

these things, but truthfully sometimes it's not so bad for a writer's thoughts to be interrupted. This posture also exposes a basic conceit of bloggers—the belief (or hope) that everybody reads what they've posted as soon as they post it, which, of course, doesn't happen. So this means that more than a few bloggers would benefit from taking a second look at what they are about to post or having a second set of eyes give it a quick read.

At The Christian Science Monitor, our blogs are edited, often by two or three people, before they are posted. I have no doubt this editing process improves the quality of the blog without sacrificing its freshness. If the feedback we've received from our readers is any indication, they believe this as well. Adapting the role of an editor to the blogging situation seems an example of how traditional media and bloggers can learn from each other. And when they are willing to do this, then the work of each will be improved.

The Best of Both Worlds

Some media organizations believe that blogs can be an important part of their


overall news package. Each day at the Monitor, our Daily Update blog on the war on terrorism and in Iraq is regularly among the top five most read pieces on our Web site. Meanwhile, The Dallas Morning News has decided to create an editorial blog where editorial writers can shed light on how they—as individuals and as a board—arrive at the opinions they publish. [See story by Keven Ann Willey on page 88.] As J.D. Lasica wrote in the Online News listserv, this accomplishes several things: It adds transparency to the usually hidden editorial opinion process, frees editorial writers to write in a more lively and personal fashion, and lets the public see that the paper's editorial board isn't monolithic. [See Lasica's story below.]

Other news organizations are experimenting with the idea of allowing their writers to do blogs as a supplement to their regular reporting, but it's still a learning process. While editing is a useful way to improve the quality of a blog, overediting a blog will kill its sense of voice and community. Learning to let go is going to be very difficult for a lot of editors who are used to an almost Stalinesque control over their

writers' output and the way that output is presented to the public.

Meanwhile, the rest of us in traditional journalism, especially those who care deeply about what's happening to the media, can be thankful that bloggers exist. At a time when media control is more concentrated and when presenting "fair and balanced news" can be just another way to limit voices and disguise a corporate or political agenda, bloggers are the dam-busters of the media world. Long may they blow open holes in the gatekeepers' firewalls so that all the voices that are being ignored or silenced can find ways to be heard. ■

Tom Regan, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is associate editor of csmonitor.com, the Web site of The Christian Science Monitor. Regan cowrites two Monitor blogs: Daily Update, a blog about the war on terrorism and in Iraq, and SciTechblog, about science and technology.

 tom@csmonitor.com

Blogs and Journalism Need Each Other

'The transparency of blogging has contributed to news organizations becoming a bit more accessible and interactive'

By J.D. Lasica

Suggest to an old-school journalist that Weblogs have anything to do with journalism, and you'll be met with howls of derision. Amateur bloggers typically have no editorial oversight, no training in the craft, and no respect for the news media's rules and standards. Does the free-for-all renegade publishing form known as blogging really have anything to do with journalism?

Well, yes it does.

Consider:

- During the peace demonstrations in February, Lisa Rein took to the streets of San Francisco and Oakland, California, camcorder in hand, and taped video footage of the marchers and speakers, such as Representative Barbara Lee, Harry Belafonte, and antiwar activist Ron Kovic. She posted the video on her Weblog, complete with color commentary, providing much deeper coverage of the events than a viewer would get by watching the local news.
- At technology and media conferences, such as PopTech, South by Southwest, and Digital Hollywood, bloggers in the audience have reported conference events in real time, posting photographs, speaker transcripts, and summaries and analysis of key points a full day before readers could see comparable stories in the daily newspaper.
- On Super Bowl Sunday, a 22-year-old blogger in Los Angeles named Jessica Rios braved the freezing cold

to attend a televised outdoor concert by the British group Coldplay. She came home and blogged it, giving her take on the concert and reporting the band's play list. Like hundreds of others who watched the show and wanted to learn the names of the songs played, I turned to the Internet. I came up empty when I visited abc.com and coldplay.com. But hundreds of us found them (through Google) on Rios's blog.

