Are Libraries utilising the full potential of Weblogs?

The blog experience in New Zealand and Australia

by

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Abstract

Weblogs (widely known as blogs) are widely promoted as a potentially useful tool of promotion and information dissemination for libraries. They are also advocated as an easy way for libraries to get involved in Web 2.0 applications. As a result, in the past year alone, the number of weblogs established in New Zealand and Australian libraries has grown substantially but little was known about how library blogs were being used or whether they were being used successfully. This study aimed to discover how blogs were being used in New Zealand and Australia and whether they were being utilised to their full potential. Content analysis of 73 blogs was carried out in combination with a survey of 46 people involved with library blogs and five interviews. The results indicate that blogs are being used for a variety of reasons and differing purposes recommended in the literature. Most blogs are being updated regularly and are regarded as successful for disseminating information in a timely manner. The majority of blogs provide links to useful information within the blog posts which readers can also access at a later time through archives. Few library blogs, however, provided categories or a search function to make this access easier. It appears the conversational aspect of the blog is not being realised. Comments are still rare. The potential for marketing and promotion of library resources through the blog and of the blog itself does not appear to be fully utilised in most cases. Nevertheless, library bloggers enjoy the medium and feel it is worthwhile continuing with the development and establishment of blogs.   Blog numbers are growing rapidly, therefore many blogs are still in their infancy and have not yet utilised the full potential of this interactive medium.

Keywords

Weblogs, blogs, bloggers, libraries, Web 2.0

Introduction

A weblog, or blog, is a Web application which has been popular for over a decade and particularly since 2001 when blog-hosting software became easier to use. It is a webpage containing brief entries arranged in chronological order with the latest entry at the top of the page. Blogs were first used as a personal online journal but have increasingly been used by corporations and organisations because of the ease with which timely information can be disseminated to both staff and clients. Hyperlinks within the blog provide an opportunity for readers to explore other websites or web pages which are relevant to the subject of the blog. The ability to comment (if this blog function is enabled) allows readers to interact with the organisation's blog authors.

Businesses have appreciated the benefits of blogs and have used them to their advantage as a powerful marketing and promotional tool and discovered a new way of building relationships with their customers. The blog is an ideal tool for sharing information in a timely and informal manner and is therefore a "natural for librarians" (Hane, 2001). Blogs can be used, for example, to direct library users to little known library collections, provide an archive of topical information, or advertise library events. The potential is also there to reach out to library users and remind them of the library's resources and services in an age of instant online information via search engines. As an interactive Web 2.0 application, the blog makes it possible to have a closer relationship with the online library user through conversations and dialogue, allowing the library to receive feedback about library user needs and subsequently cater to them.

The number of blogs in libraries in Australia, and in New Zealand particularly, has grown considerably within the past year alone. Many of these blogs have been

established as a result of recent conferences and workshops about Web 2.0 technologies.   There has been some research on library blogs in the northern hemisphere where blogs have been established for some years, but blog use in New Zealand and Australia is comparatively new and unexplored.   This research study aims to fill in that gap by exploring how these new blogs are being used through quantitative and qualitative analysis, and to discover if the full interactive potential of the weblog, so often acclaimed in the literature, is being used.

Literature Review

Up until recently most of the literature on library weblogs was general overviews or advice on how to set up a weblog to take advantage of this relatively new medium of communication which is easy to use. However, there was little follow-up research to discover if libraries had followed this advice and how blogs were being used. This finding is also commented on within the literature (Clyde, 2004c). Since 2004 there have been many more articles and books written about library blogs including research and conference papers, much of it incorporated into literature about Web 2.0 or Library 2.0.

Despite all the literature expanding on potential benefits of using weblogs in libraries, authors noted that few libraries appeared to be using them (Goans & Vogel, 2005; Winship, 2004; Clyde, 2004a). Ingle's study (2006) found that numbers have definitely increased since then. Earlier blogs may also have been difficult to find. Clyde (2004a) and Bar-Ilan (2004) found only 50 blogs linked to organisations. There is still no single source for searching for library weblogs. Clyde used three specialist directories in 2003, after Technorati, a major weblog directory, failed to find any library weblogs. Bar-Ilan (2004) found that Technorati listed only 12 of the 256 weblogs she monitored and concluded in her study that the challenge is to increase awareness of existing library weblogs. Potential blog readers, however, may not use such directories to find a local library blog. Clyde points out that the difficulty in finding library weblogs makes it a problem for libraries wanting to publicise their weblogs. This appears to indicate that there is little visible online presence and, as a potential marketing tool, the library weblog already has significant obstacles to overcome. If the blog is an attempt to make the library more visible to users of Web 2.0 applications, it appears to be failing. However, Ingle (2006) has since found that there has been an

