



Using blogs in academic libraries: versatile information platforms

Diane L. Schrecker

Ashland University Library, Ashland, Ohio, USA

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper was to provide an in-depth discussion of the poster session, Keep Blogging Along: Side by Side Library Blogs, presented at the American Library Association's Annual Conference in Washington, DC, June 27, 2007.

Design/methodology/approach – Complete with each blog discussed is a distinction of purpose, basic elements of blog design including organizational labels and tags, enhancement and usability tools, and a statement of success or failure for each project.

Findings – Comprehensive information concerning three academic library blogs; topics of collection development, children's literature review, a collaborative professional development project, and a supplemental academic course blog is provided.

Practical implications – To make available basic tools and resources for readers to create a blog, or blogs; keep statistical and evaluative information on individual projects; and enhance project usability with tools and widgets.

Originality/value – This paper details various innovative uses for blogs, or web logs, in an academic library setting and provides constructive resources to assist readers with researching and utilizing this technology.

Keywords Academic libraries, Library users, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Academic libraries and librarians continuously search for innovative ways to reach their patrons. Continuing to build quality library web presence complete with easy access to catalogs, databases, subject guides and research tools, will ensure that these sites remain valuable information portals. Often librarians are unable to update their library web sites without campus information technology and are left searching for another way to provide quick information to patrons. Blogs, or web logs, are “easily created, easily updateable web sites that allow an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the internet from any internet connection” (Richardson, 2006, p. 8). There are several distinct differences between blogs and basic web pages; blogs have the capability of being interactive and web pages are static. Likened to online journals, each new entry is automatically placed at the top of the blog with the date published prominently displayed.

This article presents an in-depth dialogue of the poster session; Keep Blogging Along: Side by Side Library Blogs, presented Sunday, June 24, 2007, at the American Library Association's (ALA) annual conference in Washington, DC. As detailed in part within the original poster session abstract, “Innovative uses of blogs in academic libraries are infinite. From general news to book reviews, liaison communication to library resources, blogs are being utilized for outreach within and beyond the library. Renowned for ease of use and ability to provide a versatile platform for information, collaboration, and professional development, several different blogs are currently in use by the Instructional Resource Center (IRC) at Ashland University Library. Each



has a differing purpose, but fulfills specific needs within the IRC web page” (Schrecker, 2007a, p. 56). Furthermore, this article offers information pertaining to basic tools and resources necessary to create a blog, as well as various tools available to enhance usability and integrate counters for statistics and evaluation. Each of the four blogs presented, Instructional Resource Center Blog, IRC Book Reviews Blog, Library Cloud, and the EDCI 131/504: Instructional Technology Lab incorporate discussion of blog purpose, elements and design, use of organizational tools, inclusion of widgets, a brief statement of success and/or failure, and existing challenges for each project. Blogs are presented and discussed in order of their creation, beginning with the one that started it all, The Instructional Resource Center Blog, Ashland University Library.

Instructional resource center blog

The Instructional Resource Center at Ashland University Library is a specialized curriculum library committed to providing quality course program and educational technology resources to students and faculty in the Dwight Schar College of Education at Ashland University and the Ashland University community. As a curriculum materials center, the Instructional Resource Center (IRC) collection includes Kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) student and teacher textbooks, activity books, materials kits, software, media selections, and reference materials in addition to juvenile and education collection titles. Responsibility for these collections falls to the curriculum librarian who is also the library liaison to the College of Education. It is important not only to develop these collections with input from faculty, but also to market existing curriculum materials to students, faculty, and staff. Traditional means of faculty communication, e-mail notifications, web page bibliographies, and book lists, were utilized with varied broad-spectrum success while consistent announcements led to a certain blasé attitude towards the actual content of the notices; e-mail was deleted, web page statistics indicated bibliographies largely unread, and booklists were withering in the literature rack. Furthermore, it was painfully obvious a large contingency of the intended audience, namely students, were not being reached with these methods. The time had come to examine alternative techniques for presenting collection development information to targeted audiences, enter the idea of an Instructional Resource Center blog.