Rios probably didn't know it, but she was committing a random act of journalism. And that's the real revolution here: In a

world of micro-content delivered to niche audiences, more and more of the small tidbits of news that we encounter each day are being conveyed through personal media—chiefly Weblogs.

Call it participatory journalism or journalism from the edges. Simply put, it refers to individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, sorting, analyzing and disseminating news and information—a task once reserved almost exclusively to the news media.

Weblogs are the most popular expression of this new media form. Blogs have exploded in popularity in the past year, fueled by greater access to bandwidth and low-cost, often free software. More than a half million people have taken up the tools of self-publishing to create personal journals on subjects as diverse as politics, microbiology and tropical fish.

"Blogs are in some ways a new form of journalism, open to anyone who can establish and maintain a Web site, and they have exploded in the past year," Walter Mossberg wrote in his Wall Street Journal technology column last March. "The good thing about them is that they introduce fresh voices into the national discourse on various topics and help build communities of interest through their collections of links."

Mossberg's description of Weblogs as a new kind of journalism might trouble hidebound journalists. But it is a journalism of a different sort, one not tightly confined by the profession's traditions and values.

Mainstream news operations are businesses supported by advertising. As hierarchical organizations, they value

Call it participatory journalism, or journalism from the edges. Simply put, it refers to individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, sorting, analyzing and disseminating news and information—a task once reserved almost exclusively to the news media.

smooth production workflows, profitability and rigorous editorial standards. Weblogs adhere to a different set of values. Bloggers value informal conversation, egalitarianism, subjective points of view, and colorful writing over profits, central control, objectivity and filtered prose.

Clay Shirky, an adjunct professor at New York University who has consulted on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies, sees the difference between traditional media and Weblog communities this way: "The order of things in broadcast is 'filter, then publish.' The order in communities is 'publish, then filter.' If you go to a dinner party, you don't submit your potential comments to the hosts, so that they can tell you which ones are good enough to air before the group, but this is how broadcast works every day. Writers submit their stories in advance, to be edited or rejected before the public ever sees them. Participants in a community, by contrast, say what they have to say, and the good is sorted from the mediocre after the fact."

Creating a New Media Ecosystem

Many traditional journalists are dismissive of bloggers, describing them as

self-interested or unskilled amateurs. Conversely, many bloggers look upon mainstream media as an arrogant, elitist club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press.

Shirky suggests the mainstream media fail to understand that despite a participant's lack of skill or journalistic training, the Internet itself acts as an editing mechanism, with the difference that "editorial judgment is applied at the edges ... after the fact, not in advance," as he wrote on the Networks, Economics and Culture mailing list in January.

Seen in this light, Weblogs should not

be considered in isolation but as part of an emerging new media ecosystem—a network of ideas. No one should expect a complete, unvarnished encapsulation of a story or idea at any one Weblog. In such a community, bloggers discuss, dissect and extend the stories created by mainstream media. These communities also produce participatory journalism, grassroots reporting, annotative reporting, commentary and fact-checking, which the mainstream media feed upon, developing them as a pool of tips, sources and story ideas. The relationship is symbiotic.

Lisa Rein, who videotaped the peace marches, borrows television news segments and retransmits them on her Weblog. She regularly records "Meet the Press" and presidential candidates' appearances on C-SPAN, then uploads the video clips to her blog, a practice she says is permitted under fair use. She also attends technology and law conferences, videotapes the speakers, and transfers that footage as well. The tools have become so easy to use that Rein—literally, a one-woman personal broadcast network—has attracted an international following. She now uploads video to her blog several times a day.

"There are just so many interesting things happening in our lives that would

make great programming," she told me. "The networks aren't interested unless it will attract millions of dollars in advertising revenues. Meanwhile, there are people and events all around us that are meaningful and that people would love to watch."

Managing Editor Scott Rosenberg wrote in Salon last year: "Weblogs expand the media universe. They are a media life form that is native to the Web, and they add something new to

our mix, something valuable, something that couldn't have existed before the Web.

