November 2006

Drinking From the Firehose -- Blogs are Making Me Feel Old!

Eleanor I. Cook

Appalachian State University, cookei@appstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cook, Eleanor I. (2006) "Drinking From the Firehose -- Blogs are Making Me Feel Old!," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 18: Iss. 5, Article 33.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5033>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

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

by **Eleanor I. Cook** (Serials Coordinator & Professor, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC) <cookei@appstate.edu>

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 **ALA RSS** 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.popgoesthelibrary.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-

continued on page 68

Op Ed from page 62

user needs and service above everything else, they are on the right track. Anything less, regardless of the management structure involved, is a serious derailment. We are here to serve our users the best way that we can. It is that simple. It is only common sense to insist that more than a single service organizational structure can accomplish that. 🌂

ATG Interviews Chris Warnock

CEO, ebrary

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *There has been a lot of buzz lately about eBooks. Do you think that the time has finally arrived for success in the academic marketplace?*

CW: I think the time has arrived for electronic content in the academic marketplace. If each book is an investment, then from the perspective of an investment, I have a difficult time speculating as to why a library would choose to buy a physical book over its electronic counterpart. If the information is the same, more people can more easily access the content, it doesn't take any shelf space, there is no re-shelving cost, and if MARC records come with the electronic version for free, then the library stands to gain in every respect.

We had one customer tell us that he had the pleasure of walking around the library, telling his colleagues that he just added 30,000 titles to the library's collection — in one day. If you look at the role libraries play, there is an opportunity before us to enable libraries to organize and optimize their information for their patrons' use, at a scale and rate that they could not ever dream of achieving with physical information. Plus, libraries should also be able to build their collections much more cost effectively through electronic content.

From a researcher's perspective, the title of an electronic book is immediately available, and can be searched as well as navigated much more easily than the physical book. The user can highlight and annotate text electronically, and if they want to cite a section, the copied text includes a customizable citation with link and copyright attribution linking to the page it copied.

Even from the publisher's perspective, distributing the electronic version represents the potential for greater profits, so much so, that it

is conceivable for the publisher to make significantly more money, charging libraries less money, for accessing their content.

There are a lot of issues that warrant discussion regarding the purchase of electronic titles, archive-ability, ownership, access rights, etc... I do not mean to belittle any of these issues, or suggest that they are not important, but from the economic and efficiency benefit to a library, and its patron base, actually from almost every perspective, the benefits of purchasing or licensing the information electronically, significantly out-performs the print equivalent.

The only thing that prevents this from being one of the greatest periods of time in the history of publishers and libraries is the rate in which they adapt to new opportunities and technologies. For libraries to be able to continue to provide information for free to their patron bases, both publishers and libraries need to adapt the way that they think about their products and how they sell or purchase those products.

One of the issues before us is the role that electronic journals can play as a model for other forms of electronic content. The issue here is that libraries are forced to subscribe to multiple collections, whether they want multiple collections or not. This is done at the consortia level in order to increase their purchasing power. In fact, this practice may actually not be in the interest of either the publisher or the library. There are economic models that suggest that libraries purchasing individually can increase their purchasing power 10 to 1, and the publishers can still make more money.

The reason I bring up this last point, is in part it seems as though libraries and publishers have begun to settle on what acceptable business models should be for eBooks, and guess

what? It looks an awful lot like the status quo — which is fine — but the status quo, in the case of the economics for libraries, is a slippery slope in the wrong direction. The academic monograph, it could be argued, is on the endangered species list, as is, in some cases, many of the smaller university presses.

Electronic distribution should offer a solution that allows publishers and libraries to flourish. We are at the dawn of a new renaissance. The tools that we have at our disposal are amongst the most powerful in the history of the world. Libraries — historically — have provided the most unbiased and egalitarian access to published information and it is libraries that should be celebrated and promoted in this regard.

ATG: *You advertise that you have 900 customers in 100 countries. What sort of customer base is out there. ebrary has implemented many new initiatives and product clusters in a variety of subject areas. Tell us about them.*

CW: World-wide about 80% of our customer base is academic libraries, the rest is comprised of community colleges, public libraries and special libraries. About 40% of our customer base is in North America and 60% is everywhere else, and by everywhere else, I really mean everywhere else.

Our products — we call them “collections” — are designed to give our library customers the flexibility that they need to build collections efficiently and in a manner that works for them and for the publisher. In every case each collection or initiative has been asked for by a customer, we add it because we can, and we add it in addition to the other services or collections that preceded it.

We offer libraries the ability to choose how they acquire electronic content. They may subscribe to information for a yearly fee, or they may purchase titles and own them. We license our technology to libraries, publishers and aggregators to build databases of their own content for their own use, and we enable them to do this all under their own brand.

For the last five years we have been gathering statistics and developing models of usage patterns with content accessible under multiple business models. The results of this research enables us to provide our library customers with the ability to purchase or lease content under a business model that fits their needs. All of these business models offer content that is accessible from a single platform. We think this gives libraries a great foundation to build their electronic collections. With data that we have collected, we will be optimizing our collections to provide the libraries with more choices that will better serve their patrons' needs.

One of the most exciting things that we have been doing is working with libraries to provide

continued on page 70

Innovations Affecting Us from page 66

re-evaluation and the results of this may be far-reaching and beneficial for libraries and their users. Perhaps the quality and strength of a library's print and electronic collections can be successfully combined with the usability and richness of popular Web interfaces which will prompt users to suggest, “why don't you just library it?” instead of “why don't you just Google it!”

Endnotes

1. Bates, Marcia J. 2003, “Task Force Recommendation 2.3 Research and Design Review: Improving User Access to Library Catalog and Portal Information.” Available online <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/bibcontrol/2.3BatesReport6-03.doc.pdf>.

Drinking from the Firehose from page 64

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!