Investigative steps were taken to determine if this platform would successfully facilitate the project and its purpose; would blogs be a useful technology vehicle for delivering information to the target audience. Blogging software was researched with several viable candidates, such as Blogger, Moveable Type, and WordPress, explored and considered. Bloggers (Google, Inc., 2007a) simple functionality, accessibility, ease of use, customization, and yes popularity not withstanding, made it an ideal choice for the project. While Blogger provides an option for users to host blogs on an external server, the decision was made to have the IRC blog reside on Blogger’s server and seamlessly link to the existing Instructional Resource Center web site. Establishing a personal account with Bloglines; a “free online service for searching, subscribing, creating and sharing news feeds, blogs and rich web content” (Bloglines, 2007) (www.bloglines.com/about 2007) and selecting subscription feeds to professional blogs, library organization blogs, and academic library blogs, provided opportunity to explore other endeavors for content and presentation (visual appeal). Lastly, blogs as tools were researched using the following books, *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other*

Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms, by Will Richardson (2006), *Who Let the Blogs Out?: A Hyperconnected Peek at the World of Weblogs*, by Biz Stone (2004), and *Naked Conversations: How Blogs are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers*, Israel and Scoble, 2006. While making the final decision regarding use of a blog, various contributing factors, including the ability have each project behave as a stand-alone project, technology issues regarding Ashland University's two-hour staging server lag time versus immediacy of blog postings from any internet ready computer, user convenience of RSS feeds, and the unique opportunity for user feedback were taken into consideration and deemed both useful and appropriate to the proposed projects.

The Instructional Resource Center: What's New page: www.ashland.edu/library/irc/new.html features links to, and short statements of purpose for, each blog utilized by the IRC providing a convenient access point for patrons. "This blog includes news and information with a main focus on collection development for the IRC; juvenile books, activity books, education titles, manipulative kits, software, audio books, and IRC reference items" (Schrecker, 2007c). The Instructional Resource Center Blog (Schrecker, 2005a) debuted on June 10, 2005 with "The New IRC Collection Blog" post:

Welcome to the Instructional Resource Center Collection Blog! Beginning with the fall 2005 academic school year, this blog will replace the yearly book lists published on the IRC web page. Items, both circulating and reference, will be entered as they are cataloged and available for use. Each entry will have an accompanying heading, specific to the genre. Please note that anyone with a specific book request will continue to be personally notified via email when the books arrive (Schrecker, 2005b).

Within the blog, each blog post is titled by location, genre, or both (AU Circulating: Education), includes a blog category label (Juvenile Books, Curriculum Textbooks, Education, etc.) and items within the post link directly to the library catalog. Furthermore, care is given to post like collection additions together making it simpler for users to locate specific blog categories. Supplemental information such as library or IRC hours, technology updates, and children's literature award book announcements, afford patrons the opportunity to keep up to date with more than just books in the IRC.

While the very nature of blogs, posting in chronological order with the newest item first, represent a routinely updated site (posts remain stagnant until the next post is added), blog sidebars remain constant, capable of anchoring persistent information resource areas. Blogger templates employ a point and click, cut and paste environment for adding these page elements (sidebar) to a blog; options are available for lists, links, photos, text, HTML/JavaScript, feeds, and more. Blog administrators choose where to place the page element into a sidebar and follow the prompts. The Instructional Resource Center Blog sidebar utilizes a combination of basic text (about the IRC, IRC collections, and disclaimers), blog links (targeted catalog, blog rolls, and categories), and external widgets that target specific blog features and collections. Table I identifies sidebar elements for the Instructional Resource Center blog; external widget sources are identified within each widget category.

The number of sidebar page elements in a blog is virtually unlimited; ideas and needs will vary by library. Individual elements may be moved within the sidebar at the blog administrator's discretion providing opportunity to focus upon specific entries at any given time. After the first few months of consistent location tweaking and inserting new sidebar information, the only elements within the IRC blog sidebar that

change are ones whose purpose is change (i.e. LibraryThing widgets displaying new books). As new posts are added, updating readers with information about the IRC and its collection, the sidebar provides stability to both the blog and the Instructional Resource Center web site.

