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Delivering the News with Blogs:
The Georgia State University
Library Experience

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ABSTRACT. To deliver information about library news, services and resources to the science faculty and students at Georgia State University, several librarians developed a blog, Science News <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/science/>. Despite the increasing popularity of blogs (or Weblogs), few libraries have taken advantage of what they offer. Blogs can be updated easily, frequently and continuously, making them an appealing alternative to static newsletters. This article summarizes the librarians' rationale for moving to this dynamic format, how the technology was balanced with the needs of the librarians and patrons, and the issues and challenges that are being addressed to ensure that this will be a viable and successful news-delivery system. Some preliminary user statistics have also been gathered and analyzed, offering encouragement that patrons are reading it. The experience with Science News is already serving as the model for the additional subject-specific blogs

that have been developed to meet the informational needs of other patron groups. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

Keeping patrons informed, from changes in hours to new services and resources, is the responsibility of any library. The Georgia State University Library uses a formal liaison librarian model as a primary communication conduit between the library and patrons. There are currently fifteen liaison librarians (including two for the natural sciences departments) who, along with their other duties as reference librarians or catalogers, are responsible for collection development and subject-specialized reference/instruction for one or more academic departments. Each liaison is also expected to keep the students and faculty in their assigned departments informed about new resources, changes in library policies, and other news that could affect their educational and research needs.

One way to communicate with patrons about the library is by publishing a newsletter at regular or even irregular intervals. Newsletters can be hard copy documents that are physically delivered to the patrons, they can be electronically produced documents sent to patrons via e-mail, and they can be HTML or PDF documents placed on the library's Web site for anyone to view. The advantage of a newsletter is that the content can be tailored to meet the informational needs of a specific department or patron group rather than just being general library news. Print and electronic newsletters can also be saved or archived so the information is permanently retained.

NEWSLETTERS: PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION CHALLENGES

Despite the enormous value in offering such a news outlet to patrons, a newsletter may not be the best solution. The difficulties that come with developing and maintaining newsletters may be substantial enough to

dissuade many librarians from producing them at all. These challenges include the cost in production time weighed against the probable readership, the need for selectivity, the lack of immediacy, and the increasing use of e-mail over more traditional communication forms.

Time/Cost vs. Readership

Newsletters take time to produce. For the Georgia State liaisons, this means time away from other, often more pressing, job responsibilities. Most of the liaisons, if asked about creating a newsletter, would probably respond with "I don't have time for a newsletter." If taking the time needed to produce a newsletter is one concern for librarians, the other concern is whether the target audience will take the time to read it. Glynn and Wu's (2003) survey of library liaisons suggests that faculty are less likely to read newsletters or other lengthy library documents, due in part to their own busy schedules, as well as to the reality that e-mail has replaced print as the primary communication tool with faculty. The other target audience, the students, will also prove to be a challenge to reach. Even if a newsletter can be distributed to them, there is no guarantee they will be any more willing to read it than the faculty. If the newsletter does not reach the maximum number of patrons possible, or if the majority of recipients do not even read it, then the production costs (especially time) will outweigh the potential benefits (readership).

Selectivity

Theoretically, a newsletter may be any length provided there is enough information to fill it. To keep a newsletter brief enough to ensure that more patrons will read it, however, the librarian may need to limit what goes into the document. If there are thirty items that might go into a newsletter with space for only ten, then the librarian will need to prioritize those news items and exclude some potentially valuable information. A librarian who wants to pass those other twenty items along to patrons will need to find another way. One option is to publish the newsletter more frequently, which will require still more time for production and distribution.

Lack of Immediacy

Because a newsletter is published periodically rather than continuously, a librarian may hold some news items until the next issue is pro-

duced, which means that some news is not reaching patrons in as timely a manner as possible. This lack of immediacy also makes newsletters ineffective for time-sensitive alerts such as a library resource being temporarily unavailable, or for any news that should be publicized before the next newsletter is produced.

