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Norman Lu
Asian Development Bank

Olivier Serrat
Asian Development Bank

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Writing Web Logs

Abstract
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Electronic communications were one of the first expressions of networked computing. They were developed to enable individuals, groups, organizations, and related systems to collaborateon documents, regardless of their respective physical locations.

However, until recent times, posting content on networks was a task that only technology-savvy persons could perform. It required skills in navigating directories and coding Hyper-Text Markup Language (HTML). But, web logs (blogs) of various types are now relatively easy to set up and maintain and have become a ubiquitous feature of the Internet.3(In December 2007, the Technoratiblog search engine was tracking about 112 million blogs.) As a result, they are redefining collaboration and knowledge capture and storage among digital communities to great effect. Increasingly, they allow the creation of networks of practice (or communities of interest) based on the particular topic discussed.

Keywords
Asian Development Bank, ADB, poverty, economic growth, sustainability, development

Comments
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Writing Web Logs

by Norman Lu and Olivier Serrat

A web log, in its various forms, is a web-based application on which dated entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video are posted. A web log enables groups of people to discuss electronically areas of interest and to review different opinions and information surrounding a topic.

Background

Electronic communications were one of the first expressions of networked computing.[1] They were developed to enable individuals, groups, organizations, and related systems to collaborate on documents, regardless of their respective physical locations.

However, until recent times, posting content on networks was a task that only technology-savvy persons could perform. It required skills in navigating directories and coding HyperText Markup Language (HTML). But, web logs (blogs)[2] of various types are now relatively easy to set up and maintain and have become a ubiquitous feature of the Internet.[3] (In December 2007, the Technorati blog search engine was tracking about 112 million blogs.) As a result, they are redefining collaboration and knowledge capture and storage among digital communities to great effect. Increasingly, they allow the creation of networks of practice (or communities of interest) based on the particular topic discussed.[4]

Definition

Blogs are websites. Typically, they are written, edited, and maintained by individuals acting in their own capacity, as subject matter specialists, or on behalf of organizations. (Some are written by multiple contributors after editor approval.) They share common features with journals: they are published on a regular basis, e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly; they have subscription mechanisms;[5] and they undergo review.[6] Elsewhere, they differ substantially too: unlike journals, blogs can evolve in a matter of seconds—authors have the means to respond to reader comments and update entries as required; while journals are typically produced by scientific or academic communities, blogs do not have clear-cut parameters; also there are no set criteria for writing blogs as they are considered a vehicle for personal expression. (Increasingly, however, they are also being used to break, shape, and spin news stories.)

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1 Others are electronic mail, bulletin board systems, message boards, and hypertext.