To date the Instructional Resource Center Blog has 655 posts; of those posts 564 (86 percent) are collection development; 62 (9.4 percent) are IRC updates of technology, hours, and job openings; 20 posts (3 percent) provide information on children’s literature awards; seven posts (1 percent) purvey information pertaining the main library; and two posts (0.003 percent) are related to university business. The original purpose of the IRC blog was to bring together collection development information in one place; these figures suggest it is being used primarily for that purpose and may be deemed successful. However, another aspect of overall blog success must be appraised. Case in point, is the blog reaching its target audience? Statistics for the Instructional Resource Center blog are being tracked by two separate online web sites, StatsCounter and FeedBurner, and suggest the blog is being accessed primarily by users not in the target audience (other libraries, countries and states), the same counter data reveals an increasing number of “hits” over the last two years and a significant growth with RSS feed subscriptions. Continued success is viable as information is being presented in a useable, categorized, and searchable format with links to integral IRC and library information. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial to promote this service to the targeted audience so as not to limit its potential impact as a searchable resource and information tool.

IRC book reviews blog

Juvenile books comprise a significant portion of the Instructional Resource Center collection and as such support the College of Education course curriculum. All new juvenile titles are highlighted with initial placement in the “New Books” reading area, two book shelves, and comfortable chairs, situated below a bulletin board display, before being shelved in their regular location. Students and faculty customarily make the new bookshelves their first stop when selecting juvenile titles. The IRC Book Reviews blog is a logical extension of this resource area, promoting new books and providing opportunity for professional reflection and viewpoints. Ideally an answer to “What new book would you recommend?” and “Do you like any of the new books?” reviews posted are written by faculty librarians focusing on new juvenile fiction and non-fiction titles.

Post structure and sidebar format of the IRC Book Reviews (Schrecker, 2006a) blog puts forward pertinent information regarding library database and internet resources to accompany reviews. Each post contains the book title, author, and illustrator links to

Table I.
Instructional resource
center blog: sidebar
elements

| Basic text | Links | Widgets |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Librarian contact information | IRC catalog quick links | Blogger: search this blog |
| Education liaison notice | IRC and library resources | Library catalog from the blog |
| Juvenile collection description | IRC blog roll | LibraryThing: IRC book reviews |
| IRC blog disclaimers | FeedBurner: site feeds (RSS) | WidgetBox: IRC book reviews |
| Blog footer | | LibraryThing: IRC reference titles |
| | | Blogger: blog post labels |
| | | Blogger: blog archive |

the library catalog, a short review accentuated with cover art images, quick links to subject headings in the library catalog, category labels, and a set of Technorati tags. Sidebar elements are a mixture of basic text (juvenile collection description and literature review), blog links (database, internet, and children's book awards), and external blog widgets (catalog from the blog and WorldCat search). Table II identifies sidebar elements for the IRC Book Reviews blog; external widget sources are identified within each widget category.

Literature reviews and resources are periodically updated; each of the sidebar elements in the IRC Book Reviews blog remains constant in both location and topic. One notable addition to the blogs post labels are Technorati tags (Technorati, Inc., 2007). While Blogger provides blog labels for internal links on posts, Technorati tags are external social tools, virtual subject links. Using these tags to index blog content "will let Technorati find you and make you more discoverable," (Israel and Scoble, 2006, p. 224) expanding your blog to a larger pool of readers.

The original hypothesis for this blog included options for student submitted reviews, faculty reviews, open comments for conversation, and an opportunity for integration into children's literature course assignments. Initial discussions have been held with interested faculty members, but the blog has yet to fulfill this particular function. As of September 19, 2007, The IRC Book Reviews blog included 48 posts with reviews of juvenile books and in May 2007, celebrated its first year anniversary. While preliminary goals of a review per week from a pool of librarian and faculty reviewers were not realized, statistical results from FeedBurner and StatCounter reveal an increase in use over the one-year span. Interest in continuing this blog is high, conversely external factors of patron usage and time available to commit to it as a long-term project are periodically examined. At this time, an increase in the number of reviews and internal word-of-mouth advertising are planned to increase readership and viability of the blog.