Due to the limited space of newsletters and the time lags in producing them, a considerable amount of news is not reaching patrons, including:

- immediate, time-sensitive alerts
- new monograph acquisitions, such as reference titles of note or a list of recently acquired titles in a particular subject area
- announcements about electronic journals: new titles or added coverage
- minor but important changes to databases
- notable Internet resources
- other topics of interest, from announcements about new open access scientific journals, more popular "in the news" items

E-MAIL AS A REPLACEMENT TO NEWSLETTERS?

Because e-mail has largely replaced print as the principal means of communicating with faculty, much of the information that could go into a newsletter may certainly be distributed this way. E-mail is a more informal medium where messages only a few sentences long can be sent quickly and without spending time creating lengthy documents for physical or electronic dissemination.

However, while it is certainly effective for sending the time-sensitive alerts, e-mail, as a sole substitute for newsletters, is not a realistic option if the ultimate objective is to keep faculty more informed about the library. Although e-mail addresses the immediacy issue, a librarian also runs the very real risk of annoying faculty with a barrage of messages. The library news, no matter how valuable and well intentioned it may be, could then become nothing more than junk mail to the faculty (Glynn and Wu 2003). E-mail is most effective when used selectively, and so the librarian is back to prioritizing news items and choosing which news items should and should not be sent.

Another disadvantage to relying solely on e-mail to communicate with patrons is that it can be an equally ineffective tool in reaching other core patron groups such as students. Not only will they be just as disinclined as faculty to appreciate numerous messages from the library, but librarians may also face additional challenges in terms of managing

contact information. There may only be a few dozen faculty members in a particular department, while students may number in the hundreds. No librarian will want to manage large lists of Yahoo and Hotmail addresses if these are what the students use instead of their university accounts. Librarians in other settings, like schools and public libraries, may encounter similar obstacles when using e-mail to keep patrons informed.

BLOGS: AN ALTERNATIVE NEWS-DELIVERY SYSTEM

Even if newsletters are abandoned and e-mail is used only for the most important or time-sensitive alerts, librarians still need to keep patrons informed about library news and resources pertinent to scholarly activities. The challenge for libraries is to find or develop a system that combines the permanence and patron-specificity of newsletters with the ease and immediacy of e-mail, while avoiding the drawbacks of either format. Blogging has emerged as a possible solution.

What Is a Blog?

Despite numerous articles that have been written on the subject, this is still one of the most frequently asked questions the authors have received from other librarians, local colleagues included. While the words "blogs," "Weblogs" and "newsblogs" may not mean anything to many Internet users, in all likelihood they have come across them on the Web. There are no official blog standards yet, but they do share enough common characteristics that most attempts to define blogs and their components have given rise to unofficial standards (Bausch, Haughey and Hourihan 2002; Harder and Reichardt 2003). From the viewpoint of the user or visitor, a blog is a Web site with:

- content arranged as entries of text and hyperlinks, posted in reverse chronological order,
- a time stamp for each entry so the reader knows when it was posted, and
- an archive of previously posted content that can be easily accessed by visitors.

These features could describe any traditional HTML-based "what's new" page that includes some kind of search engine. The differences,

however, lie in the technology, and this is where the explanations seem to break down.

The authors speculate that there is a wide information gap between the blog-savvy librarians and the much larger group of reference and public services librarians who are unfamiliar with how blogs work. Understanding that blogs are databases that function using an amalgam of Web technologies is less vital than knowing how librarians can use them in their work.

