Shiny Toys or Useful Tools?

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Blogs and wikis aren't shiny new toys for libraries and librarians any more. They've moved from toys to tools. As with most tools, they're not magic, they're not right for everything or everybody, but they can be powerfully effective in many situations.

This article was written as a presentation for the 2009 OLA SuperConference in Toronto, Ontario—although the article includes more than the presentation (including graphs).

Definitions

I'm not going to tell you how to start a blog or a wiki. For blogs, where you don't need your own domain it's trivial: Go to wordpress.com or blogger.com and sign up. For wikis, it's a little more difficult, and since I've never actually installed a wiki (I may run one, but that doesn't count), I won't pretend to tell you.

I thought definitions might be useful, partly because common definitions of blogs and wikis tend to include *way* too much. You'll find longer and more thoughtful versions of these items on the PALINET Leadership Network, pln.palinet.org—which is itself a wiki and where these articles originated. (I wrote the articles and PLN operates under a Creative Commons BY-NC license, so we're good here.)

Lightweight publishing or content management
Blogs and wikis are both lightweight publishing or lightweight content management systems for the web. Let's go through that piece-by-piece:

➢ **Lightweight**—both wikis and blogs reduce barriers to online publishing:
  ➢ **Technical barriers**: You can set up a blog with no technical knowledge and a wiki with very little technical knowledge. You don't even need to understand HTML.
  ➢ **Software cost barriers**: The most popular and respected software choices for blogs and wikis, at least in the library field, are open source programs available at no cost.
  ➢ **Hosting cost barriers**: Free hosting services abound for both blogs and wikis, although such free services may not be ideal (and are almost certainly not ideal for most library purposes).

➢ **Usage barriers**: Both a strength and in some cases a weakness.
  ➢ If you have author permissions, it's trivially easy to create a blog post—either using WYSIWYG tools built into the popular software choices or, for major software options, using your own word processing program to create posts, then posting them directly to the blog.
  ➢ Most blogs support comments and it's trivially easy to add a comment to a blog post.
  ➢ Wikis are designed for collaborative content creation by anyone with edit access—every page has a clear way to modify it and the editing tools are usually simple.
  ➢ Unfortunately, ease of usage and modification also translates into easy spamming unless you take modest steps to protect your blog or wiki.
➢ **Publishing or content management for the web**: Blogs and wikis both consist of sets of pages, organized in some manner, that are primarily read directly on the web and typically stable rather than ephemeral by nature. Blogs and wikis allow for various forms of navigation and organization.

Blogs and wikis both make content visible on the web as soon as it's created. Neither tool is primarily designed for layered editorial control.

Blogs and wikis are far from the only publishing and content management systems for the web. Full-fledged content management systems (e.g., Drupal) may offer more robust management options.

"Microblogging" systems such as Twitter may offer even lower bars to participation: you don't need to be able to write a coherent paragraph to use Twitter, but it helps if you're writing for a blog or wiki.

Blogs and wikis: The minimal definition
A blog is a web-based set of individual posts initially presented to readers in reverse chronological order—that is, newest first.

That's it. Add anything more and you're confusing the picture. Blogs don't need to be websites; some library blogs are embedded. Blogs don't need to use blog software—and websites built with blog software aren't always blogs. Blogs don't always consist of online personal journals, don't always have dated entries, don't always use journal style or have links. Many fine blogs don't allow comments; even more don't allow trackbacks.

What about wikis? That's even simpler: **A wiki is a set of web pages created and managed using wiki software.** But that's not very useful. A more common definition happens to be wrong: **A wiki is a collection of Web pages that anyone can edit**. That's simply not true—many good wikis do not have open editing, and in the days of spam it's a little dangerous to have fully open editing. Wikis may be *designed* to enable anyone to contribute or modify content, but they may not be run that way.

Which One to Use?

Which should you use? I'm not going to discuss that here because I'm particularly proud of "Blog or wiki—which tool to use?" at PLN, a 1,700-word discussion that even includes a comparison table. I can't do the article justice by summarizing it here; go read it.

Cautionary notes

The big yellow sign, the overall cautionary note to consider before starting either a blog or a wiki, is true for both: **Creating a channel doesn't create content**.

Ever seen a blog with one lonely post? I've seen dozens of them. Ever seen a wiki with one or two good articles, skeletal pages elsewhere, no sign of activity in months—except, if accounts are open, tons and tons of spam? I certainly have.

In all cases, the problem's the same: Enthusiasm for the channel, for the medium, without strong indication that content would be forthcoming. Either the people or institution turned out not to have anything to say, or were too lazy to say it.

