces.msn.com
www.sixapart.com/typepad
www.sixapart.com/livejournal
diaryland.com
myspace.com

Software to set up your own blog:

Costs
movable type:
www.sixapart.com/movabletype
pmachine: www.pmachine.com

Open Source (read: free)

check out www.opensourcecms.com
This stuff may be free, but it still must be set up. Many hosting sites now offer automated setup. See, for instance, hostingmatters.com.

So you're ready to post?

- Write what you know.
- Write to have a conversation, not pontificate.
- Link, link, link. When you cite others, they will notice and often cite you back.
- Use your personality – makes it fun and distinguishes it from other publishing
- Acknowledge comments and corrections.
From Ken Sands, Spokesman-Review
- Revolve blogs around topics, not personalities.
- Be subject specific.
- Give up the idea that you control the story – exchange ideas and solicit feedback.

Avoid burnout

- Blogging takes as much time as you allow it to. Give yourself a deadline. Follow it.
- Keep notes. Don't drop everything to blog – save it for your scheduled time.
- If you don't blog one day, it's not the end of the world. Take a break – a couple of days, a couple weeks – if that's what you need.
- Make clear you won't necessarily respond to every comment.

Avoid Getting Fired

- **Make sure you know the policies where you work. Clear it with your supervisor.**
- **Never break news about your employer or your beat on a personal blog.**
- **Don't let blogging interfere with your work – unless it is part of your work.**
- **Never disparage your bosses or co-workers. Even if you don't name them, they will find out. They will exact revenge.**
- **Your blog is public, Public, PUBLIC. If you wouldn't say it in a crowded room, don't say it online.**
- **See Sun's policy: <http://www.tbray.org/ongoing/When/200x/2004/05/02/Policy>**

Blogging, Participatory Journalism and Editing

Issues:

- Liability
- Credibility
- Authenticity
- Speed

Liability: Congress has made it so that you potentially have more liability if you edit.

Credibility:

- Traditional – Institutional, enforced by standards.
- New media – Individual, transparency, trust and merit. "Swarming accuracy."
 - But "swarming accuracy" depends on a "swarm." What about online backwaters?
 - Double standard: rumors vs. RUMORS.
 - Idea of publish, seek reaction, adjust. Sometimes seek reaction beforehand.
 - Grounded in the idea that much of your audience is smarter than you.

Authenticity and speed:

- Working to balance writer's voice, authenticity and speed with institutional needs.
- Quick editing for filing that concentrates on fact and glaring grammar.
- Later editing to augment links and supplemental material and to tie related items together. Some attention to style, depending on house rules, but not to the point of mindlessly gutting personality (in other words, ellipses and dashes can be OK).

Editing oriented to feedback and willing to update and link generously.

Editing may have to change more toward a fast-moving collaboration helping the writer achieve what he or she wants, in whatever form. – Common Sense Journalism

Possibly good news for the copy desk:

Human "filters," or subject matter experts, are becoming increasingly important. – Oxford Analytica

Blogging is so 2004. Citizen, or participatory, journalism is the new thing.

- Takes lots of work to get it right. Effective sites require "seeding" and monitoring. If you build it, they won't necessarily come.
- You lose control
- You potentially gain deeper and broader paths into community
- People don't necessarily want to be journalists; they do want to influence

Fort Myers News-Press "mobile journalists" or "Mo Jo's" – reporters detached into the neighborhoods cover them like a blanket, but also solicit "citizen" help.

Citizen media editor developing at some papers and sites (BlufftonToday, Ventura County Star, Bakersfield/Northwest Voice)

- As described in Online Journalism Review: Part chat moderator, part copy editor, part ombudsman

Danger: Cookie-cutter sites like Your Hub – began in Denver, now moving to other Scripps papers. But will we try to do it "on the cheap" and so standardized, like design, that we kill it, or get killed?