Here is an explanation of blogs for librarians:

- Blogs can serve as an alternative to static newsletters for keeping patrons informed (in near real-time format) about library services and resources. Has a database changed, a new reference set become available, or there is a new Web site that patrons might find useful? A librarian can post that information quickly, easily and immediately.
- Web-based forms are used to build and update content in blogs. The librarian uses a form to create a new entry consisting of a few sentences of text and maybe a hyperlink. That entry is immediately posted for everyone to see. One also uses forms to edit previously posted entries and save these changes just as quickly. If a person can fill in a Web-based form, he or she can run a basic blog and add new entries as often and as frequently as needed.
- A librarian does not need to know HTML to construct or maintain a blog, because most are ready to run "out of the box." Some basic HTML knowledge, however, would enable one to customize the layout, as well as format entries with lists, paragraphs and hyperlinks.
- A blog can be incorporated into a library's Web site, or it can be hosted by an external service that provides access to the blog at little or no charge. The librarian logs onto the site to add or edit entries, then links to the blog from the library's Web page.
- Blogging does not have to be tied to a single writer or editor. Responsibility for managing it can be divided among multiple contributors who have the authorization to post and update entries. A library can have one blog that many librarians across multiple departments use to publicize general library information, and the library can have a series of blogs run by smaller groups of librarians who want to deliver information to more specific audiences. Business librarians can manage one to deliver information for business faculty and students, for example.

A Very Short History of Weblogs

There are numerous articles, Web sites, and even some books that elaborate on the history and evolution of blogging. MOSAIC's "What's New" page (1993-1996) is often recognized as being the first Weblog, with Jorn Barger <http://www.robotwisdom.com/weblogs/> receiving credit for coining the term in 1997 (Bausch, Haughey and Hourihan 2002; Harder and Reichardt 2003). Weblogs, or 'blogs,' remained on the periphery until 1999. Then hosting services like Pitas and Blogger emerged, which allowed even novice Internet users to set up their own blogs relatively quickly and easily (Clyde 2002).

There is no way to calculate with absolute accuracy the number of blogs in existence. The head of blog publisher Gawker Media has suggested there may be three million active blogs (St. John 2003). Blogger, which Google purchased in early 2003, boasts a membership of more than a million bloggers alone (Kay 2003). Perseus Development Corporation (2003), while studying blog abandonment rates, estimates there will be more than five million hosted blogs by the end of 2003 and that this number could double by the end of 2004. There are blogs

- by (or for) politicians <http://www.tom-watson.co.uk>, <http://blog.johnkerry.com>;
- by individual and collective voices from across the political spectrum <http://andrewsullivan.com>, <http://www.instapundit.com>, <http://www.ariannaonline.com/blog/index.php>;
- by novelists and entertainers <http://www.neilgaiman.com/journal/journal.asp> , <http://margaretcho.com/blog/blog.htm>;
- as well as the community-based blogs and sites maintained by veteran bloggers <http://www.metafilter.com>, <http://www.scripting.com>, <http://www.slashdot.org>.

There are even sites now like Daypop <http://www.daypop.com> and Blogdex <http://blogdex.net> that track and rank the most "popular" blogs. While some blogs have large audiences, the vast majority are personal online diaries with small readerships.

Literature Review

Since the release of hosting services like Blogger and Pitas, numerous articles have been published in newspapers and newsstand magazines about blogs, many of which can be retrieved with a search in Lexis-Nexis

or Academic Search Premier. Most of the articles are general interest pieces that usually include a brief description of blogs and how they evolved, some examples of popular blogs, and a list of suggested resources for readers who want to create their own blogs (Branscum 2001; Ernst 2003; Metz et al. 2003). Some authors have examined it as a social and communication phenomenon, from a scholarly examination of blogging as part of the media ecology, to the unintended consequences when friends, family, and employers stumble across personal blogs (Oravec 2003; St. John 2003). Recently the media have taken an interest in the rise of political Weblogs and warblogs and the role they are playing in political and journalistic discourse (Seipp 2003; Ashbee 2003). The academic community has also taken notice of blogs, as college and university educators explore the potential of blogs in higher education (Glenn 2003; Stiler and Philleo 2003). Applications are also being explored in business and corporate environments, giving rise to the term "k-logs" to identify blogs in this knowledge management context (Bausch, Haughey and Hourihan 2002; Herman 2003). Unfortunately, most of the literature still focuses on blogging basics rather than on practical applications.

