

Sharing Your Opinion With The World: Weblogs, Photoblogs, & Podcasts

by Peter McCracken

Think you have something to say? The rest of the world apparently does, and the simplicity of 'blogs' allows them to share their thoughts with everyone. Blogs—short for “web logs,” or online personal journals—have exploded over the past few years. Some estimates suggest there are now well over three million blogs, but that's a misleading number: nobody reads the vast majority of them, and only several thousand have significant readership. The ones that do, however, can have a great deal of influence, and in most cases have developed a critical mass of content and readers that assures attention to items reported there.

Blogs are as variable as individuals. People write about whatever they want, and they say whatever they want, as well—occasionally getting themselves fired as a result. Blogs are probably most prominent in politics and technology, but they appear in nearly every field. In the watery world, however, there are surprisingly few blogs. Kelly Drake, a librarian at Mystic Seaport, recently started a nice blog on maritime heritage issues called “Maritime Compass,” at <http://maritimecompass.blogspot.com>. Anyone can submit items to post; everyone who reads her blog will then be able to read what she has included. Lincoln Paine, a Maine-based maritime historian (and a former editor of *Sea History*), has a maritime history blog at <http://maritimehistory.blogspot.com>, but like many blogs it's short on content: its most recent posting was from May 2005. Hopefully, more will be added soon.

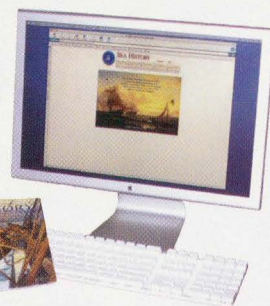
A downside of blogs is that you need to go to the site to see each new posting. “Blog readers” solve this problem, however. Several free readers exist, including <http://www.bloglines.com> and <http://www.feedreader.com>. In each case, you create a free account and define which blogs you want the reader to track, using a format called “RSS”. (Just look for the little orange “RSS” or “XML” button on the page you want to track.) You're then notified, via various methods, when a new posting is added to the blog you're tracking.

Google recently introduced Google Blog Search, at <http://blogsearch.google.com>. Google owns blogger.com and blogspot.com, so it certainly has interest in the area. You can, however, search more than just the sites Google owns. Because it's a brand-new service, the Google service only searches feeds from about June 2005 or so.

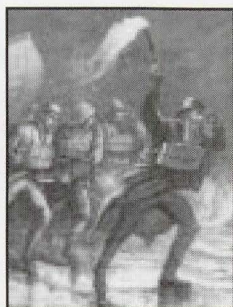
Blogs are not limited to text. Web sites such as www.flickr.com and www.photoblogs.org provide space for individuals to post their photos. At flickr.com, disparate images are grouped together through the terms people use when describing their photos. RealTravel, at <http://www.realtravel.com>, hosts travelers' photos and trip journals. Another site, <http://www.panoviews.com>, shows a variety of 360° QuickTime images of classic yachts, cargo ships, and cruise ships, usually in Genoa, Italy, harbor. Podcasts are audio postings; they're sort of like an individual's personal radio show, posted to the internet for anyone to download and enjoy. Podcasts can be found at <http://www.podcastalley.com>, <http://audio.weblogs.com>, and <http://www.ipodder.org>.

There's no limit to what can be posted on these sites, and over time, we can expect to see more and more maritime content, providing many more voices. These resources dramatically simplify the process for folks who want to post their opinions online, and as long as they can be found, they'll be worth exploring. ⚓

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