For your own personal liblog, that may not be a big deal. You start a blog, you post a few items, you get bored and stop. As a student of liblogs, I'd appreciate it if you removed your listing from the LISWiki blog list (if you added it), but otherwise no real harm has been done. It's just another vacant blog page. For that matter, if you have two great years and then get bored, that's your decision. You might choose to shut it down formally, or you might just let it rot in peace.

For a library blog, maybe you should think about it more. If you publicize an official blog and it goes for long periods with no new items, it makes the library look sloppy at best, moribund at worst. And if you *don't* publicize a library blog, nobody will be aware of it—and it won't do anybody any good. Of course, if it's an embedded blog—a blog that serves strictly to feed something else on your website—that may not matter, as long as the "something else" doesn't begin to look stale.

I'm *not* suggesting a multimonth planning process before you start a library blog. Such a process may yield another problem, as the planning may result in a whole network of mostly-empty blogs instead of one or two robust blogs. I'd suggest a lean planning process taking four things into account:

➢ **Purpose**: There's nothing wrong with a multipurpose library blog—particularly in a smaller library—but you should define the general purpose of a blog before you start it. That may help guide your choice of name and even look.

➢ **Followthrough**: You should have clear commitments to prepare entries for the blog, frequently enough to make sense for your community, for long enough to give the blog a fair trial. I'd suggest commitments for at least six months of posts. Frequency depends on the size of your library and nature of the post, but the blog should be active enough to make your library look as vibrant as it actually is. Except for functional blogs such as new materials lists or mirrors of newspaper columns, you probably shouldn't aim for a fixed frequency. Posts should appear when they're appropriate, not when it's time according to an arbitrary schedule.

➢ **Publicity**: You need to let people know about the blog, unless it's an embedded blog (e.g., an events blog that appears part of your home page). While blogging can increase your web presence in unexpected ways, you won't gain a community audience without letting them know the blog's there.

➢ **Starting small**: Don't overthink library blogs. One lively blog will serve your library better than half a dozen rarely-updated blogs. It's easy to add more blogs. It's a little more difficult to shut down blogs that didn't work out.

On the other hand, you **should** shut down an official blog that isn't working, with an appropriate ending message and, if appropriate, link. If your library blog hasn't had a post in 240 days, there should be an obvious and visible explanation.

A few other cautions apply to all library blogs and many liblogs:

- ➢ **Think several times** before using eccentric templates, including anything other than black type on a white background. White on black or dark blue on light blue may look cool, but it's difficult to read and will drive some people away from your site.
- ➢ **Don't** assume people will *come* to your site. These days, the most common way to use a blog is via the feed (whether RSS or Atom).
- ➢ **Don't** force people to your site by using partial feeds. Partial feeds—where the feed user gets the first 50 words or just the title of your post— are massively annoying, and unless your content is spectacular, many of us will ignore you.
- ➢ **Don't** assume you'll get comments—and don't try too hard to get them. Comments are great; they're also unpredictable. Some great blogs have very few comments. Some mediocre blogs have loads of them. I've found that, other than birth, marriage, divorce and new jobs, it's nearly impossible to predict which posts will draw lots of comments—so I don't try.
- ➢ **Do** assume you'll get spam comments and even more spam trackbacks. If you're using WordPress, akismet and Spam Karma 2 both do excellent jobs of trapping most spam. Similar tools may be available for other blog software. If the tools don't work, moderation may be needed (although it's usually unfortunate). As for requiring registration for comments…well, are you *that* important?
- ➢ **Post when there's something to say**. Don't post just to be posting.

The State of Blogs in General

Between my own studies in the library field and Technorati's reports on blogging as a whole, I believe it's reasonable to conclude that the "shiny new toy" phase of blogging reached its peak in 2006. Since then, I believe we're seeing fewer new blogs (excluding forced blogs resulting from library school courses and 23-things exercises)—and a fair number of disappearing blogs.

That does *not* mean blogging has become irrelevant. It does mean blogs have moved to the useful tool phase—and, as always with useful tools, they're not right for everything or everybody. Since 2007, librarians and other people are considerably less likely to start up a blog "just because," even though they're not sure they have anything to say. That's healthy. I've heard assertions that everybody should blog, but that's

as ludicrous as saying that every librarian should write at least one peer-reviewed article a year or that everybody should regularly publish books. The net effect of everybody blogging would be nobody reading, or rather that we'd probably still have around seven million healthy blogs and billions of empty shells.