Articles written in the library literature about blogs have reflected the general media to some extent, though geared for a more specialized audience. Some take a more technological slant to focus on issues like RSS and blogging options for intranets (Notess 2002; Fichter 2003a). Other articles are general-interest pieces that give basic information about blogs and advocate their use in libraries, though a few librarians have moved beyond this point to explore library applications or offer concrete examples of how libraries are using blogs. Carver (2003) lists several public libraries that are using blogs to publicize news and events, while Fichter (2003b) urges more libraries to use them as a marketing tool. Harder and Reichardt (2003) suggest that academic libraries can develop department or subject specific Weblogs to reach faculty and graduate students with content customized to meet their information needs.

How Librarians and Libraries Are Using Blogs

There are several directories that list librarian and library blogs, including the Open Directory Project (ODP) <http://www.dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Weblogs/> and LibDex <http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html>. It is important to distinguish between librarian and library blogs as there are some distinct

differences. Librarian blogs are owned and managed by librarians, but may have little or no connection to any library organization. There is also a lack of uniformity in terms of audience, purpose, and content. Some of these sites disseminate information about resources for information professionals <http://resourceshelf.blogspot.com>, while others are personal Weblogs with librarian-related content <http://www.lipsticklibrarian.com/blog/>. Excellent examples of librarian blogs include sites by Jenny Levine <http://www.theshiftedlibrarian.com>, Blake Carver <http://www.lisnews.com/~Blake/journal/> and Steven M. Cohen <http://www.librarystuff.net>.

A library blog, however, is managed by one or more librarians within the organization. It has some kind of presence on the library Web site (or is at least linked to it), and the librarians use it to deliver news and information relevant to patrons at that library instead of a larger community of librarians and information professionals. The ODP has created a separate list of these organization library blogs to distinguish them from the librarian sites <http://www.dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Weblogs/Organizational_Weblogs/>. Most of the library blogs have been created by public libraries like Redwood City Public Library <http://www.rcpl.info/services/liblog.html>, but some academic libraries, including the University of Alberta <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/mt/blog/libnews/> and the University of Baltimore Law Library <http://ubaltlawlibrary.blogspot.com> are also using blogs to deliver news to patrons. Another growing list of library blogs, this one divided by library type, is also available <http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/index.shtml?links.html>.

BLOGGING AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Georgia State's first two library blogs, "News and Events" and "Science News," evolved from conversations between the authors, who folded their independent initiatives into a single project (Goans and Vogel 2003). The Web development librarian wanted to automate the library-wide general news Web page as part of a larger goal to move the library's Web content from static HTML pages to database-driven pages. One of the science liaison librarians wanted to develop a blog to deliver library news relevant to the faculty and students within the university's science departments. It was also suggested that this might be the first of a series of subject-specific blogs that could be accessed from

the library-wide news page but independently maintained by smaller groups of librarians.

The authors looked at other blogs to identify features they wanted to incorporate into the two library blogs, considering the needs of both the librarians who would be managing them and the patrons who would be using them. Next, they considered what technical and personnel resources were available to support this project. This collaboration between technology and public services was vital, because both perspectives were needed if the most appropriate blogging solution was to be selected.

The librarians had three options, each with advantages and drawbacks: to use a remote blog-hosting service, to download and modify third-party software to develop and manage their blogs, or to build the blog entirely in-house. They selected the third option, building it in-house, because it would give them complete control over design and functionality (Goans and Vogel 2003). While this was the optimal choice for the Georgia State University Library, it is also the one that demands the most time and technical expertise to set up and maintain. This would not be the best choice for some libraries. These organizations may want to consider remote hosting services and third-party blogging software instead. In selecting which approach to take, reference and public services librarians interested in blogging are strongly urged to consult with their organization's Web and systems librarians.

Beginning with the science liaison's proposed patron interface for Science News, the Web development librarian built the two blogs in December 2002. They tested them over the next few months and made improvements as needed. With the assistance of the recently hired Web programmer, the librarians explored new features and enhancements. Some changes were incorporated immediately while others were put on hold for further discussion. Active blogging on Science News began in July 2003.

