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## *Message from the Editor-in-Chief*

I am very pleased to present to you Elaine Dong's paper "Using blogs for knowledge management in libraries" in our *CALA Occasional Paper Series* no. 2.

Elaine's paper explains what blogs can do for librarians to handle knowledge management needs. Knowledge management is a hot topic from the business world since mid-1990s. This paper is not an original research, but provides a clear introduction to blogging, a relatively new tool, and knowledge management in libraries, a timely issue. The author concludes that blogging is helpful for knowledge sharing among library staff and helps to build connections with library users and other stakeholders of the library.

I hope you will enjoy this issue.

Judy Jeng, Ph. D.  
Editor-in-Chief, *CALA Occasional Paper Series*

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# **Using Blogs for Knowledge Management in Libraries**

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## Using Blogs for Knowledge Management in Libraries

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### Abstract:

This paper describes the concept of knowledge management and its twofold mission in libraries. It introduces the definition and types of blogs and analyzes their technical and cultural characteristics; it also makes a comparison between blogs and other social media such as email, websites, listservs, and wiki in order to demonstrate the efficiency of blogs as knowledge management tools for libraries. In addition, it examines and explores the applications of blogs in libraries in the areas of internal communication, public services, and public relations.

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### Introduction

Knowledge management (KM), a relatively new concept developed in 1995, has become a hot topic in the library profession in the past few years. In their *Working Knowledge*, Tom Davenport and Laurence Prusak (1998) addressed the idea that knowledge is broader, deeper, and richer than information, and their definition of knowledge was:

"Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms."(p.5)

There are two kinds of knowledge: one is explicit knowledge, which as the phrase implies is knowledge that can be articulated and codified; another is tacit knowledge (termed in 1997 by Michael Polanyi, who says "we can know more than we can tell") which is often subconscious and held in a person's brain in the form of know-how and experience. In their *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) defined knowledge as a "dynamic human process of justifying personal belief toward the truth" (p. 57). They describe the distinction between knowledge and information as "information is a flow of messages, while knowledge is created by that very flow of information, anchored in the beliefs and commitment of its holder" (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 58). They also believe that a successful KM program needs, on one hand, to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge in order to share the knowledge; on the other hand, it also encourages people to internalize codified knowledge retrieved from the KM system and make it personally meaningful (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 62). KM was defined by Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English as "the technologies involved in creating, disseminating, and utilizing knowledge data; also any enterprise involved in this" (Webster, 2007).

The mission of KM in a library has two levels that rarely take place in other organizations. One is to convert the vast amounts of knowledge locked inside the minds of employees to explicit knowledge and make it visible, and to facilitate the access and utilization of the codified knowledge across the library. Another is to collect, preserve, and provide access to the records of human knowledge (library resources), and to extend the knowledge and promote achievement in individuals and communities. KM at this level encompasses the processes and services of collecting, organizing, and distributing library resources, such as acquisitions, cataloging, digitizing, circulation, interlibrary loan, and library resource publicizing.

In a world with ever-increasing sources and amounts of information and knowledge, there is a growing need to find additional tools to capture and organize diverse bits of information and knowledge in order to access and make greater use of them. So is there a handy "Swiss knife" tool available for the need? The answer is yes. In the following sections the author introduces a rising star, blog, explains the reasons that people select it for KM purpose rather than other social media, and explains its applications in libraries.

### Why Blogs for KM?

According to Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, a blog is "an online diary; a personal chronological log of thoughts published on a Web page; also called Weblog, Web log" (Webster, 2007). Blogs

allow people to publish thoughts and news and make comments easily. Contents on blogs are searchable. They are organized and archived automatically, usually in reverse chronological order. Blogs have risen as prevalent online communication tools within a few short years following the popularity of email, BBS (Bulletin Board System used as an online forum for a particular interest group), and ICQ (a conferencing program for the Internet which provides interactive chat, e-mail and file transfer); blogs continues to grow rapidly. A blog search engine firm, Technorati, currently states that it is tracking over 112.8 million English blogs worldwide, which does not include other language blogs. It is estimated that on average, over 175,000 new blogs are created every day, with over 1.6 million posts per day, or over 18 updates a second (Technorati Media, Welcome page).

