Blogs are important Web 2.0 Tools!

By June Kaminski, RN MSN PhD(c), 2008

In recent years, web site owners and cyber-explorers have joined the Blog craze in droves, making blogs a critically important Web 2.0 application. Perfect for adding a "personal touch" to your site! Many people use them as an easy way to begin an electronic community about a topic or cause of interest. Learn how you can apply these easy to use tools to establish a personal link with your visitors, boost your traffic in the process and provide unique content for your site.

A Blog is.....

> **A BLOG IS A 'WEB LOG" - A GREAT SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOL THAT IS EASY TO SET UP FOR HOURS OF INTERACTION!**

Just what are these new sensations? A blog is an easy application that allows web site owners to write a regular online dialogue that readers can respond and add to. Many companies actually hire writers to add to and maintain corporate blogs. They range in content from a personal diary- like format to crisp, thought-provoking journalistic commentaries. Many invite readers to pitch in - to respond to what the originator has written. They can slowly build to become very useful and substantial content, especially if the comments are well written and include useful and/or important information. Blogs are so popular that new language has begun to be used that relate exclusively to them. For instance, the entire scope of

blogs - that is all of the blogs that exist online together form what is called the blogosphere. If a particular issue, subject or topic becomes extremely popular in the blogosphere, it is said to be causing a blogstorm or blog swarm. These storms happen quite frequently since blogs cover the whole gamut of topics available, including politics, religion, health, finances, legal issues, travel, research, literary topics, group work, mysticism, self-help, sports, dating, education, and so on and on and on,..... As well, some people call the tools used to build blogs, blogware while others call them weblog software programs.

Basically, a blog is a web based publishing tool that can be presented within a site that you design yourself, or you can use ready made software and/or web applications that allow you to blog instantly. One such place is Blogger, a free online service that allows you to set up your own blog using their premade templates within the time it takes you to register, name your blog, post pictures, and choose an available design. Blogger is an interesting service, since the original three designers (owners of Pyra Labs in San Francisco) who created Blogger sold it to Google but stayed on to help to run things. As they describe, "Now we're a small (but slightly bigger than before) team in Google focusing on helping people have their own voice on the web and organizing the world's information from the personal perspective." (Blogger, 2005).

The Easiest Route

As aforementioned, you can either design your own blog layout or use a prepackaged one. The best way to get started is to visit a few blogs to get an idea on what sort of use of space works best, what colors stand out, as well as what would suit your own site best. However, you don't necessarily have to have a site already to use a blog. MANY sites are 100 per cent devoted to the blog, all on its own. If you put a search into Google or your favorite search engine, you will call up literally millions of potentially related sources. Actually, Google has a special search area especially devoted to them, called Google BlogSearch. Blogs are big news these days, and most are free or dirt cheap to use!

Some easy places to look include, Blogger's tour - they show you step by step how a blog can work, no matter how you intend to use it. ProBlogger is another popular Blog resource that can also give you a bird's eye view of how blogs tick. Another site that offers free basic blog facilities is Live Journal. If you want more customizable features, they offer them for about $20 a year. WordPress is another free service you can try - this has become one of the most popular blog sites over the past three years or so.

To begin, you need to decide if you want to try an existing structure or create your own page...

Open Source Blog is a great site to visit to find out all about the latest Open Source Blogging software available, which help you to add a custom blog that matches and sits right in your own web hosting space with the rest of your existing site (or your own exclusive blog site).

Your next decision is whether you want others to be able to add to your blog, or do you want to keep it non-interactive? By looking at the various packages available (all for free!) you can decide if this feature suits your needs or not. One positive outcome that comes from including others comments is the potential to develop an online community. The downside is that you may need to monitor or filter

what is written - some comments may be inappropriate or even downright rude, perverse or spam. OpenSourceCMS is another resource site that offers downloads of various Blog softwares (as well as e-Commerce, Groupware, e-learning, gallery, wiki, and other OS software). Asymptomatic also offers a handy Blog Software Chart for easy access to information about Blogware capabilities, costs, and accessibility.

Customizing the Look and Feel of Your Blog

Blogs can be extremely plain looking or they can be quite sharp and even beautiful. Jennifer Apple presents a very helpful article called Tips For Blog Templates & Blog Design In Photoshop that addresses the aesthetics as well as the practicalities of designing usable and pleasant web blogs. If you are a web designer or web hosting provider, you might want to consider offering Calliope Blogs as part of your service. Their slogan is "Blogging as an art form" and they do provide some very aesthetic looking templates that are easy for you and your customers to use. As well, offering blogs as part of your web design service is another good way to attract new design clients, especially if you can couple it with sound writing skills. As mentioned before, many corporations and organizations hire writers such as the ones at WWWriters to write and maintain their specialized blogs. As well, you can create or access Blog Templates for unique, predesigned layouts.

Whatever way you choose to go, adding a blog to your site or even just starting a blog on a blogging site can be the beginning of a very meaningful and useful adventure. We all have important things to say - a blog can be the perfect tool to begin to share your particular wisdom, views, experience and expertise, and boost your Web 2.0 presence!