SCIENCE NEWS: THE BLOG

Administrative (Blogger) Interface

The science liaisons manage the blog using the administrative interface. Here they can add new entries, edit and update the previously posted entries, and customize areas of the interface that include any descriptive text like the blog tagline (see Figure 1).

To post a new blog entry, the librarian selects "Add" to bring up the Web form (see Figure 2). A WYSIWYG editor is used for composing

FIGURE 1. The Science News blog administrative interface used by the science liaison librarians to manage the blog content as well as customize the descriptive text. The science liaisons, Web development librarian and Web programmer are the only ones who can access this page.

the entries, but even without this editor the text could still be formatted into lists and paragraphs using basic HTML tags. Hyperlinks are used to direct visitors to related online resources, but the links to the licensed resources are manually modified to ensure that only Georgia State University patrons have remote access to the databases and electronic journals while Science News remains publicly available.

A subject category is assigned to each entry from the choices in the drop-down menu. The Web development librarian will add to this list as new categories are suggested. The librarian can manipulate the order in which the displayed entries are arranged through backdating or resetting the time stamps. An entry can be suppressed if it is not yet ready for public viewing, or it can be set as an alert, which overrides the reverse chronological order and puts it at the top of the patron view. Once an entry has been posted, it can be retrieved at any time and updated quickly.

FIGURE 2. The "Add an Entry" form for posting new entries to Science News, as well as editing previous entries.

Patron (Visitor) Interface

The Science News patron interface <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/index.asp?typeID=56> was designed with "standard" blog features in mind (see Figure 3).

Each entry has a title, content composed of text and hyperlinks, a subject category, a time stamp with the contributing librarian's name, and a permalink. Permalinks are the permanent URLs assigned to each posted entry, and a librarian can use them in e-mails or even elsewhere in the blog to direct patrons back to particular entries. Only the most recent entries appear on the main page, so it is important for patrons to have easy and flexible access to the archive. Visitors can browse the archive by

FIGURE 3. The Science News blog as viewed by patrons.

month or by subject category, or they can search the entire blog by keyword. Links to additional information about Science News and about blogs in general have also been added. An RSS feed, indicated by the 'XML' button, is available for users employing desktop or Web-based news readers (sometimes called aggregators).

Since active blogging began in July 2003, more than 200 items have been posted to Science News. Here are some examples, by category:

- Library News: daily updates on the science collection's move from one library building to the other; announcements about SFX; alerts when library resources will be temporarily unavailable
- Books: notices when new multi-volume reference works are available; recent monograph acquisitions for popular subjects like evolution and bioinformatics
- Databases: announcements about new databases; notices about significant updates to current databases; information about database-related resources like PubMed current awareness tools and SciFinder guides
- Instructional: news about new class and subject guides; announcements about drop-in instruction sessions
- Electronic Journals: announcements about new and added online access to journals, including backfile archives; notices about updates to collections like Wiley InterScience interface and IEEE Explore; announcements about resources that are no longer available like the ScienceDirect transactional allowances
- In the News: articles on topics of interest, including textbook pricing, open access publishing, serials pricing issues; inaugural issue of *PLoS Biology*; Nobel Prize winners; SARS information resources; profiles of scientists in the news
- Faculty: periodic listings of new articles authored or co-authored by University faculty; reminders to faculty about placing materials on reserve and about requesting library instruction sessions for classes and lab groups

BLOG MARKETING

Regardless of the type of blogging option a library selects, marketing it is essential. With Science News up and running, the next step was to get the word out to the science faculty and students. As with any new resource or service for these patrons, the science liaisons need to market and publicize it. The added challenge here is that the new service is based on Web technology unfamiliar to many patrons, so the librarians need to de-emphasize the "gee-whiz" factor of the delivery system itself and focus instead on demonstrating the tangible benefits of that delivery system. The fact that it is a blog will not inspire patrons to use Science News, but they will use if it offers them relevant library news in a timelier manner.