Library Cloud

Welcome to Library Cloud, a collaborative blog effort by academic librarians Rebecca Bailey, Case Western Reserve University and Diane Schrecker, Ashland University. The beginning of an academic school year is not the best time for undertaking a new project. However, as we may address some beginning-of-the-academic-year topics, we thought starting now would be beneficial and appropriate. The blog format will change somewhat in the next few days as we finalize the look of Library Cloud and detail specifics such as our purpose and reasoning behind this effort (Schrecker, 2006b).

| Basic text | Links | Widgets |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Librarian contact information | Library database resources | Library catalog from the blog |
| Blog purpose and description | Internet book review resources | Blogger: search this blog |
| Juvenile collection policy | Library resources | WorldCat: search for books |
| Book review literature review | IRC and library blogs | Blogger: blog post labels |
| Blog disclaimers | Internet: juvenile literature | Blogger: blog archive |
| Blog policy and copyright | Internet: book awards | |
| Blog reviewer information | FeedBurner: site feeds (RSS) | |
| Blog footer | | |

Table II.
IRC book reviews blog:
sidebar elements

Library Cloud is a collaborative professional development blog with modest beginnings rooted in a workshop, Blogging Goes to College: Brainstorming Weblog Use in Higher Education, co-sponsored by OhioLINK and Youngstown State University in July 2006. One workshop outcome was the kernel of an idea *vis-à-vis* a collaborative librarian blog where participants could discuss topics of interest, specifically those relevant to academic librarianship. Unlike previously discussed single author blogs, Library Cloud is a mutual effort between first two, and now four, academic librarians. This fact alone dictated a drastically different blog set up and administration effort.

Beginning in August and concluding a month later, ground rules for this project were discussed via e-mail; included were topics of name and logo, blogging platform, sidebar elements and widgets, professional content, and the concept of blogs as scholarship. Each blog participant has equal administrative rights, access to counters, statistics, e-mail, and element of blog set up. Of particular importance to Library Cloud participants was the development of a blog disclaimer regarding post content being a reflection of, and belonging to, individual authors, not that of their respective employers. Moreover, the disclaimer section encompasses both link and comments stating, “Authors are not responsible for the content, accuracy, or reliability of information on sites linked from this site. Posted comments on this site represent only the viewpoint of the commenter and will be removed if deemed offensive by the authors” (Bailey *et al.*, 2006). Disclaimer statements are located in the sidebar along with other basic textual information, links, and widgets. Blog sidebar elements are another area of differentiation afforded Library Cloud. As a professional development blog, these blocks of information are less stringent in subject matter than those affiliated with a university project; added to the widget list were items that would help drive blog traffic (tag clouds) and provide users with resources beyond the blog. Table III identifies sidebar elements for the IRC Book Reviews blog; external widget sources are identified within each widget category.

Supplementary sidebar category links direct users to professional library blogs, library organization blogs, and library topic wikis, which are updated periodically by blog contributors. Internal Blogger labels added to each post are compiled in the Library Cloud label allowing for topic searches within the blog.

Library Cloud is in its infancy, a small fish in the virtual academic library blog pond, but the opportunity to blog about the library profession is rewarding. As of November 2, 2007, Library Cloud has 149 posts with a significant number of categories identified and ranging from frequent, 23 for Academic library to the singular, Ellison Dies at one. The recent inclusion of two new blog contributors has not only expanded

| Basic text | Links | Widgets |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Welcome and blog purpose | Contributor links (profiles) | Blogger: search this blog |
| Blog disclaimers | Blog email link | Technorati: tag cloud |
| Blog comment policy | FeedBurner: site feeds (RSS) | ZoomCloud: tag cloud |
| | Internet: library organizations | Blogger: blog post labels |
| | Blog rolls (6) | LibraryThing: favorite books |
| | Wiki roll | WorldCat: search for books |
| | | Blogger: blog archive |

Table III.
Library Cloud: sidebar
elements

the areas of subject expertise discussed, but also provided a needed influx of post frequency. FeedBurner statistics show a steady increase of blog subscriptions and use, StatsCounter raw count data has doubled in the last several months, and though comments are still limited in scope and number, the increase in readership may translate to blog discussion. Contributors are in agreement, as long as the project remains enjoyable and readership continues to increase, it will continue.

EDCI 131/504: instructional technology lab blog

The Instructional Resource Center in Ashland University Library provides resources to facilitate EDCI 131/504, a self-paced instructional technology lab taken by all incoming freshman education majors and non-certified Bachelor's plus students that requires demonstration of basic technology competencies as mandated by the state of Ohio for teacher certification. "A tool for information, weekly updates, and assignment tips from the EDCI 131/504 Graduate Assistants" (Schrecker, 2007b) the EDCI 131/504 Instructional Technology Lab blog <http://instructionaltechnologylab.blogspot.com> is a collaborative effort affording graduate assistants and the course instructor (also the curriculum librarian) opportunity to present class information and updates. WebCT, the course software presentation tool used for EDCI 131/504, includes an internal calendar, but Instructional Resource Center student workers are unable to view or access tools within this environment. Therefore, the EDCI 131/504 Instructional Technology Lab blog presents updates to students enrolled in the course and affords student workers in the Instructional Resource Center opportunity to have updated information, increasing communication between all interested parties as well as assisting the course to run more efficiently.