Other trends also strengthen the core of blogging while reducing the number of blogs and, even more so, the number of posts. There are lots of alternatives for people who really just want to link to websites or have very little to say—Twitter, Facebook, FriendFeed, delicious and who knows how many more? Those media don't replace blogs, any more than blogs replace journals or books. They do some things better than blogs, and I believe blogs are better off when those things migrate to more suitable tools.

Want a snarky reason to believe blogs will continue to matter, but as tools rather than as toys? *Wired* has run a piece saying blogs are dead—that you shouldn't start new ones and should drop the ones you have. The reasoning has something to do with how unlikely it is that you'll become a million-subscriber A-list sensation, as though immense popularity is the only reason to have a blog. For those of us living in the real world, this kind of *Wired* dismissal is a pretty good endorsement of continued significance.

Shorthand significance

When I did three books on library-related blogs, I shied away from judgmental terms like "healthy" or "robust" as applied to specific blogs. I'm still nervous about those terms, but for the purposes of this article and talk, I need some shorthand signifiers.

Technorati uses a cutoff of 120 days to separate "active" from "inactive" blogs—if you don't post at least three times a year, your blog is essentially inactive, maybe even moribund.

I'll suggest two thresholds for library-related blogs:
- ➢ **Robust**: A blog averaging at least one post per week (no more than a 7-day lag on a spot check), with a Google Page Rank of 4 or higher.
- ➢ **Active**: A blog averaging at least one post every *two* weeks (no more than a 14-day lag on a spot check), with a Google Page Rank of 2 or higher.

Sure, lots of blogs have a lot more than one post per week, but with aggregators and alternative communications methods, one good post per week is enough to make for a healthy liblog or library blog, particularly when the blog is well-represented in the wider web (Google Page Rank serving as a quick surrogate for web presence).

Liblogs

The Liblog Landscape 2007-2008 is not only the biggest study of blogs in any niche (as far as I know), it's also the kind of book that *Academic Library Blogs* and *Public Library Blogs* **should** have been. I can *unequivocally* say it's worth $35 as a trade paperback with a beautiful wraparound photograph from New Zealand as a cover, or $25 as a PDF download. If it doesn't sell a few hundred copies, it's a shame—and, unfortunately, probably also the death knell for this kind of large-scale study of library-related blogs.

I'm not going to excerpt the book. The first 121 pages are thick with facts, figures, charts and correlations—a rich overall examination of the world of liblogs and how it's changing. The remainder offers a quick factual look at each of 607 liblogs.

Fewer new liblogs are being created, although older ones aren't disappearing at any great rate. Most liblogs have fewer posts in 2008 than in 2007—and most of those that are still active in 2008 have somewhat *longer* posts in 2008 than in 2007. For that matter, most of those that have any comments at all have more comments per post in 2008 than in 2007—they're more conversational. "Most" in all cases is a long way from "all," to be sure:

➢ 70% of blogs in the study had fewer posts in 2008 than in 2007.

➢ 44% had longer posts, 38% shorter posts (8% couldn't be measured).

➢ 40% had more comments per post, 38% fewer (22% had no comments).

➢ 15% of blogs fall into the category I regarded as most likely: fewer posts, longer posts, more conversational. That's a minority, but it's the largest group of blogs.

➢ Incidentally, because a couple of people have posited that old blogs will have fewer posts, I found absolutely no significant correlation between the age of blogs and *any* other metric.

In March-May 2007, considering 523 blogs with countable posts, 338 (65%) were robust in terms of posting and 76 more were active (at least seven posts over 13 weeks), for a total of 414 or 79%.

In March-May 2008, where 533 blogs had countable posts, the percentages were a little lower, as you'd expect given an overall decline in posting frequency. 316 blogs were robust (59%) and 82 more were healthy, for a total of 398 or 75%.

I had occasion to scan the blogs again in mid-October 2008, looking at Google Page Rank and days since the most recent post—the same test I did for all

1,000+ blogs in mid-December. I've trimmed the list of 607 blogs down to 570, excluding non-English blogs and those that had disappeared by March 2007.

➢ 238 of the blogs—42%—were robust, that is, there was a post within the most recent week and Google Page Rank was at least 4.

➢ 327 of the blogs—57%—were active, that is, there was a post within the most recent two weeks and Google Page Rank was at least 2.

Those are tricky figures. That list of 570 still includes a fair number of blogs that were nearly moribund in March 2007. Let's look at a narrower list of 425 blogs—blogs that were around in March 2007, had at least two posts during March-May 2007 and at least posts in March 2008. What's the situation there?

