
Corporate Library Blogs

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Corporate librarians have a lot on their plates these days. Uncertainties abound: a diminishing staff correlated with an increasing number of employees to work for, administration that can close the library with one stroke of the pen or vote at an executive board meeting, the continuing battle with vendors over the increasing costs of electronic databases, and more. The ongoing demand of services, coupled with the possibility of not having a place to call work can cause librarians to be reactive or proactive in their positions. It is always my hope that the latter choice is taken.

With a positive attitude, we have a lot on our side. As librarians, we can control one of the most important parts of the corporation: the information. And, if we can find a way to leverage that control

and place this information in a filtered environment, send it off to our clients, and be seen as not just reference workers, we can create a niche for ourselves in the corporate environment. This is not to say that information delivery has not been a mission of the corporate library. The point here is that since the technology has grown exponentially over the past 5 years, with the advent of easy methods of distribution, now is a better time than ever to jump on this opportunity to create a place for ourselves.

One of the methods used by librarians is e-mail. Librarians can scan numerous online distribution centers (news engines, etc), filter out the information that best suits the client, and send it as a full text e-mail. This method is being used at corporate and academic libraries around the country as has proved to be useful. E-mail, however, has its weaknesses, just like any other medium. First, e-mails can be caught by spam filters. Second, conversation among the employees is difficult with e-mail. Even if comments on the articles did occur, it is hard to collect these in one place. Third, contributions from multiple librarians in e-mail newsletters are difficult to manage. If the company expects to utilize the collective wisdom of the library employees, the library staff should be able to contribute to this content dissemination program. E-mail, then, is useful and easy, but probably not the most effective way to perform this specific task.

Blogs need not be formally introduced here. They have become an international phenomenon for easy publishing to the Web and have taken journalists, marketers, and librarians by storm over the past few years by changing the means of delivering content to our customers. Journalists have found that they battle against the "citizen blogger" for breaking news. Marketers love blogs for their

means of reaching an extremely broad audience with little publishing expertise. Lastly librarians love blogs for the way in which news and relevant data and resources can be created and sent out to their patron.

Blogs far exceed the three fallibilities mentioned previously with e-mail distribution of content. First, since the content of the blog is not sent out via e-mail, it is not likely to get caught in company spam filters. Second since blogs allow any user to comment on any post, conversations can take place in real-time, on a blog, without filling up e-mail inboxes (that is, if they get past the spam filter). Also, blog comments allow for the easy stream of conversation to take place in one place (like forums) rather than in different e-mail exchanges. Related, the easy management of blogs allows numerous writers to post to the blog with minimal technology interference. Thus, those "non-techie" staff members can have the opportunity to publish their ideas and thoughts, which would otherwise go unheard.

In order for librarians to pounce on the blogging realm and use them in their everyday work in distributing content, a basic question should be asked. Does your library need one? And, if so, what type of content is your library going to be placing on the blog? While these may seem like easy questions, they aren't. Before investing the time (and possibly money) into a corporate library weblog, these questions need to be answered. In order to determine the answer to the first question, an informal survey might be in order. The next time a employee comes into the library, have a set of questions ready. A few suggestions include: Would you go to the library weblog if we had one? What type of information do you think we should have on our weblog? Do you know about weblogs? Do you have any questions about weblogs? Do you

think that a weblog will help the company increase its public persona or engage or build clientele?

Another way of addressing this issue might be with meetings with the executive board of your company (or the library committee). Have a formal presentation ready for your committee members and have handouts of articles that display how companies can possibly increase revenue with blogs. Administrations are always looking at the bottom line. How much is this going to cost based on how much money is it going to bring in. If you have a difficult time convincing your bosses why blogging can be a benefit to your library and company, then you might want to rethink the reasons why you want a blog in the first place. In other words, don't have a blog because "everyone else is doing it."

Once a library has decided that a blog would be in the best interests of the patrons (or even for the staff on an internal blog), the second question needs to be addressed: What is going to be on the weblog? Walt Crawford said it best when he wrote "*First Have Something to Say*", the title of his book published by ALA last year. Deciding on what to say has a lot to do with the reasons behind starting a blog. You can't have one without the other. One of my suggestions is to find out what your staff or patronage needs. Do they need research assistance? Do they want to be updated with new resources on particular subjects? Do they are want to see new books or databases that have been added to the print or electronic collection? Do they want all three?

If these first two questions have been answered and the library is ready to start blogging, there are more issues to be dealt with. Here's a question: How friendly are you with your IT department?

I have always told conference attendees that one of the most important (but overlooked) aspects of starting up any technology initiative at a company involves having a friendly working relationship with the people who “control” the computers and the server space. The suggestion here is to remember to educate the IT staff on the nature of the set up that is going to be needed.¹ If you plan on downloading the software to the server, you need to make sure that they have the necessary plans in place. Also, the library staff will need to address any possible security questions that will arise.

The next issue that should be addressed is one of mission statements. It has been the belief of many librarians who blog that mission statements are crucial to the content that goes into the blog, especially within a corporate environment. Again, what do you want to get across to the user? Also, along with the mission statement, rules should be put forth about what can and cannot be published on the weblog, as having this set up beforehand can resolve any issues that may arise afterward.² The company may also want to set up a disclosure statement or have employees or library staff sign waivers about publishing to the corporate weblog. That said, doing this may cause the librarian to think twice before publishing something that may be considered controversial, and thus deplete the essence of true blogging: to express oneself and stimulate the free flow of ideas without having to re-think ones point of view). I do think that there is a “middle of the road” solution to this problem, which will enable the company

¹ *Cohen, Steven M. & Michael Stephens, “Get ‘em Started: Teaching Weblogs to Staff”, Presentation at the Internet Librarian Conference, Monterey, CA. November 16th, 2004*
(<http://www.tametheweb.com/presentations/getemstarted.ppt>)

² *Ibid.*

to protect itself from liabilities and not require the blogger to look over his shoulder every time a post is made to the blog.

The last issue that needs to be discussed when blogging for a corporate environment is marketing. What sense is there to having a blog, especially those that are for public consumption, if there is no one to read it? If you are lucky enough to have a marketing department in your company, work with them to prepare a press release for your weblog. Another idea is to contact your local paper and ask if they want to run an article about the weblog.³

When all of the pieces of the corporate blogging puzzle are in place, when the administration, IT department, and librarians are on the same page, then all that is left is to publish the content. Contrary to the issues mentioned in this article, the writing of the content is probably the most difficult part of the process. A team of committed bloggers is needed in order to make it work in a corporate environment. The key is to make it an exciting venture for them. Exciting bloggers make for exciting blogs.



³ *Ibid*

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