E-Mail

One assumption that must be dispelled early in any library blogging project is that it can and will replace the need for e-mailing faculty and other groups. For crucial messages that must be sent to every faculty member, e-mail is still the most efficient method of communication. But the science liaisons also use it to send periodic "Science News from the Library" announcements that include a few headlines for entries posted during that time period. These alerts will keep the faculty informed about Science News and hopefully remind them to check it periodically for updates, while still keeping the number of e-mail messages sent relatively low. Permalinks to individual blog entries can be included in e-mail correspondence to direct patrons to news of particular interest. The Science News URL is also included in a signature file attached to outgoing messages.

Word of Mouth

Each face-to-face interaction with students and faculty is an opportunity to promote Science News. Instead of merely describing it in the text of an e-mail and hoping that someone will look at it, the science liaison can use a nearby computer to show patrons the kinds of information being posted. These demonstrations can be done in library instruction sessions for classes and lab groups, in student and faculty orientations, and in one-on-one patron consultations.

Linking

Linking to Science News from other, heavily trafficked Web pages has been another important way to attract patrons. It is already linked from News and Events, the blog for general library news <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/>. Many of the two science liaisons' Web pages, including their home pages, class/subject guides and some of their journal lists, have a distinctive "Science News" logo that functions as a hyperlink to the blog.

Marketing Beyond the Organization

Some efforts to publicize Science News have focused on avenues outside the immediate Georgia State community, to increase awareness

among librarians elsewhere who are considering developing their own blogs. The authors submitted the Science News link to Daypop and Blogdex, as recommended by Bausch, Haughey and Hourihan (2002). It was also added to several library-specific blog listings, including the Open Directory Project's list of library organization Weblogs. All of these sites offer a feature for librarians to submit blog links for inclusion.

Do You Call It a 'Blog' or a 'Weblog'?

In the early stages of publicizing Science News, there were concerns that the jargon of blogs and Weblogs would be an ongoing marketing obstacle. Although blogs and blogging have received considerable media coverage, it would just be technobabble to many patrons, which has been confirmed in at least one recent study (Whelan 2003). The danger is that this unfamiliarity might discourage patrons from looking at Science News because the question of what a blog is will become more important than what it delivers. One option was to eliminate all mention of blogs and Weblogs from the library's Web pages entirely, but this was rejected because these words do have meaning to those patrons who know about blogs.

After several discussions with the library's public relations specialist and the new science liaison librarian who joined the library in 2003, the librarians decided to de-emphasize the jargon at the top level, while simultaneously offering more information to those patrons who do want to learn more about blogs. Instead of "Science Newsblog" or "Science News Blog," it would just be "Science News," with the tagline "A library Weblog for the GSU Science faculty and students" so visitors know the Web site's intended audience. A tagline should state the blog's purpose (Bausch, Haughey and Hourihan 2003), and here it has been expanded into an "About This Blog" section that lists examples of the kinds of news that readers will find. Another simple improvement was to create a redirect URL for public distribution <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/science/> that would be more user-friendly and easier to market than the actual URL <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/index.asp?typeID=56>. If visitors do want to learn more about blogs, there is also a "Tell Me More About Blogs" page with more detailed information about Science News, the contributing librarians, and why this format has been selected.

MAINTAINING THE BLOG

Regardless of how actively a blog is marketed, its true value will ultimately be judged by the quality and quantity of the content being delivered. Along with making patrons aware of Science News, the librarians are making every effort to ensure that users find it a valuable resource and worth future visits.

Posting and More Posting

Readers will not return if there is no new content. This may be easier to accept in principle than to put into practice, given the high abandonment rate of hosted blogs (Perseus 2003), but regular and frequent posting is a standard rule. When the Georgia State librarians were considering the advantages of moving to a blog format for news delivery, they also took into account that some time would be required to maintain Science News as well as market it. Any advantages to using a blog as a news delivery tool are meaningless if the librarians are not committed to adding content on a regular basis. Publishing frequency on Science News has varied from several times a week to several times a day, and concerns that there would not be enough content have proved groundless.