➢ 206 of the 425—48%—were robust.

➢ 286—67%—were active. That's a substantially higher percentage.

Quick check around December 15

I did a status check in late December 2008 on the trimmed list of 570, looking at days since the most recent post (on or before December 15) and Google Page Rank. The first is a sign of life in general; the second is a sign that the blog has some visibility.

I chose December 15 because it's before most institutions shut down for winter break, so it's reasonable to assume an active blog would be active around that period. If a blog had a post on December 16 but hadn't had one since June, the June post would set the interval: Metrics require consistent rules.

I did the same set of tests for all three categories—liblogs, academic library blogs and public library blogs. These notes apply to all three.

➢ 227 (40%) appear robust. That's a very slight dropoff from October—only 11 fewer blogs.

➢ I'd characterize another 93 as active, for a total of 321 or 56%. That's nearly identical to the October figure, with six fewer blogs.

In order to provide some coherence with the other two books, I eliminated blogs that didn't have at least two posts in 2007—and also those that have disappeared since then. That leaves 475 blogs, some of which are probably defunct but still visible on the web.
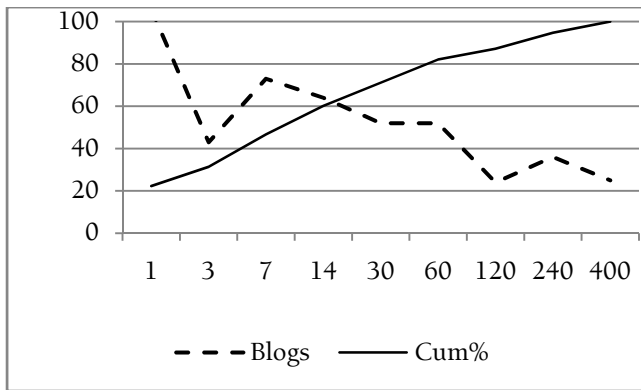
This graph shows the number of blogs and cumulative percentage of all liblogs with a post within X number of days—that is, within 1, 3, 7, 14, 30, 60, 120, or 240 days. (400 is an arbitrary number meaning "more than 300 days, but there *is* a previous post.") The horizontal axis—the freshness of the most recent post—is logarithmic. The dotted line shows number of blogs within each grouping; the solid line shows the cumulative percentage of all blogs.

These are good results. More than one-fifth of the blogs (22%) had posts on December 15 itself, and 47% had a post within the previous week. Just over 70% had a post within the month and more than 82% had a post within two months. Using the "120-day limit" for blogs to be alive, 87% qualified—leaving 51 that, while still visible, were nearly moribund.

How about Google Page Rank (GPR)?
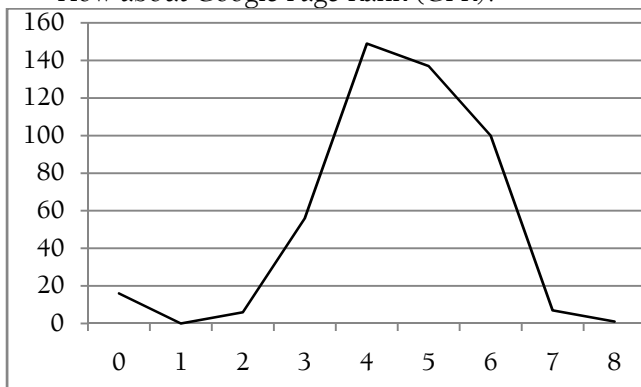
This graph shows Google Page Rank along the bottom, number of blogs along the side. While 16 blogs were essentially invisible (sometimes because of recent URL changes), 84% have a GPR of 4 or more, which in my mind is wide visibility on the web. This graph is not quite the same as the graph in *The Liblog Landscape*, based on a check two months earlier: GPRs do change, of course, although not rapidly. To wit:

➢ Eight blogs dropped a *lot*—three to five digits, in all cases dropping to GPR0. That almost always means either a URL change or that the blog went moribund a long time before. (One

of those eight is peculiar—Google seems to have it in for one particular liblog!)

➢ Three liblogs dropped two places (always from 5 to 3) and 28 dropped one place (which seems to happen due to tweaks in the GPR algorithm).

➢ On the plus side, 54 liblogs increased by one, while six went up two, four went up three (one going from 3 to 6, three others going from nothing to 3), and two went up 4 (in both cases going from 0 to 4).

➢ That leaves 373, 79% of the total, that didn't change GPR between October and December.

Predictions and projections

I'm not sure how large the really active core of English-language liblogs is, although it seems to be somewhere around 300 to 400, depending on your definition of activity.

