

What Is A Blog, Anyway?

If you look at the bottom of this page, you won't see any of the telltale signs that it is generated by a blog software package like Blogger, Moveable Type, or WordPress. When I was redesigning this site and wanted to add a blog to it, I made the perhaps foolhardy decision to write my own blogging software. Why, you might ask, would I recreate the proverbial wheel? As I'll explain in several other columns in this space, writing your own software is one of the best ways to learn—not only about how to write software, but also about genres and to think about (and rethink) some of the assumptions that go into the construction of software written for specific genres. The first question I therefore asked myself was, What is a blog, anyway?

Seems like an easy question. But it's really not. Blogs began literally as “Web logs,” as logs of links to websites that people thought were interesting and wanted to share with others. Hip readers of this blog will recognize, however, that this task has recently shifted to new “Web 2.0” services like del.icio.us, Furl, and Digg. Many blogs continue to include links to other websites, of course, perhaps with some commentary added, but the blog is quickly becoming the wrong place to merely list a bunch of links.

Following this initial purpose, the blog became a place for early adopters to write about events in their lives. In other words, the closest cognate to an offline genre was the diary. As I'll argue in my next post in this series, this phase has made a permanent (and not entirely positive) mark on blogging software. Let me say for now that it led to what I would call “the tyranny of the calendar” (note all of those calendars on blogs).

Many bloggers (including this one), however, aren't writing diary entries. We're passing along information to readers, some of it topical and time-based and some of it not. For instance, I found [a great post on Wally Grotophorst's blog about getting rid of the need to type in passwords^{\[1\]}](#)

(which I do a lot). Is this topic essentially about Friday, October 28th, 2005 at 2:43 pm as WordPress emphasizes in Wally's archive? No. It's about "Faster SSH Logins," as his effectively terse title suggests. This led me to my first idea for my own blogging software: emphasize, above all, the subject matter and the content of each post.

It also made me realize something even more basic. At heart a blog is very simple: it's merely a way to dynamically create a site out of a series of "posts," in the same way that a website consists of a series of web pages. Blogs now do all kinds of things: rant and rave, sell products, provide useful tips, record profound thoughts. With this in mind I started writing some PHP code and setting up a database that would serve this blog, but in a much simpler way than Blogger, Moveable Type, and WordPress.

In Part II of this series, I'll discuss the advantages and disadvantages of existing blogging software, and how I tried to retain the positives, remove the negatives, and create a much slimmer but highly useful and flexible piece of software that anyone could write with just a little bit of programming experience.

Part 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Popular Blog Software^[2]

This entry was posted on Friday, December 16th, 2005 at 11:19 am and is filed under Blogs^[3], Programming^[4], Software^[5]. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0^[6] feed. You can leave a response^[7], or trackback^[8] from your own site.

References

1. [^] a great post on Wally Grotophorst's blog about getting rid of the need to type in passwords (timesync.gmu.edu)
2. [^] Part 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Popular Blog Software (www.dancohen.org)
3. [^] View all posts in Blogs (www.dancohen.org)
4. [^] View all posts in Programming (www.dancohen.org)

5. [^ View all posts in Software \(www.dancohen.org\)](#)
6. [^ RSS 2.0 \(www.dancohen.org\)](#)
7. [^ leave a response \(www.dancohen.org\)](#)
8. [^ trackback \(www.dancohen.org\)](#)

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