"It should be obvious that Weblogs aren't competing with the work of the professional journalism establishment, but rather complementing it. If the pros are criticized as being cautious, impersonal, corporate and herd-like, the bloggers are the opposite in, well, *almost* every respect: They're reckless, confessional, funky—and herd-like."

Readers Become Part of the News Process

The emerging relationship between Weblogs and traditional journalism promises to be fitful and stormy. Earlier this year The Washington Post's Leslie Walker suggested that readers will never be able to rely on Weblogs for dependable news and information because bloggers don't cling to the same "established principles of fair-

Benefits Blogging Brings to News Outlets

What benefits do Weblogs bring to journalism? Several.

Pushing the envelope. Weblogs are helping to expand the boundaries of experimental forms of transaction journalism. Freelance journalist Christopher Allbritton, a former reporter for The Associated Press, asked his Weblog readers to finance a trip to Iraq at the outbreak of hostilities there. Some 320 people donated more than \$14,000 and helped him launch Back-to-Iraq.com. His readers then served as his editors during three weeks of dispatches during which Allbritton broke news on the fall of Tikrit and highlighted the Balkan-style ethnic tensions among Kurds, Arabs, Turkomen and Assyrians. [See Allbritton's story on page 82.] Similarly, freelancer David Appell, a physics PhD who has written for Nature, asked his readers to donate \$20 apiece to fund his investigation of the politics of the sugar industry. He wrote a report after raising \$425.

Influencing at the edges. We see sentiments first expressed on Weblogs bubble up into the mainstream media days or weeks after they first surface in the blogosphere. Similarly, all too often the mainstream media tend to dispose of stories in a fast-paced news cycle, with even important news events falling off their radar screen after 48 hours. Bloggers say, hold the phone, we're not done with this yet. Blogs keep stories alive by recirculating them and regurgitating them with new angles, insights and even newsworthy

revelations. Weblogs were credited with helping to get the mainstream news media interested in the racially insensitive remarks by Senator Trent Lott that led to his resignation as Senate majority leader.

Enhancing reader trust. News organizations such as MSNBC, The Providence Journal, The Dallas Morning News, and The Christian Science Monitor have embraced the Weblog form in some part of their editorial operations. [See articles by Tom Regan of the Christian Science Monitor, Sheila Lennon of The Providence Journal, Eric Alterman at MSNBC.com, and Keven Ann Willey at The Dallas Morning News on pages 68, 76, 85, and 88.] These news organizations realize that Weblogs offer an opportunity for newsrooms to become more transparent, more accessible, and more answerable to their readers.

Independent journalists and pundits such as Andrew Sullivan, Doc Searls, and Joshua Marshall have found that publishing a Weblog increases their authority and credibility in the eyes of readers. Time magazine media critic James Poniewozik described the perception gap between the audience and the media about trust this way: "Journalists think trust equals accuracy. But it's about much more: passion, genuineness, integrity." Weblogs and a commitment to open dialogue instill trust in the relationship between news media and audience.

Repersonalizing journalism. Blogs present a vehicle for expressing thoughts and reportage that doesn't always fit the contours of a traditional news report. Television reviewers have begun blogging their experiences with network executives and Hollywood stars during the annual summer Television Critics Association press tour in Los Angeles. Political writers are using blogs to bring daily commentary to the campaign trail. But more important, blogs offer an opportunity for readers to hear a journalist's voice and personality. Newsroom-sanctioned Weblogs promise to show journalists as human beings with opinions, emotions and personal lives—and yes, with warts and foibles. Weblogs could usher in a refreshing new openness in newsrooms by attaching a face and personality to reporters. Blogs could show that newspapers aren't monolithic corporations but a collaborative team of individuals with varying viewpoints and who have more in common with their readers than they could possibly know from reading their print articles alone.