My best guess is that this number won't change much over the next year. A few semi-inactive bloggers will start blogging a little more; a few active bloggers will stop blogging entirely; a few newcomers will light up the liblog universe. Using my rule that I don't measure blogs that have been around for less than six months (to eliminate most class assignments and other truly ephemeral blogs), I'd guess the core in mid-2009 might be a little smaller than in mid-2008, but I'd predict a range of somewhere between 10% fewer and 5% more. That would yield around 270 to 420 active liblogs in mid-2009, and I'm comfortable with that broad projection.

How active will those blogs be?

➢ I think the big drop in posting frequency has already happened. I'd expect to see roughly comparable levels of activity across the board, although you'll certainly see big variations in individual blogs.

➢ If anything, I'd expect fewer very short posts (and fewer linkblogs) and more slightly longer posts. Or, in a few cases, maybe *much* longer: I encountered a 7,800-word post on one high-profile liblog in January 2009, and that's more words than a full *quarter's* worth of posts for 251 of 404 currently-active blogs for which I could calculate post lengths in 2008.

➢ It's hard to predict anything about conversation intensity (number of comments per post). I see attenuated conversations happening in many different places, with stuff showing up on FriendFeed (or maybe Facebook or Twitter) that might previously have been in blog com-

ments. I'm really not sure where things are going in this regard.

Academic Library Blogs

In 2007, I looked at more than 400 academic library blogs and studied 231 of them in some detail, resulting in the book *Academic Library Blogs: 231 Examples*. I chose the 231 based on simple baseline criteria: The blog had to be in English, it had to be reachable in mid-2007, it had to have started no later than December 2006, there had to be at least one post in two of the three study months (March, April and May 2007), and I wouldn't use more than five blogs from a single institution.

Quick check

Remember that all 231 blogs in this universe were reasonably active in early 2007 and had been around at least six months by the time I started working on the project. I'd be inclined to believe that these should all be survivors. Of those 231, using only post frequency, 124 (54%) were robust (averaging at least one post per week during the quarter studied) and another 52 (23%) were active, for a total of 76% active.

So what did I find in late December 2008, looking for health as of December 15, 2008?

First, and perhaps most surprising, 17 of the 231—7%—*just weren't there*. I got 404 errors, missing servers, or just *nothing*.

That leaves 214 for which posts were still visible. How current was the most recent post?
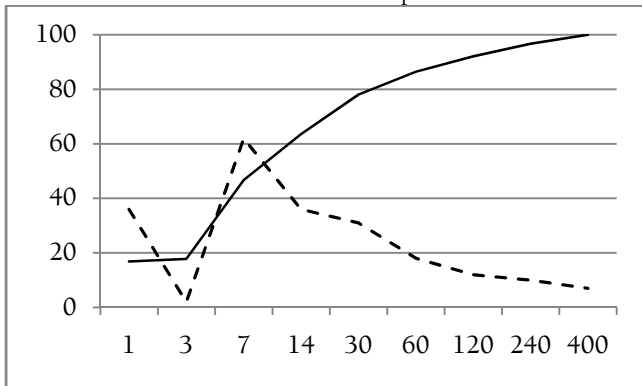
This graph shows the number of blogs and cumulative percentage of all blogs with a post within X number of days. The dotted line shows number of blogs within each grouping; the solid line shows the cumulative percentage of all blogs.

These are good results. Omitting the blogs that disappeared entirely, one-sixth of the blogs had posts on December 15 itself, and almost half of them had a post within the previous week. More than three-quarters had a post within the month and more than

86% had a post within two months. Using the "120-day limit" for blogs to be alive, 92% qualified—leaving only 17 blogs that, while still visible, were essentially moribund.
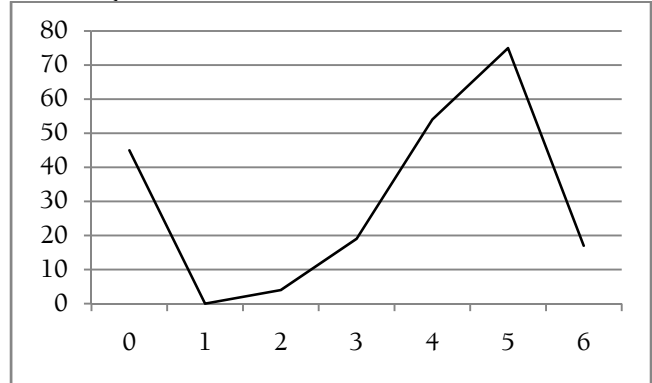
In this graph, the horizontal numbers are Google Page Rank values and the vertical numbers are number of blogs with that value. While 45 blogs were essentially invisible, more than half were quite visible. I regard anything over GPR 3 as being broadly visible within the web, and 146 of the 214 blogs—68%—fall into that category. No academic library blog reached GPR 7 or above, but it's difficult to move past 6. (It's difficult to move past 5, actually, and it's hardly surprising that the two big groups here are 54 blogs at GPR4 and 75 at GPR5.)