As of October 19, 2007 the EDCI 131/504 Instructional Technology Lab blog had 69 posts; generally assignment specific, posts also often include updates pertaining to grades, due dates, IRC technology, plus library and IRC hours updates as needed. After being published to the blog, individual posts are directly linked to the course calendar, therefore each time a student enters WebCT new blog posts are part of the "news" presented. The blog utilizes Blogger's internal labeling system as opposed to external Technorati tags due to the nature of the blog purpose; there is no need to increase readership outside of students enrolled in the course. For the same reason, widget use is minimal with the bulk of information presented basic text and links of primary importance to the course. Table IV identifies sidebar elements for the EDCI 131/504 Instructional Technology Lab blog; external widget sources are identified within each widget category.

The EDCI 131/504 Instructional Technology Lab blog is now in its third term of use (Spring, Summer and Fall 2007); FeedBurner and StatCounter data indicate students are taking advantage of this resource. Unlike the Instructional Resource Center blogs,

| Basic text | Links | Widgets |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Course instructor | EDCI 131/504 information | Blogger: blog post labels |
| Graduate assistants | MS Office software resources | Blogger: blog archive |
| Graduate assistant office hours | FeedBurner: site feeds (RSS) | |
| EDCI 131/504 introduction | | |
| Course advice, tips, information | | |

Table IV.
EDCI 131/504
instructional technology
lab blog: sidebar elements

campus IP addresses are not blocked from either StatCounter or Feedburner. Results of this decision are dual; counters log every instance of blog post publication, but it is also possible to view on-campus use and determine which access points originate from within course software. Instructional Resource Center student workers have voiced their support concerning the continuation of this project. Course evaluations have not indicated a specific interest in the blog thus far and this will be taken into account when assessing the project at the end of the academic year.

Widgets, counters and tags: enhancing library blogs

Each blog, reliant upon their purpose and direction, has made the most of readily available external resources to enhance function and usability. Counters and feeds provide important data for evaluation, widgets augment presented information for users, and post tags allow for projects to be connected to the blogosphere. Beginning with gathering statistical information, this section will summarize an assortment of resources used in the four blogs introduced within.

StatCounter (StatCounter Ltd, 2007a) is a free, invisible, service that collects user data for web pages and blogs. StatCounter describes its service as “Essentially, you place a small piece of code on your website, when someone visits your website, that small piece of code is executed and the visitor’s public details (IP address, browser, operating system, referrer, page title and URL, etc.) are analyzed and stored for reporting to you later” (StatCounter Ltd, 2007b). Each free account log is limited to 100; once the mark is met logged statistics will continually “roll-over” always keeping the most current. It is possible to customize a project with different options for collecting statistics. For example, users may block single and IP address ranges so as not to count personal visits or download a blocking cookie (note that clearing cookies from a computer removes the blocking cookie but not blocked addresses). Of particular interest is information garnered detailing specific posts and the path used to find each post. Popularity notwithstanding, knowing what information is being accessed may assist with what is discussed in future posts. As noted in the sidebar element information tables, each blog discussed here has a StatCounter account that compiles information on users; Library Cloud has a separate account and the Instructional Resource Center blog, IRC Book Reviews blog, and EDCI 131/504 Instructional Technology blog are three parts of a single project. Another web site that offers a method of collecting visitor statistics is FeedBurner.