Fostering community. When journalism becomes a process, and not a static product, audiences discard their traditional role as passive consumers of news and become empowered partners with a shared stake in the end result. Weblogs offer one way to promote that kind of interactivity. ■—JDL

ness, accuracy and truth” that traditional journalists do. Bill Thompson, a visiting lecturer in the journalism school at City University, London, wrote in Britain’s *The Guardian*: “Blogging is not journalism. Period.”

Perhaps. But there’s another possibility: that journalists need to move away from the notion that journalism is a mysterious craft practiced by only a select priesthood—a black art inaccessible to the masses. We forget the derivation of the word journalist: someone who keeps an account of day-to-day events.

Years ago I met Frank McCulloch, a legendary editor at *The Sacramento Bee* and *Los Angeles Times* and an ex-Marine who was Saigon bureau chief for *Time* during the Vietnam War. An ink-stained member of the old guard, McCulloch believed that journalism was a simple thing. Find the right people. Ask the right questions. Write it up. “This ain’t rocket science,” he often said.

Exactly. Citizens are discovering how easy it can be to play reporter and publisher. To practice random acts of journalism, you don’t need a big-league publication with a slick Web site behind you. All you need is a computer, an Internet connection, and an ability to perform some of the tricks of the trade: Report what you observe, analyze events in a meaningful way but, most of all, just be fair and tell the truth as you and your sources see it.

Bloggers can do that. Few bloggers fancy themselves journalists, but many acknowledge that their blogs take on some of the trappings of journalism: They take part in the editorial function of selecting newsworthy and interesting topics, they add analysis, insight and commentary, and occasionally they provide a first-person report about an event, a trend, a subject. Over time, bloggers build up a publishing track record, much as any news publication does when it starts out. Reputation filters—where bloggers gain the respect and confidence of readers based on their reputation for accuracy and relevance—and circles of trust in the blogosphere help weed out the charlatans and the credibility-impaired. If the

blogs are trustworthy and have something valuable to contribute, people will return.

I’m constantly astounded at the breadth of knowledge displayed by bloggers on subjects as diverse as wireless networking, copyright infringement, sonnet poetry, and much more, all written with a degree of grace and sophistication. Many readers have begun to turn to gifted amateurs or impassioned experts with a deep understanding of niche subjects, rather than to journalists who are generalists and cover topics a mile wide but an inch deep.

Now, is all blogging journalism? Not by a long shot. Nor is it likely that blogging will supplant traditional media or, as some have suggested, that blogging will drive news organizations out of business. When a major news event unfolds, a vast majority of readers will turn to traditional media sources for their news fix. But the story doesn’t stop there. On almost any major story, the Weblog community adds depth, analysis, alternative perspectives, foreign views, and occasionally first-person accounts that contravene reports in the mainstream press.

We need, then, to stop looking at this as a binary, either-or choice. We need to move beyond the increasingly stale debate of whether blogging is or isn’t journalism and celebrate Weblogs’ place in the media ecosystem. Instead of looking at blogging and traditional journalism as rivals for readers’ eyeballs, we should recognize that we’re entering an era in which they complement each other, intersect with each other, play off one another. The transparency of blogging has contributed to news organizations becoming a bit

more accessible and interactive, although newsrooms still have a long, long way to go.

Old media may have something to offer the young turks of blogspace, too, in the trust department. Bloggers who dabble in the journalistic process would do well to study the ethics rules and conflict of interest policies of news organizations that have formulated a set of guidelines derived from decades of trial and error. The conventions of journalism—accuracy, credibility, trustworthiness and being straight up with your readers—are guideposts that any good blogger should engrave on her wall. More needs to be done to make this collaboration a deeper and more meaningful phenomenon.

Transparency of Reporting

“Journalists must invite their audience into the process by which they produce the news,” Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel write in their book *The Elements of Journalism*. “This sort of approach is, in effect, the beginning of a new kind of connection between the journalist and the citizen. It is one in which individuals in the audience are given a chance to judge the principles by which the journalists do their work. The first step in that direction has to be developing a means of letting those who make up that market finally see how the sausage is made—how we do our work and what informs our decisions.”