increase in the number of specifically library blog directories and was able to find 457 active library blogs. Of those, 18 were Australian and New Zealand library blogs. For this research, a greater number had to be found using similar methods. The Ciber Briefing Paper on "Information behaviour of the researcher of the future" (2008) recommends that research libraries "make their sites more highly visible in cyberspace by opening them up to search engines" (p. 31). This can also apply to library blogs, particularly if their purpose is to enable easier access to relevant information. Searching for library blogs for this study will reveal if visibility is a problem.

The review of the literature on the use of weblogs by librarians and information professionals reveals a consensus that there are potential benefits to using weblogs as a valuable tool for both disseminating information and promoting library services to patrons and colleagues. Some authors have outlined ways in which library weblogs are being used (Crawford, 2001; Cohen; Tuining; Skinner). Clyde (2003a) analysed 55 weblogs maintained by libraries in USA, Canada and the United Kingdom. The aims of her study were to identify their purpose, content and the way they were maintained. She also undertook to determine their intended audience and indicators of commitment. She found a common purpose among them - that is to provide news, information, and links to internet resources for library users. Much of the literature, however, does not evaluate whether goals are achieved, or whether blogs meet the needs of library users. Goans and Vogel write of their experiences in setting up a blog at Georgia State University (2005). They set up two blogs and kept statistics to evaluate whether goals had been met and to determine if the blogs were being read. Using software they followed web traffic for a period of nine months. Monitored usage revealed the weblogs were working effectively in disseminating timely information to relevant patrons. This

appeared to be the only study that attempted to evaluate weblog usage. The literature does not appear to cover evaluation of institutional blog usage in general. While this study cannot directly evaluate blog usage, it will examine whether libraries do. It was felt a survey of New Zealand and Australian libraries with blogs might reveal if such evaluation of goals and needs are being carried out.

Stover (2006) is one of few, in the literature about library blogs, to emphasise the need for paying attention to marketing considerations when developing a blog. She advises that libraries first discover what users want and to approach blogging as a means of building relationships with library users, rather than just as a promotional tool. This relates to relationship marketing where the goal of any marketing "should be the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships with customers" (Christopher, 1995). Are blogs in New Zealand and Australian libraries taking advantage of this relationship-building potential? This study will explore this issue.

Stover and Mi & Nesta (2006) refer to the four Ps of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion). Stover refers to the blog itself as the 'product', and equates 'price' to the cost of time to both staff and blog readers. Blogs take a great deal of staff time to maintain, which is an issue discussed in literature about business blogs (Scobe, 2006; Ochman, 2004) but notable by its absence in articles advising blog use in libraries. 'Place' is about virtual access (Mi & Nesta, 2006) and getting the product, the blog itself, "to patrons at the right time and location" providing RSS feeds and links to the blog (Stover, 2006, p. 161). It is important, therefore, that libraries know the intended audience of the blog. Instead of one blog trying to be everything for everyone, a separate blog can be set up for different types of patrons such as faculty or students to

focus on their needs. However, Bell (2005) advises making the content of a blog diverse to appeal to as many different readers and library users as possible rather than having a narrow focus and risk losing disinterested readers. This depends on the purpose of the blog and the informational needs of readers. For this research, content analysis was chosen to reveal if readers could determine the purpose of a blog at a glance and whether it might meet their needs. Stover relates the final P, 'promotion', to promoting the blog itself. The major factor in promotion is communication (Mi & Nesta) which involves participation with the audience (Stover). Mi and Nesta emphasise that marketing is essential now that libraries no longer have a monopoly on information. Focus must shift to user satisfaction, and information provided with the speed and convenience that internet users are used to (Mi & Nesta 2006). A survey of bloggers in New Zealand and Australian libraries would indicate how they are promoting their blogs. Promotion can also refer to the blog as a marketing tool to promote library resources and services. There appears to be little research on blog use as a marketing tool even in business-related literature. Jeffrey Hill, in his unpublished masters thesis (Hill, 2005) also noted the lack of academic work about blogs. His research focused on small business bloggers with regard to their perceptions and expectations concerning their blogs. While there were perceived advantages of using a blog, any benefits as a marketing tool were difficult to measure. The Ciber Briefing Paper (2008) urges libraries to market themselves more aggressively. The library blog could be a useful tool for this if adequately promoted. A survey of library bloggers and interviews were methods chosen to find out if libraries promote their blog, which in turn can be used to market library resources.