This quick check says that a healthy percentage of academic library blogs are doing just fine—they're being updated fairly frequently and they're widely visible. (Is there a correlation between GPR and currency? Not really; it comes out at -0.18, which isn't enough to count.)

How many academic library blogs appear to reach my two suggested thresholds?

➢ 110 of the 214, or 51%, fall into the Active category—while another 21 (10%) are active in terms of posting, albeit with little web visibility. For a library blog, web visibility is only one measure of success.

➢ 72 of the 214, 34% of the total and 65% of active blogs, fall into the Robust category. That's pretty good. Still, in both cases, it's a drop from 2007 levels.

A few success stories

I'd originally thought of including all Robust blogs—but that's too many blogs. Here are the 19 academic library blogs that were *very* fresh (a post within 2 days) and visible (GPR 5 or 6 as of December 2008), with quick notes, noting that in all cases "2007" means March-May:

- **Library News**, University of Iowa—a general blog that averaged one post every three days in 2007, with 223-word posts.
- **UBC Academic Search - Google Scholar Blog**—a blog devoted to Google Scholar, with only 8 posts in 2007, averaging 184 words, and with 1.25 comments per post.
- **Law In The News**, Lewis & Clark, a blog with enormous numbers of very brief posts (primarily links) in 2007.
- **Law Library Blog**, UBC, with few posts in 2007 (7), but long posts (621 words).
- **News from the PRI Library and Data Archive**, devoted to population research, with more than 100 posts in 2007.
- **PNCA Library**, Pacific Northwest College of Art, only four posts in the 2007 period, 49 words each.
- **Swem Government Information**, a government docs blog from the College of William & Mary, 468 posts in 2007, 83 words each.
- **Flow** : information for Okavango Delta planning—the only African blog in the study (Botswana). 55 posts in the 2007 study, 130 words each.
- **Business Blog** from Ohio University—15 posts in 2007 (122 words each)
- **..STCC Library 'blog..**, Springfield Technical Community College, 42 posts in 2007, 96 words each.
- **Ryerson Library News**, Ryerson University, six posts in 2007 study, 85 words each.
- **ZeffBrief**, University of San Francisco Law Library. 2007: 35 posts, 207 words.
- **UBC Physio Info-blog**—another blog from UBC, this one on physiotherapy! 2007: 35 posts, 167 words each.
- **Leddy News**, Leddy Library, University of Windsor. 17 posts in 2007 quarter, averaging 101 words each.
- **Hardin News**, University of Iowa, Medical library. 10 2007 posts, 320 words each.
- **Library Log**, Drexel, 32 posts in 2007, 147 words each.
- **reading girl speaks**, Oberlin College, 12 posts in 2007, 90 words each.
- **UW Libraries Blog**, University of Wyoming, 69 posts (and 66 comments) in 2007, 119 words each.
- **Government Publications Library – University of Colorado**, 73 posts in 2007, 324 words each.

The hot 19 includes two government documents blogs (out of six in the study), four very specialized blogs out of maybe 18 in the study, three law blogs out of *five* in the study—and five Canadian blogs out of 20 in the study.

Are these blogs exceptional in other metrics? To some extent, yes. Three were among the most visible academic library blogs in 2007. Nine—nearly half—were among blogs with the most posts. Six were among blogs with the most words overall (but only one had unusually long posts, while five had unusually *short* posts). Nine had more comments overall than most blogs, and seven had more comments per post than most blogs.

It's worth noting that not all of these 19 were robust in 2007. Two of them averaged less than one post every two weeks during the study period; four more averaged more than one every two weeks but less than one per week.

Predictions and projections

I don't have predictions or projections about academic library blogs. Clearly, quite a few of them are both useful and used. Clearly, some of them aren't. I suspect more of the former will emerge (but perhaps not *lots* more) and that some of the latter will disappear. Based on what I can tell of changes from early 2007 to late 2008, I wouldn't expect to see rapid disappearance—and I haven't looked at newer academic library blogs.