The emergence of the concept Web 2.0 in 2004 and the rise of Library 2.0 thereafter further facilitate the use of blogs, since a blog is an essential part of Web 2.0 and Library 2.0. Tim O'Reilly (2005) noted that "one of the most highly touted features of the Web 2.0 era is the rise of blogging" (p. 3). Library 2.0, as described by Walt Crawford (2006) in his Library 2.0 and "Library 2.0", is about "the library being more present in the community through programming, community building, and outreach via technology (IM, screencasting, blogs, wikis, etc.). It's about allowing user participation through writing reviews and tagging in the catalog and making their voice heard through blogs and wikis..." (p. 6).

## 1. Types of Blog Software

### 1.1 Blogging Software

This type of software only offers the blogging function. It is designed for one way publication of information that typically only one person (sometimes several people) are authorized to post news and opinions, while other readers could read posts and make comments. Examples are Wordpress and Blogger.

### 1.2 Forum Software

Forum software provides discussion forums in addition to the blogging function. The forums provide places for readers to discuss topics the site covers and add "stickiness" to the site. Forum software is great for group communication in the circumstance of multiple people discussing particular topics back and forth. Examples are phpBB and myBB.

### 1.3 Complex Content Management Software

Many content management systems (CMS) incorporate blogging, discussion forums, Wiki, and other functions. So they are counted as blog software in this paper. Two examples of free CMS software are SharePoint and Dupal. SharePoint has the features of announcement, wiki, and discussion. Dupal offers a score of functions such as blogging, forum, collaborative authoring, and podcasting.

## 2. Technical Characteristics of Blogs

In her article Knowledge Blog-Library knowledge Management, Haiyin Cui (2005) summarized four technical characteristics of Blogs as: "zero technology, zero cost, zero editing, and zero format" (p. 49). I made minor changes to the wording and clarify these characteristics as the following:

### 2.1 No/Little Technology

Creating and maintaining a website require expert technical skills, while establishing and running a blog, especially a personal blog, require no or little technical skills. If one knows how to send an email, one can create one's own blog site and start to publish a weblog in a minute. The beauty of blogs is their technical simplicity that requires minimal learning curve and the ease of blogging without necessitating IT involvement.

### 2.2 No/Low Cost

There are many free blog software packages that are easy to use and provide free hosting services so that people and organizations can establish their own blog sites without any cost. Some complex blog software packages charge a relatively inexpensive fee. These software packages need to be installed in customers' own systems, and it is usually easy to install, set up, and customize according to customers' needs. It takes effort to keep a blog site updated and active, and it is usually a joint-effort of participants within the organization.

### 2.3 No Editing

Quite different from traditional ways of publishing, weblogs are created and published by people independently and instantaneously. They are unedited, unfiltered, and uncensored raw materials that come directly from people.

#### 2.4 No Format

Blogs provide simple and clear template for bloggers to create and publish weblogs instantly without concern for their styles and formats, which saves bloggers' time and allows them to concentrate on content creating and polishing.

### 3. Cultural Characteristics of Blogs

#### 3.1 Capture Bottom-Up Knowledge

Blogs focus on bottom-up knowledge creation and collection. As for bloggers, the experience of creating posts and writing comments is as intimate as personal conversations. The feature of intimacy without medium and intervention helps capture what's in creators' minds, and articulates them into codified knowledge. As for an organization, blogs are convenient media to collect thoughts, ideas, and other information of grass-roots efforts from employees, and to facilitate the sharing of the collected information and knowledge. As a result, tacit knowledge trapped in people's minds, that may never have chance to be articulated for traditional publishing, is captured, organized, and shared across the organization.

#### 3.2 Share Thoughts and Build Connections

Blogs establish dynamic virtual communities where people can discuss issues and exchange ideas. They provide a means of collecting and disseminating fresh perspectives, thoughts, and other information. The instant sharing of knowledge and information helps spark creativity and cooperation, enhance productivity, and foster healthy knowledge ecologies.

Blogs also encourage and facilitate the connections among people, systems, and knowledge through built-in tools such as comments, track-back, and discussion forums. They break down physical barriers, bridge the gaps between people and systems, and create social connections by bringing communities and individuals closer together around shared themes.