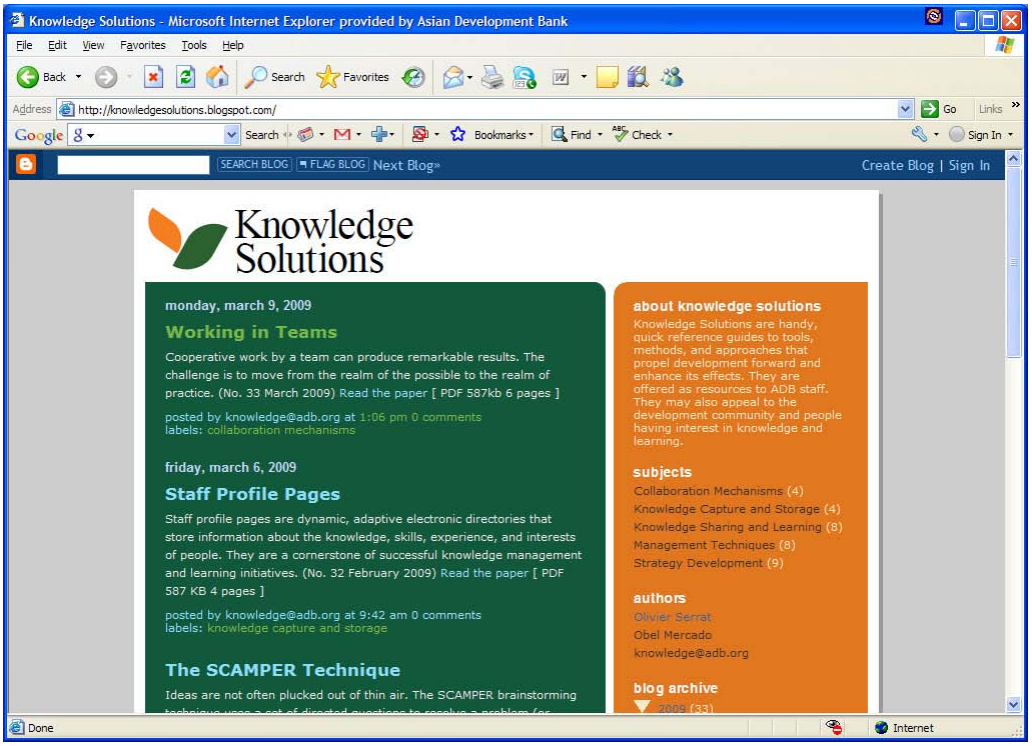
2 The term "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger in 1997 to describe the process of logging the web. The short form, "blog," was coined by Peter Merholz in 1999.

3 Many portals offer free tools for bloggers and space to host blogs.

4 Not surprisingly, given their use for social networking, research reveals that blogs become popular through citation and affiliation.

5 Unlike journals, they rely on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) to push new content to subscribers.

6 Unlike journals, which are reviewed by peers or external referees, blogs do not have formal review process. But, they receive critical inputs through the feedback (comments) feature most incorporate (but can still be vetted).



Features

Needless to say, the format of a blog should match the purpose for which it is intended. This has implications for the features it should rest on, or advertise. Even so, the common features of blogs are:

- Text—Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art, sketches, photographs, video clips, music, and podcasts.
- Tags—Posts are classified into subject areas and subtopics.
- Reverse chronological order—New posts are found at the top of the page.
- Comments—Readers can react to a post, and discuss it with the author and other interested parties.
- Links—A typical blog offers links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its primary topic.
- Archives—A searchable database of previous posts.
- RSS feed—RSS enables visitors to subscribe to a blog and know what is new without having to visit the site itself.
- Permalinks—It is important that links not be lost. Many sites archive older entries and generate a permalink for individual entries.[7]

Writing a Blog

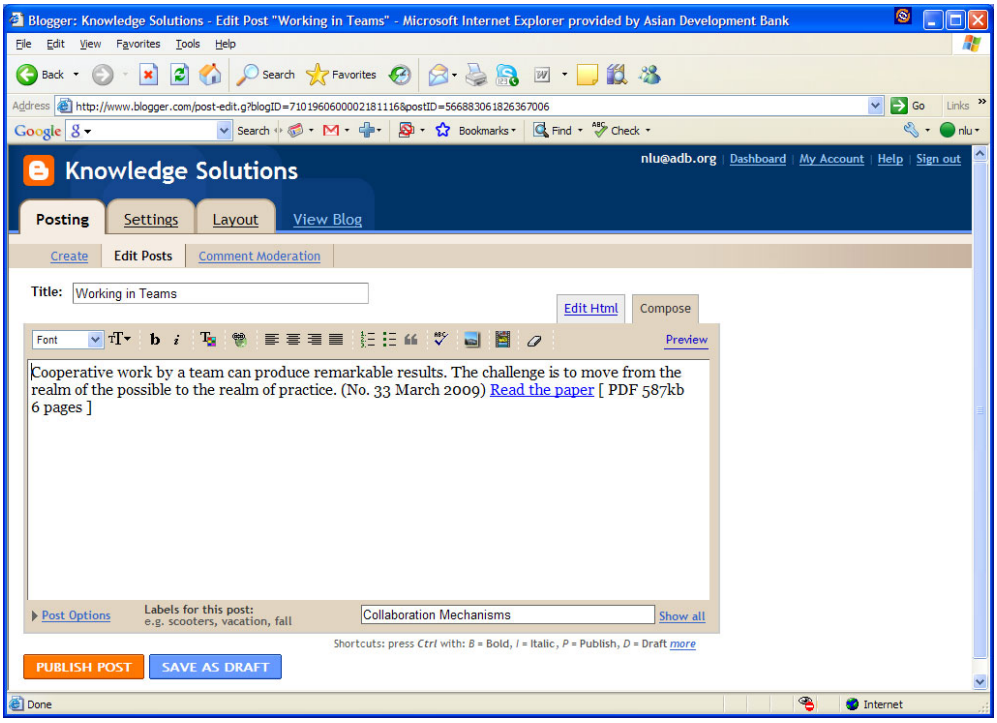
In the age of "push-button publishing" (a term used to denote the ease with which one can create, write, and maintain a blog) anybody can have a fully functional platform in 30 minutes or less. While there are no hard-and-fast rules, authors should observe a few basic guidelines:

- **Write as you talk.** Blogging is a conversation. The message should be clear and easy to understand. Use plain English to start a discussion and engage readers. They will respond if they are interested. This is an opportunity for mutual enrichment.
- **Stay on topic.** The majority of readers are interested in content that centers on a specific theme. If the con-

[7] A permalink is a Uniform Resource Locator designed to refer to a specific information item and to remain unchanged permanently (or at least for a lengthy period of time).

tent of all posts relate to it authors will create a loyal following.

- **Label posts.** Each post must be filed under a specific category or subject. This makes it easier for readers to find related posts.
- **Use keywords.** If the goal of the blog is to increase visibility the title of the blog should include related keywords. The title should be no longer than half a dozen words.
- **RSS.** RSS will increase readership and distribution and extend a blog's reach.
- **Old news is not news.** Blogging each day can be a drain but it is important that the information presented be current, informative, and accurate.
- **Adhere to a schedule.** Blogs and RSS feeds are created on a daily basis. Realizing that blogging requires time and effort, authors should not create unrealistic expectations. Still, search engines spider pages at regular intervals and frequent update of blog content will raise profile.
- **Create links.** Linking to other blogs also raises profile. (These should relate to similar subject areas.) Search engines use links as a means to validate blogs, which raises their profiles in search results.8



- **Use media whenever appropriate.** Many blogs offer capabilities to add photographs and video clips. However, if several media files relate to a post, consider placing them elsewhere, for example on media sharing sites such as Flickr. Blogs that are saddled with large files rapidly become unusable.
- **Look up to peers and readers.** Bloggers are Internet users. Paying respect to their views will enhance the relevance and credibility of posts. Blogs are easy to set up but they can taken down with speed if authors do not treat their audiences well.
- **Recognize intellectual property.** On the Internet, citing sources is easier, especially if these are already available online. An embedded reference that provides a hyperlink is usually sufficient for citation purposes.

8 Aside from metadata, search engines use the number of referencing links to weigh up a site's relevance to search terms. For instance, if several websites link to a particular blog on aquaculture, search engines will accept that as a validation of the blog's content and assign to it a higher rating in search results for queries on aquaculture.

Knowledge Solutions

Further Reading

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For further information

Contact Norman Lu, Knowledge Management Officer (nlu@adb.org), or Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).

Asian Development Bank

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members—48 from the region. In 2007, it approved $10.1 billion of loans, $673 million of grant projects, and technical assistance amounting to $243 million.

Knowledge Solutions are handy, quick reference guides to tools, methods, and approaches that propel development forward and enhance its effects. They are offered as resources to ADB staff. They may also appeal to the development community and people having interest in knowledge and learning.

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Asian Development Bank
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City
1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel +63 2 632 4444
Fax +63 2 636 2444
knowledge@adb.org
www.adb.org/knowledgesolutions