

Bloggng

Bloggng is a growing trend, and an easy and informal way to communicate with a wide range of people. It requires some input but can also provide you with useful and encouraging feedback. Weblogs, or Blogs for short, are often likened to journals. The entries made to blogs can be either interactive or non-interactive. If they are interactive, others can add commentaries to the entry. The person who writes this online journal is known as a *Blogger*. One of the most attractive elements of a blog is that they can be written with relative ease by anyone about anything (source: <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Spring05/Urriste/weblogs.html>). Each weblog entry (also known as a post) will typically contain one or more links to related material being discussed in the entry. For topic-oriented weblogs the diversity is enormous. There are hundreds of thousands of blogs already online, covering such diverse topics as politics, war, Africa, science, technology, the Internet, books, space exploration, medicine and academic life. Despite the buzz, weblogs really are not all that new; they have been around since the late 1990s. Recent software and hosting platforms have made bloggng much easier to do, and this has led to the explosion of weblogs (source: <http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/jul02/gak16.htm>).

Why blog?

- A blog can extend an institution's influence by attracting development policymakers and practitioners to engage in a way that is more interactive than websites and e-mail;
- Blogs can create a forum for expert commentary and analysis on burning development policy issues;
- Easy-to-read, incisive informal writing can demystify jargon, cut straight to the chase and make the case for important policy issues that are not in the spotlight;
- Weblogs can help set the media agenda – authoritative comment and analysis on under- or unreported issues can lead journalists or others to follow up and write about it;
- For those interested in a specific topic, relevant blogs could eventually become a leading supplement to traditional print and online news;
- The feedback loops created by the blog could lead to new audiences and collaboration opportunities, such as media requests and commissions (e.g. for op-ed pieces).

Some examples:

- The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) blog: <http://blogs.odi.org.uk/blogs/2005/default.aspx>
- On a specific issue: Centre for Global Development blog on Vaccines for Development at <http://blogs.cgdev.org/vaccine/>
- Within a professional field: RealClimate, a blog on climate science aims to be a commentary site for the interested public and journalists. Working climate scientists post comments, and the discussion is restricted to scientific topics. The site provides a quick response to developing stories and provides the context sometimes missing in mainstream commentary, see: <http://www.realclimate.org/>
- Global Growth, see: <http://global-growth.blogspot.com/>
- International Rescue Committee, see: <http://ircblog.org>
- K.Y. Amoako, Executive Secretary of ECA, see: <http://amoako.typepad.com/>
- CIVITAS, see: <http://www.civitas.org.uk/blog/>
- Adam Smith Institute, see: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/>

Editorial guidelines for blogs

Issues, not Personalities: Many of the blogs on the internet are personal diaries. Institutional blogs are different – they are collaborative weblogs, produced by several members of staff to shed interesting perspectives on topical issues. So focus on hot topics, issues that are either on the development agenda or issues you think should be. Writing in the first person is default blogging style. However, avoid excessively personalising the posts – although you should by all means link to your previous articles or posts as relevant.

Stick to What You Know and Add Value: Before you write, make sure your intended topic is within your area of expertise. Postings will result in feedback – so be prepared to write or speak in more detail about your area of expertise. If you are not comfortable about a specific topic, leave it to others. Stick to the facts and only posit an argument or opinion if you can illustrate it concretely. Before you post, ask yourself: ‘Am I adding value?’

Be Clear, Complete, Concise: Your text should be clear, complete and concise. Avoid jargon and explain things using simple language. Make sure your argument or the point you want to make flows well. Run a spell check before you share your views. Remember, once you have pressed the ‘send’ button, your post is in the public domain! If you make a mistake, quickly correct it and admit your error, before someone else does it for you.

It’s a Two-way Street: The web is all about links; if you intend to write, make sure you look around and read what others have posted. Referring to the work of others or linking to it will provide readers with more material to read, and will also generate backward linkages. Each post should contain at least one link, ideally two or three, to work related to the issues being raised.

Be Who You Are: Many bloggers work anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. To be credible, it may be more effective to be transparent and honest. In an institutional blog, staff will usually use their own names (and will have a summary of their expertise available).

Love Your Audience: You should not post any material that is obscene, defamatory, profane, libellous, threatening, harassing, abusive, hateful or embarrassing to another person or to any person or entity.

Respect Copyright Laws: In order to protect your institution, you must respect laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else’s work. Refer to other people’s work and link to it.

Caveat Personal Opinions: If this is an institutional blog, postings by staff are the institution’s liability. However, any personal comment on particular issues (these are encouraged in blogs!) should be prefaced or proceeded by a caveat: ‘What I’m about to write/have just written is entirely my personal view, and is not intended to represent official organisational policy or positions’.

Further resources

- Civiblog: A resource for those doing civil society work and wanting a free, hosted blog platform with the ability to aggregate with other related blogs. ‘Civiblog, a one-stop-site for global civil society. We are tapping into two explosive movements at once: (i) the growth of the citizen sector and (ii) blogging, which is an increasingly popular tool with the potential to empower citizens the world over, one post at a time. Civiblog is completely free – no hosting costs or licensing fees. Civiblog is targeted – designed by and for civil society workers. Civiblog is community-driven – news from around the world, written by you’, see: <http://www.civiblog.org/>
- Blogging news and resources, see: <http://www.writerswrite.com/blogging/>
- Resources on blogging by the Development Gateway, see: <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/ict/rc/BrowseContent.do~source=RCContentUser~folderId=3081>.

- ICT for Development Weblog, see: <http://community.eldis.org/ict/>
- Ramalingam, Ben (2005) 'The Knowledge and Learning Toolkit', London: ODI (forthcoming). Especially for practical advice on how to set up a blog, software packages, and the steps of the blogging process.