What is Feedburner? Feedburner (<http://feedburner.com/fb/a/blogs>) provides a way for users to analyze their blog traffic, market blog information, and provide content to users (FeedBurner, Inc., 2007a). “If you publish a blog, you publish a feed. A feed is the format that allows your content to be delivered (and subscribed to) on the web” (Feedburner, Inc., 2007b). Unlike StatCounter, no code installation is required; FeedBurner makes use of RSS feeds instead. This free service requires users to register and burn their feed, or feeds, and it literally takes seconds to complete the process and begin collecting information. Like Blogger, FeedBurner is part of the Google family and as such provides opportunity for users to work easily between the platforms. Since the acquisition of FeedBurner, Blogger users are able to redirect every version of their feed to one, allowing for a more accurate picture of blog readership (FeedBurner, Inc., 2007c) (www.feedburner.com/google). FeedBurner and StatCounter provide similar, yet different data to bloggers. With FeedBurner both feed and site data are available to

users, allowing for the added benefit of knowing how many readers have subscribed to a blog feed as well as the most popular page, and incoming and outgoing resource links. It is also possible to have more than one blog project feed burned within an account; Library Cloud has its own account and the library blogs feed data is part of a single FeedBurner account. Lastly, it would be remiss not to mention that FeedBurner provides significant opportunity for users to publicize their blogs including a “Chicklet Chooser” that allows for subscription buttons to be placed directly on the blog and a “Headline Animator” that creates a graphical display of recent headlines.

Technorati (Technorati, Inc., 2007) is a search engine that makes use of tagging, or labeling, placed on blog posts or web sites. When Technorati tags are added to blog posts, content immediately becomes part of the entire Technorati blogosphere, linked to any other blog or web page using the same user-defined tag category. Once a free account is created and a blog or web site claimed, there is an assortment of widgets available to enhance tag use including Technorati search boxes and tag clouds. While each of the Ashland University Library affiliated blogs discussed have been claimed and intermittently use Technorati tags, Library Cloud routinely incorporate them into blog posts. Why the distinction? Library Cloud is presented to a wider and more diverse community, whereas the Instructional Resource Center blog, the IRC Book Reviews blog, and the EDCI 131/504: Instructional Technology lab blogs are basically tools for internal library use. Library Cloud has a Technorati tag cloud in the sidebar, an option, which provides users with occasion to view other posts with like tags. Ideally, the benefit of using Technorati tags is in becoming “linked” to the blogosphere.

LibraryThing (LibraryThing/Spalding, 2007) in essence, is “an easy, library-quality catalog” that “connects you with people who read the same things” www.librarything.com. With a free account, users may catalog up to 200 books in LibraryThing, or choose to option for paid accounts featuring unlimited entries. Connectivity and visual appeal are significant to this resource; users connect with other people reading the same book and may create book widgets to share their collections and add visual appeal to their blog readers. For example, a simple text list of books read placed within a blog sidebar imparts basic information to readers, but the same list in which colorful book covers accompany the list and link to your LibraryThing catalog with more titles garners more attention.

The Instructional Resource Center blog, IRC Book Reviews blog, and the Instructional Resource Center what’s new page make use of LibraryThing book widgets. Free accounts were created to promote new titles and incorporate their library of information via widgets into both blogs and the IRC web site. For example, a sidebar book widget displays covers of titles recently reviewed on the IRC Book Reviews blog; it links to that blog’s library and then ultimately back to the accompanying review. New IRC reference titles are also highlighted on the Instructional Resource Center blog in this manner, providing a great graphical element to the reference collection. This practice has met with much success as students routinely ask about books featured on the Instructional Resource Center blog in conjunction with the new books area and recent reviews. Library Cloud also has a LibraryThing account and uses a sidebar book widget to display recommended reading by the blog the collaborators. This is a popular tool in many ways for blogging librarians and book aficionados alike.

The word widget has different meaning to those involved in math and science than it does to bloggers and WidgetBox (WidgetBox, Inc., 2007c) where the term describes

“a small piece of interactive content that can be dynamically embedded into a web page” or blog (WidgetBox, Inc., 2007a). Widgets are used to present information within the sidebar of blogs and often, as discussed with LibraryThing and Technorati, web sites will provide ready made widgets for enhancement of their specific user tools. WidgetBox is a growing resource for finding widgets outside of specific entities to use on blogs and web pages. Of particular interest is their tool called a blidget. What is a blidget? “A blidget is a widget that contains your blog. Other people can place your blidget on their sites, increasing your exposure” (WidgetBox, Inc., 2007b). Using WidgetBox to create a blidget is quick, easy, and best of all free. Create an account, navigate to the Blidgets at WidgetBox page, enter a blog or web site URL, and follow their steps to insert your blidget into the desired web page or blog. This is an ingenious tool to allow bloggers to market targeted blogs and web sites. Furthermore, once placed within a blog or web site it is possible to view statistics on blidget use.