In the literature for both library blogs and business blogs, one of the major advantages to establishing a blog for such purposes is said to be two-way communication with customers which create conversations and build community (Farkas, 2007; Kaushik, 2007; Schwartz, 2005; Tuining 2003; Weil, 2006). While there is much potential in blogs for interaction with customers, there is little research to discover whether existing blogs are building communities and relationships. The OCLC report found that college students and the general public had little interest in participating in social networking sites set up by libraries (OCLC, 2007, pp. 5-1 – 5-5). This is not encouraging. Nevertheless, this study will examine whether the potential for conversations is realised. With regard to social interaction, Hill found there was little evidence of conversation taking place within the blog. Clyde (2003a) also found this same lack of evidence concerning interactivity with library blog readers. Her findings indicated that few library weblogs allowed for interaction and there was little evidence that the facilities were used. Less than half provided an RSS (Rich Site Summary) feed, and only half had been updated within the previous week and few had been updated regularly. More recent research has found this still to be the case (Ingle, 2006). Content analysis of specifically New Zealand and Australian library blogs a year later was selected to reveal any change. Clyde was most surprised at what was missing from the weblogs. Many library weblogs had no link back to the main library, so could not effectively be used for promoting the library. Only a quarter provided interactive facilities designed to encourage user involvement, so it could not be determined who, if anyone, read the blog. For those who allowed comments only three of the eleven weblogs revealed evidence that people were posting comments. The majority of the weblogs were a one way medium. Bar-Ilan noted in her 2004 study that the majority of weblog readers do not comment. This point is also noted in a genre analysis of weblogs

(Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004). Scoble (2006) warns, however, that comments do not necessarily represent the opinion of the majority of readers. This problem will be explored through content analysis of blogs to reveal any changes to levels of interactivity.

The literature therefore promotes the potential of blog use but also highlights issues such as lack of interactivity, a lack of evaluation, and the need for proper marketing, shortcomings which reflect under-utilisation of the weblog's full potential. These are problems which this study will examine. Of the literature, it appears that only Ingle (2006) included weblogs in Australasia. This study aimed to fill in some of those gaps in information about blog experiences in New Zealand and Australian libraries by the combined methods of content analysis and a survey. Additionally, interviews with bloggers were undertaken to reveal any fears or obstacles regarding blog use, as well as views surrounding interaction with customers. The results of these combined methods should indicate if blogs in New Zealand and Australia are utilising the full potential.

Methodology

A mixed method approach was used for this study to encompass quantative and qualitative methods through content analysis of blogs, an online survey of library bloggers and interviews. It was felt that content analysis in conjunction with survey and interview questions would be a useful method of looking at the blog from a potential reader's point of view. Users' experience of blogs was beyond the scope of this project, but analysis of blog pages might reveal potential problems that may discourage some readers. It might also reveal the library's awareness of the potential of blogs and how that potential is used. A survey of library bloggers was chosen to gain insight into how libraries are using blogs, which can be compared with findings from the content analysis, but also why they use them, their motivations for and experiences of blog use, and whether they feel that blogs are a successful medium of communication. It would also identify whether libraries seek feedback from customers to help improve the blog itself and utilise its full potential. Findings from the survey may indicate perceptions which are at odds with the blog reader's experience. If, for example, libraries think their blogs are easily found, how does this compare to findings from the content analysis? A further interview with some bloggers was chosen to clarify aspects raised in the survey such as the amount of time spent on blogging, bloggers' views on customer feedback and measurement of the blog's effectiveness. Interviews were also selected as a method to gain library bloggers' views of the blog as a tool to build relationships or community. Comparing results from this combined approach would help to gain more understanding of issues surrounding library blog use in New Zealand and Australia.