### 4. Compare Blogs with Other Social Media

Blogs are more effective for KM and group communication than other social media. Blogs are purposed to develop dynamic and diverse knowledge ecologies where diverse bits of knowledge are incubated, captured, and shared among diverse sets of people.

Blogs have some unique features that websites don't have. Blogs enable individuals to converse directly with coworkers and patrons; entries on blogs are organized and archived chronologically; postings are dated and comments can be added directly to them.

Blogs, especially those with discussion forums, are great for group communication. A post can be responded to by many people and all the conversations are recorded at one place, which allows people to track, post, and follow conversations on particular topics. Email is great for one-to-one communication, but not good for group conversation. In addition, email systems don't organize information automatically. People have to organize emails manually by moving them to different categories and deleting old ones.

Listservs such as AUTOCAT and OCLC-CAT have similar functions as blogs and aim at providing informal discussion forums for a huge number of members. Readers need to constantly delete unwanted emails from these listservs; whereas blogs focus on smaller communities and have more formal and focused structures.

Wiki software is not designed for group discussion, but for creating and editing rules, regulations, and other information cooperatively. It allows a group of authorized people to create, edit, or delete the content on the website. An application example is Wikipedia, the biggest online multilingual free-content encyclopedia. It pulls together posts on various topics. Anyone granted access may create and edit information on it.

## **Blog Applications for KM in Libraries**

Blogs are continuous and dynamic. They can help libraries build shared knowledge bases by encouraging people to publish and share knowledge, by linking staff members that work independently or at a distance, and by connecting libraries with patrons and communities. Blogs have been used for KM purpose in the following areas in libraries.

### **1. Internal Communication**

Blogs can be used in the libraries where communication among staff is poor. The author once established a blog site for the Cataloging and Acquisitions Department of an academic library. Before launching the blog, professional expertise was poorly communicated in the Department. There were oral instructions among people, but they were not written down and hardly ever passed to other people. The benefits of the blog are apparent. A blog provides a dynamic communication and learning venue for people. Its main page functions as a bulletin board for the department news and policies, and on which people can make comments. It includes a discussion forum where people communicate problem-solving experiences. When people run into a question or problem, they would search the blog site first to see if the solution is available there.

The author has participated in a blog project in current position. The objective is provision of an effective internal communication channel to inform employees about library resources, events, and services, so as to facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge across the Libraries. Current internal communication tools in the Libraries, such as newsletters and static web sites, lack the ability to meet the 'real time' needs of the Libraries and patrons. The blog will offer a platform where the Dean, department heads, and public relations people share news, perspectives, and policies with employees, and do so frequently and easily. Later on it may include discussion boards for all employees to publish their opinions and ideas, as well as forums for various committees and projects. This is so that members could use them to collaborate virtually, to track progress and actions, and to discuss issues while receiving feedback immediately.

### **2. Public Services and Public Relations**

The traditional media a library has used for public services and public relations are brochures, newsletters, newspapers, radio, T.V., and its website. With little or no cost and just a little effort, blogs have become effective tools to promote library resources, programs, and services to the public and to improve public relations. Some application instances in these areas are listed below.

Firstly, blogs can be used to continually update patrons, employees and donors about current services and activities, and to alert patrons to different new resources such as new books, journals, and databases; secondly, blogs are great outlets for gathering user comments and suggestions on trial databases and public services; thirdly, instructional librarians could use them to build learning communities where instructors and students can exchange ideas; fourthly, blogs allow librarians to share news and information with peers in other libraries; finally, they can be employed by a library to build partnerships with other university departments and units, or other libraries that share common interests.

## **Conclusion**

Blogs offer flexible and cost-effective means of knowledge sharing within a library, and help build connections or partnerships with other libraries or other university departments and units. In an age with explosive information and knowledge coming from everywhere, blogs make it easy to capture and disseminate various bits of information and knowledge, including ephemeral thoughts and ideas that might never be available through conventional publishing channels. They also help people transform knowledge from tacit to explicit and make greater use of knowledge to achieve work efficiency. A key factor for a blog's viability is that the library should have an open attitude regarding knowledge sharing and should encourage employees to become knowledgeable bloggers; in return, the library will gain maximum benefit out of it.

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