Public Library Blogs

I also looked at public library blogs and their metrics for March-May 2007. Out of some 368 original candidates, 252 met the criteria—that is, begun in 2006 or earlier, English-language, at least one post in two of the three study months, no more than five blogs from any library.

Of those 252, 119 (47%) had robust postings in 2007 (an average of at least one post per week), and another 66 (26%) were active (at least one post every other week), for a total of 73% that were in pretty good health. That's a little lower than for academic libraries, but not terrible.

Quick check

How were things in December 2008—noting that I was only checking for the most recent post?

As with every other type of blog, a few of them *just weren't there*—or, in a couple of cases, had been rendered invisible. Eleven simply weren't there (yielding 404 errors); two were protected (requiring passwords for access); one was now a parking page,

meaning the domain hadn't been protected; and one was no longer a blog. That leaves 238 blogs.
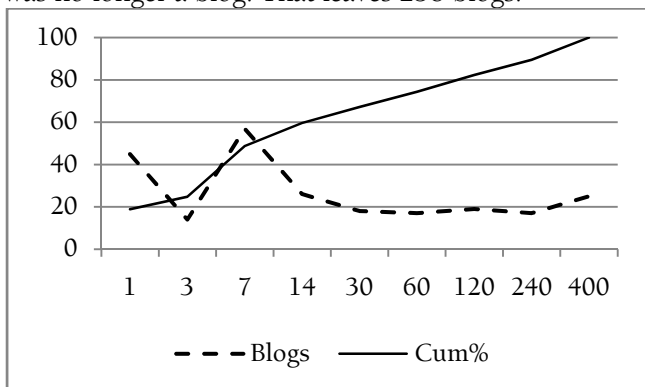
Here's the same freshness graph as for other types of blog—and the news here, while by no means bad, isn't quite as good. Almost one out of five blogs was updated on December 15, and *almost* half had a post within the previous week (49%), but only two-thirds had a post within the month and not quite three-quarters had a post within two months. Using the 120-day limit for blogs to be alive, 89% qualified—leaving 25 blogs that, while still visible, were essentially moribund.

The next graph shows Google Page Rank—and, while the shape is similar to that for academic library blogs, it's shifted: The peak is at GPR4 rather than GPR5. (Note that while a handful of liblogs are *very* visible, with GPR 7 or 8, none of the library blogs achieved that level of visibility.)
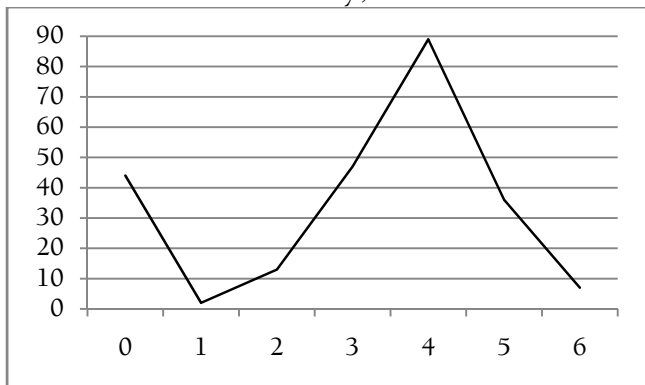
The bottom line is similar: A healthy percentage of public library blogs are doing just fine. As for the two thresholds:

➢ 129 of the 238, or 54%, fall into the Active category—and another 13 (6%) are active in terms of posting but have little web visibility.

➢ 83 of the 238, 35% of the total and 64% of active blogs, fall into the Robust category. That's almost exactly the same as for academic library blogs.

Apparent success stories

Eighteen of the blogs were *very* fresh (a post within two days) and visible (GPR 5 or 6). Here's the list, with libraries added where not obvious, noting that comments are about March-May 2007:

➢ **Ann Arbor District Library**. 400 posts 2007, 134 words per post. Many comments and comments per post, long overall, quite visible in 2007.

➢ **Turning the Page…** (Cincinnati, Ohio) 92 posts, 458 words per post. Long overall and long posts, more comments than most.

➢ **Marin County Free Library Blog**. (California) 35 posts, 111 words/post. Fairly visible in 2007.

➢ **SJCPL Blog**. (South Bend, Indiana) 203 posts, 221 words per post. Many comments and comments per post. Quite visible in 2007.

➢ **Kids Lit.** (Menasha, Wisconsin) One of Tasha Saecker's blogs (see "Sites and Soundbytes" below). 105 posts, 179 words per post. More comments and comments per post than most, fairly visible in 2007.

➢ **Sites and Soundbytes**. Another Saecker blog. 83 posts, 96 words per post.