Establish Credibility

As blog contributors, the librarians must consider credibility and authority just as they would when creating any other Web pages for their patrons. Internet resources are not suggested or recommended without first being reviewed. Although blogs are more informal by nature, writing mechanics like grammar and spelling are not ignored. To minimize the occurrence of broken links, the librarians test the links in new postings, and there are plans in the future to implement automated link-checking software. If the link will only be available for a limited time, like a *New York Times* article that is freely available for a week, then alternative sources, such as Lexis-Nexis, to access that information are also suggested.

To Delete or Not to Delete?

This is another issue that has arisen for the librarians involved in the project. Blog entries can be deleted as easily as they can be updated, but

serious questions have developed as to whether or not they should be deleted. For example, that blog entry directing readers to the *New York Times* article could simply be deleted later if no alternate resource were available. The suppression option that the librarian-bloggers can use on entries not ready for public viewing could also be used, effectively deleting it from the public view. But deleting or suppressing entries could create a ripple effect that would have internal and external ramifications for the blog.

- The database integrity may be affected because of cross-linking between the internal library blogs.
- Patrons may have bookmarked a permalink, which becomes a broken link if the blog entry is deleted or suppressed. Is there an inherent conflict between creating a permanent URL for each entry, while at the same time being able to delete any entry with just a click of a button?

In July 2003, *Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology* (a journal the library does not subscribe to) offered month-long free access to several articles on calcium research. This information, along with a hyperlink to the articles, was posted to Science News in July, and then suppressed at the beginning of August when the free access was no longer available. Concerned about the possible consequences of rendering these entries unavailable to patrons, the librarians decided on a practice of "edit" rather than "delete." The *Nature Reviews MCB* entry was unsuppressed and edited to remove the hyperlinks and to replace instead with more complete article citations so a patron would at least have that information if they wanted to obtain the articles. Editing a blog entry will always be preferable to deleting or suppressing it, even if that entry refers to a resource like a Web site that is no longer available. It is better to update the entry accordingly than remove it altogether.

One Blog or Six Blogs?

Another ongoing challenge for the science liaisons has been balancing content so that relevant information is distributed to students and faculty in all six science departments. Again, one of the advantages of this format is that multiple contributors can market and manage a single blog to multiple groups of patrons. But a blog targeted to multiple departments must serve the needs of all those departments without neglecting any of them. While many of the posted entries would be of potential interest to the entire science community, the more subject-spe-

cific news items have been primarily biology and chemistry-related because these are the departments of the science liaison who worked with the Web development librarian to create Science News. These content inequities should be resolved as the new science liaison moves into her role as blog co-contributor and can focus on the informational needs of her departments.
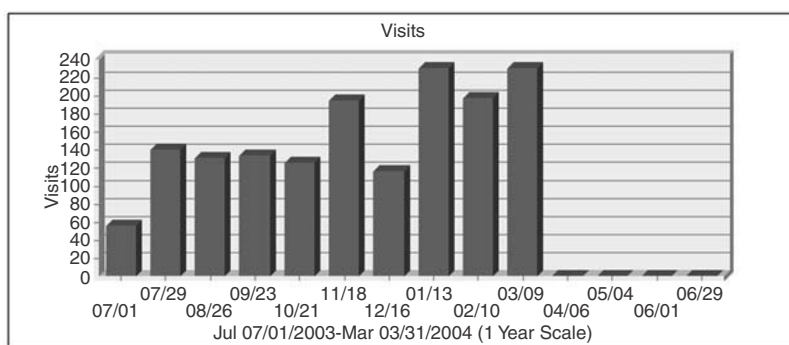
Statistics

In early discussions with librarians at other institutions, the question of statistics came up a number of times. For Science News, active blogging and marketing began in July 2003. To assess initial public use of the blog, Web traffic statistics for a nine-month period (July 2003 through March 2004) were examined. The library utilizes WebTrends software to analyze and create reports from the Web server log files.