The Instructional Resource Center “what’s new” page has a blidget featuring the Instructional Resource Center blog. Each time the Instructional Resource Center blog publishes a new post, the blidget on the IRC what’s new web page reflects the update. Patrons are able to view the blog updates on the IRC web page, click on an item of interest, and be redirected to the individual blog post. Likewise, the Instructional Resource Center blog has a blidget of the IRC Book Reviews blog. Each time a new book review is added, the blidget is automatically updated reflecting the highlighted book. Use of a blidget provides another opportunity for blogs information to be promoted within the Instructional Resource Center web site and Instructional Resource Center Blog.

Another product from Google, Inc. (2007b), Picasa, is a free online photo gallery resource that may also be downloaded locally to organize photographs on a computer. Sign in to an existing Blogger or Google G-Mail account and view albums compiled by Picasa containing Blogger project photos and images. When using the online photo gallery, it is possible to designate albums as either public or private for sharing. A relatively new perk to Picasa Web Albums is the ability to upload photos, organize and add captions, then create a slide show to e-mail or embed on a blog or web page. Used for the first time within a Library Cloud post titled “Learning something new” (Schrecker, 2007d) a Picasa web album slide show features images from the Academic Library Association of Ohio’s (ALAO) Curriculum Materials Interest Group (CMCIG) spring workshop held on May 18, 2007 at Miami University of Ohio’s King Library. A short photo flash montage, 26 pictures presented in less than two minutes, the web album presents an overview of the day’s activities and is archived on the Google server and may be viewed by anyone reading the blog post. Not currently used in any of the other blogs discussed, Picasa Web Albums would be useful for creating library and Instructional Resource Center tours that could be embedded as either a sidebar widget or post.

ZoomClouds (ZoomGroups/AR Networks, 2007a) is another free widget resource to create and customize a tag cloud based on blog content and RSS feeds. Steps for creating a ZoomCloud tag cloud are simple; sign up for a free account, choose the feed (blog or web site), design and customize the cloud with the available editor and copy and paste generated code within the desired site. Among the customization tools are choices for tag color, font size assigned to word weights (the more often a word is used, the heavier the weight), cloud border color and size, and overall size of the generated

tag cloud. Within the cloud settings it is also possible to target words both for inclusion and exclusion in the cloud.

Visitors clicking on the tag cloud are directed to ZoomClouds where the most posts using the selected word are displayed. Statistics are offered; it is possible to “see how many clicks your tags are getting by the hour, by day, week, month, or year” and to get “reports to see what tags were clicked on the most and from what countries those clicks were made” (ZoomGroups/AR Networks, 2007b). This is another useful tool helping to determine what readers are accessing when visiting a blog. Library Cloud has a ZoomCloud tag cloud in the sidebar and 2007 statistics indicate the tags have been used every month with the exception of January and range from a low of 12 clicks (November) to 270 clicks (March). It is interesting to compare the tag clouds as presented by both Technorati and ZoomCloud in relation to the Blogger labels generated by each post author. However, regardless of the different tag and label clouds and lists created, readers are regularly using each of them.

Conclusion

Blogs, or web logs, are versatile platforms for presenting information to academic library patrons. When combined with academic library web sites, as well as specific web sites for curriculum resource centers, they are capable of enhancing existing web presence and providing opportunity for conversation and communication. A certain amount of time and effort is required to create and maintain a blog, be it a simple library collection blog, a course blog, or a professional development blog aspiring to present topics of scholarship. With potential to reach library patrons via this burgeoning technology, the effort is not without rewards. “20 years from now, people will look back at the blogging tools we use today and smile at how quaint they were. What will have replaced them? We haven’t a clue” (Israel and Scoble, 2006, p. 211). The blogs presented highlight several feasible projects currently in place supporting library collections, course curriculum, and a commitment to collaborative professional development. Regardless of future outcomes, the opportunity blogs present at this time is not to be ignored.

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About the author

Diane L. Schrecker is a curriculum librarian at Ashland University Library, Ashland University, Ohio, USA. She is also the director of the Instructional Resource Center at Ashland University Library, the library web master, and an adjunct faculty member with Ashland University's Dwight Schar College of Education. She can be contacted at dschreck@ashland.edu or schreckd@gmail.com