➢ **MADreads.** (Madison, Wis.) 80 posts, 255 words per post. More comments and comments per post than most, fairly visible in 2007.

➢ **The Perrot Memorial Library Blog** (Greenwich, Connecticut) 60 posts, 159 words per post. More comments than most.

➢ **Wellington City Libraries**. (Wellington, New Zealand) 60 posts, 53 words per post—very short posts.

➢ **Old Bridge Library Weblog**. (Old Bridge, New Jersey) 46 posts, 111 words per post.

➢ **Austin Public Library Blog** (both versions) (Austin, Texas). This blog has two identical versions—one on Blogger, one hosted by the local newspaper. Both had 28 posts averaging 244 words each.

➢ **Newton Reads**. (Newton Centre, Massachusetts) 16 posts, 158 words per post.

➢ **Buena Park Library District News**. (California) 10 posts, 227 words per post.

➢ **What's New in Newton Reference?** (Newton Centre, Mass.) 10 posts, 127 words each.

➢ **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Teen** Eight posts, 243 words each.

➢ **The Atrium**. (Grand Rapids, Mich.) 55 posts, 194 words each. More comments than most.

➢ **The Short List**. (Essex, Connecticut) 47 posts, 120 words each. More comments than most.

Predictions and projections

I see roughly the same trends here as for academic library blogs. I'd expect almost all robust blogs to continue—and some of the moribund ones to disappear. Will there be a flood of new, robust, public library blogs? It's possible, but I'd be a little surprised.

Overall Conclusions

We're out of the shiny new toy phase for blogs (and wikis). I'm guessing most libraries these days will only start blogs after making reasonably certain the blogs will serve real purposes *and will be updated regularly*. I'm guessing very few library people start blogs in the expectation of becoming rich and famous.

Blogs work well as tools, maybe better because they're not so shiny. With realistic expectations, blogs can serve librarians and libraries well. I don't see that changing rapidly.

Comparing liblogs and library blogs

Just for fun, here are graphs combining all three types of blog (only cumulative percentages for freshness).
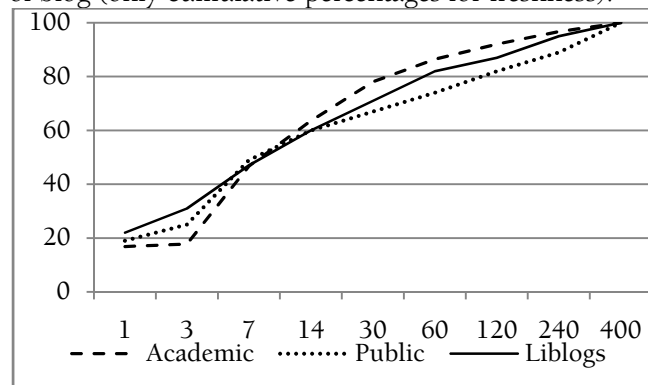
The first graph shows the cumulative percentage of blogs within a category that had a post within X days before December 16 (thus, December 15 is "1"), where "400" means "more than 240 but a post was visible." Note that academic library blogs actually start out a little below the others, but wind up strong.

The second graph shows Google Page Ranks. As noted earlier, you can have a useful academic or public library blog with no web visibility, possibly because it's feeding some other page on the library site, so it's not all that odd that a fair number of each (but very few liblogs) have no GPR at all. Otherwise—well, it's hard for a library blog to get past GPR 5, but quite a few liblogs manage to do that.
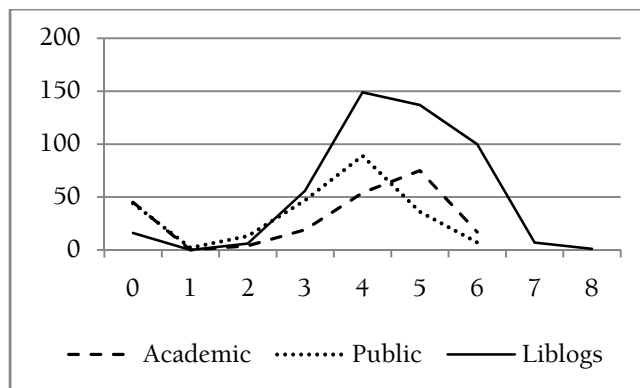
That's the not-so-short form (and I obviously didn't cover all of this in a 45-minute talk with no visuals). For the *really* long form of how library blogs were doing in 2007 and how liblogs were doing in 2007 and 2008, you'll need to buy the books.

Masthead