

Bloggng for Editors – ACES 2007

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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"

An ethos

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

Free or low-cost blogging services:

blogger.com	spaces.live.com	typepad.com	livejournal.com
wordpress.com	diaryland.com	myspace.com	

So you're ready to post?

- Write what you know. Have a conversation.
- Link, link, link to other sources.
- Acknowledge comments and corrections.
- Use the "label" feature of many blogs so related posts can be easily found.
- Go to Technorati occasionally and see if anyone has "tagged" your blog – see what they are saying about you.
- Make sure you get e-mail alerts on all comments so you can delete trolls and flammers.
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>**

If you have to edit a blog:

Threshold question: Is it post first edit later, or edit and then post?

- If post first, then edit, your immediate focus is libel, fairness and accuracy. (Yes, it should be anyhow, but the copy is live, so this puts a premium on it.)
- If you are editing before posting, there will be a premium on speed (but perhaps not quite as much as when the copy is live).

Thinking about it as you would a column is not a bad idea. Unlike a normal news story, the writer's "voice," not the publication's, is going to have a bit more importance.

The likely hierarchy:

- Libel, fairness, fact
- Correct word usage and spelling
- Tangled syntax and very obvious errors, such as danglers
- Style and punctuation – if at all

You may find yourself with other duties that a lot of places are kind of making up as they go along:

- Effective linking
- Tagging/labeling
- Community/comment moderation

Linking is one of those things newspapers have tended not to do well. Worry less about people leaving the site; it may seem counterintuitive, but by linking to other sources you increase your credibility online, where status matters less than transparency and merit.

If they are done, links are the reporter's job, but ultimately the editor's responsibility.

Effective linking:

- Seek out primary source material whenever possible
- Look for related material that can provide context
- Go deep to minimize clicking
 - Warn of unusual file formats (PDF, JPG, FLV) that might require user software
 - Provide links to free "players" when necessary.
 - Know why "hotlinking" to a photo is considered bad
- Know search engines' strengths and weaknesses. Not just Google, but meta-engines such as Dogpile and specialized engines, such as Icerocket for blogs.
- Be able to evaluate Web sites quickly. Not all .com is bad, not all .org or .edu is good, and .mil and .net can be misleading at times (sites can be hijacked).

Tagging/labeling

For labels, plan a structure beforehand, differentiated enough to be useful. Be willing to expand it as topics change.

Tags: Be familiar with Technorati and how people are finding the blog from there. What kind of tags are they giving it?

Community moderation

- Sec. 230 of the Communications Decency Act means less is more. You may incur liability with excessive intervention
- Understand that many things may make people uncomfortable, but are they really "inappropriate"? What is your threshold for "flaming"? Trolls are provocative, but is that enough to remove a post? You didn't go into this to be dull, did you?