Many journalists who blog are doing just that—exposing the raw material of their stories-in-progress, asking readers for expert input, posting complete text of interviews alongside the published story, and writing follow-up

We need, then, to stop looking at this as a binary, either-or choice. We need to move beyond the increasingly stale debate of whether blogging is or isn’t journalism and celebrate Weblogs’ place in the media ecosystem.

stories based on outsiders' tips and suggestions. As for readers who blog, giving them a stake in the editorial process—by letting them provide meaningful feedback or suggesting story leads—increases loyalty and understanding and spurs them to share their positive experience with others.

The authors of a research study, "Interactive Features of Online Newspapers," sum it up this way: "Journalists today must choose. As gatekeepers they can transfer lots of information, or they can make users a smarter, more active and questioning audience for news events and issues."

Journalism is undergoing a quiet revolution, whether it knows it or not. Readers will always turn to traditional news sites as trusted, reliable sources of news and information—that won't change. But the walls are cracking. The readers want to be a part of the news process.

We will always need a corps of trained journalists to ferret out impor-

tant stories, to report from remote locations, to provide balance and context to the news. But beside big media journalism we are starting to see a mixture of commentary and analysis from the grass roots as ordinary people find their voices and contribute to the media mix. Blogs won't replace traditional news media, but they will supplement them in important ways.

What's ahead? Certainly a much larger role for amateurs in the news process. Weblogs are only one part of the puzzle. For instance, in late June 2003, NHK (the Japan Broadcasting Corp.) carried news of a serious highway accident. The scene was carried live via video from a bystander who was playing the role of journalist by shooting the action with his portable camera phone. Mobloggers—tech-savvy users who post photos, video and text to Weblogs from their mobile devices—just held their first convention in Tokyo. In Daytona Beach, Florida, a janitor created his own one-man TV station

and occasionally Webcasts live news events.

All of this portends important changes as journalism expands its tent to include citizen participation. Ultimately, bloggers and the phenomenon of grassroots journalism have just as meaningful a role in the future of news on the Net as do the professionals. ■

J.D. Lasica, senior editor of the Online Journalism Review, publishes the Weblog New Media Musings at jdlasica.com/blog. He was an editor at The Sacramento Bee for 11 years. He edited a white paper on participatory journalism called "We Media," released by New Directions for News in August 2003.

 jd@well.com

Weblogs Bring Journalists Into a Larger Community

'... we need to drop grandiose claims of being aloof, objective observers and be more transparent about how we do our jobs.'

By Paul Grabowicz

One of the most alarming aspects of the Jayson Blair affair was how few people mentioned in his stories complained to The New York Times about his deceptions. This problem is not unique to the Times. In the wake of the scandal an Associated Press Managing Editors' survey found many readers viewed newspapers as so arrogant, uncaring or disingenuous that it was a waste of time to try to correct errors. A July 2003 Pew Research Center survey similarly reported that 62 percent of the public believed news organizations try to cover up mistakes rather than admit to them.

Clearly major changes are in order if news organizations are going to re-

establish credibility with readers and viewers. One step would be to embrace the growing sphere of Weblogs, which break down many of the existing barriers between journalists and the public.

What Weblogs Offer Readers

Weblogs are easy-to-create Web pages reporters can use to post short, regularly updated news items or commentary on issues they are covering, with links to longer stories and background information elsewhere on the Web. Anyone who has authored a Weblog knows the blogging community doesn't share the hesitation of newspaper read-

ers in pointing out errors. Even the slightest misstep on a journalist's Weblog is likely to elicit a batch of quick responses.

More importantly, a Weblog thrusts a journalist into a larger community where a posting is picked up and passed from one blogger to the next, each adding comments and expanding the discussion. As such, Weblogs are far more animated than the often-stilted forums at news Web sites. They elicit a much broader conversation in which what people have to say about what's been written is regarded as being of equal importance.

Reporters can use Weblogs to post items that expand on their regular news