To better understand how patrons are using Science News, several steps were taken to ensure greater accuracy of the numbers being reported by WebTrends. The following conditions were filtered out of the usage statistics:

- The IP addresses of the computers used at the desks of the two science liaisons, the Web development librarian and the Web programmer. This filter keeps daily activity by the blogging librarians and developers out of the report, whether they are working on the blogs or reading them from their office computers.
- The unique cookie value of the two science liaisons, the Web development librarian and the Web programmer that is set when any of them log into another computer to work on the blog. This filter ensures that the report does not show blogging maintenance activity from any computer.
- Web spiders and bots, so that the numbers using Science News represent people and not machines.

The report shows that during the nine-month period, Science News was viewed by 1,087 unique visitors (see Figure 4). Activity waxed and waned during this period, but there was a noticeable increase in total activity from July 2003 through March 2004. It increased during July and remained stable until November, when there was a surge in activity. A decrease in readership occurred in December, which the authors speculate was due to the semester break. Then usage increased dramatically in January and has remained steady as of March 2004.

FIGURE 4. Visits to Science News from July 1, 2003 to March 31, 2004, from WebTrends (filtered).

Even though the blog service is still young, the usage statistics from this preliminary report are encouraging enough that the librarians believe this is a service worth continuing. By July 2004, there will be a full year of statistics available for a more granular examination of off-campus versus on-campus users and blog traffic activity. The librarian-bloggers are also keeping a record of when they promote the service and what form that communication took (e-mails, library instruction sessions, etc.). By evaluating this information alongside the usage statistics, the librarians will explore the effectiveness of their marketing activities.

ADDITIONAL SPECIALIZED WEBLOGS: THE NEXT PHASE

When the librarians addressed branding and marketing issues for Science News, it was done with future expansion in mind so that a template (including titles, logos, taglines, and descriptive text) would be in place for the next librarian or group of librarians interested in blogging. In October 2003, the library launched its second specialized blog, this one for Georgia State University's new Institute of Public Health <http://www. library.gsu.edu/news/publichealth/>. Well-received by the Institute's faculty, the Public Health blog is also linked from their home page. A third blog was set up in December 2003 as the news portal for the library's scholarly communications Web site <http://www.library.gsu. edu/news/scholarlycomm/>.

More blogs went live in 2004. In January the social sciences liaisons began their own blog so they could publicize information and resources

for their patrons <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/ssnews/>. With five librarians involved, there was some initial discussion as to whether there should be one blog or several. They have opted to make this a joint venture for now, with plans to review the service in the next few months to see if the collaboration is working. Two more blogs followed, moving from the testing phase to public viewing. One is for Government Information and Maps <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/gov/>, and the other is for the library at the University's extension campus <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/alpharetta/>. Links to these blogs and their associated RSS feeds are available on the main blog <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/>.

CONCLUSION

The necessity of keeping library patrons aware of services and resources has not diminished. In fact, it is even more urgent as the explosion of online content and services has made it more difficult for patrons to keep up with new Internet resources and changes to databases and electronic journals. Implementing Science News as a blog instead of a newsletter has shifted the focus from time-consuming layout and production issues to rapid dissemination of relevant, quality news and information. Science News can be updated quickly, easily, and as frequently as needed, while patrons can read it whenever they choose. The science liaison librarians will continue to maintain the blog while aggressively promoting the value of this service to the Georgia State University science community. The real challenges in making Science News (as well as the other library blogs) will involve marketing and maintenance, getting patrons to visit, and offering the valuable content that will bring them back.

As demonstrated at this library, blogs can support the goals of the organization while simultaneously meeting the specific objectives of librarians. Libraries can use blogs to meet general marketing, outreach and technology initiatives. At the same time librarians can use blogs along with other tools like e-mail to keep patrons continually aware of the services and resources available to assist them in meeting their own research and educational objectives.
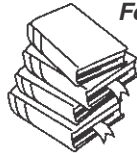
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