As with studies by Clyde (2004) and Ingle (2006), a content analysis of library blogs was undertaken after first searching for blogs using a number of directories and search engines. A total of 73 library blogs were found: 40 in New Zealand and 33 in Australia. All blogs found were analysed including inactive or abandoned ones to better reflect the state of library blogging. Blogs were found for secondary and tertiary institutional libraries, public libraries and special libraries, which included national or state libraries. Internal blogs are not generally covered by search engines and were not included in the content analysis.

A survey was set up online at Survey Gizmo (www.surveygizmo.com). An invitation to complete the survey was sent via email to various libraries in Australia and through the New Zealand Libraries emailing list, the NZLibs listserv. Potential participants were directed to an information sheet online which included a hyperlink to the survey itself. A total of 46 participants completed the survey. Internal library blogs were also represented as indicated by the responses of some participants. As internal blogs were not included in the content analysis, any comparison of results would have to take this into account. The information sheet for survey participants also included an invitation to take part in an interview. Seven participants expressed an interest to be interviewed and interview responses from five participants were received via email. Participation was entirely voluntary.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this project and aspects of it which could have been done better.

- Only the researcher collected, coded and analysed results so are subject to error.

- There may have been limited awareness of the survey by public and school

libraries as the survey was not publicised on specialised library listservs.

- The sample of interviewees was very small so their responses may not reflect a majority viewpoint.

- Interviews were carried out by email. While this is a valid method for interviewing, it does eliminate non-verbal clues through body language which can prompt further questioning.

- Academic and school library blogs are updated less frequently at the end of the year when students finish the semester or school term.

- The information sheet for the survey did not clarify that the survey was for New Zealand and Australian blogs. Surprisingly, a response from London was received so, for consistency, the information gathered for that response could not be used.

- There was no comparison between Australian and New Zealand library blogs. Such a comparison could have revealed greater use of potential by more mature blogs in Australia.

Sample

Initially only New Zealand library blogs were searched for in several directories, but this was expanded to include Australian library blogs to give a better sized sample. Directories mentioned in the literature were searched first but most of these contained primarily American library weblogs. Searching in, for example, *Libdex* and *Dmoz* produced no library blogs in Australasia. This was the case also in searching *Liszen* and the *Ambient Librarian* wiki. The Library Weblogs list at *Libdex* had not been updated since 2006. The most useful directories were the Blogging Libraries Wiki at *Blogwithoutalibrary*, the LIANZA's ITSIG wiki resource page of *New Zealand library*

bloggers, and the Australian blog directory at *librariesinteract*. None of these directories were comprehensive, however. More general searches were made through search engines at *Google*, *Google blogsearch*, *Yahoo*, *Technorati, Sphere* and *Icerocket*. *Icerocket* produced successful hits due to an advanced search facility of being able to limit the author to *library*. *Technorati*, *Sphere* and *Yahoo* searches did not produce any additional results. Some blogs were found on more than one directory.

When thorough searches of the directories above had been completed, library websites were also searched to look for obvious links to blogs. The library website addresses were found through directories such as the Directory of Australian, New Zealand and Pacific libraries (which had several dead links) and Te Puna. Many libraries listed had no obvious link to a blog, although this does not necessarily mean the library concerned did not have a blog. Three more library blogs were found through the blogrolls of neighbouring or similar library weblogs. As a result, a total of 73 New Zealand and Australian blogs from tertiary, public, school and special libraries were found for content analysis. Some institutions produce more than one blog. This is especially the case for academic libraries who wish to have specific blogs for specific purposes or subjects. Of 40 New Zealand library blogs analysed, seven libraries produced 21 of those blogs. Of 33 Australian library blogs analysed, two libraries had at least two blogs. In many cases these blogs are created and written by different staff members for different purposes, so they had a different look and feel to the others and seemed suitable for separate analysis. The number of library weblogs is constantly growing, so this analysis is by no means comprehensive, but covers the majority of easily found weblogs in New Zealand and Australia.

New Zealand and Australian blogs were found through the following directories and search engines:

Table 1 Directories

Found through	Total	%	Academic		Public		School		Special	
			NZ	AUS	NZ	AUS	NZ	AUS	NZ	AUS
Blogging Libraries Wiki	10	14.08	1	1	3	4	1	-	-	-
LIANZA ITSIG Wiki	11	15.49	3	-	6	-	-	-	2	-
Librariesinteract	8	11.27	-	6	-	1	-	-	-	1
Icerocket	13	18.31	2	3	1	2	2	2	1	-
Google Blog Search	4	5.63	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
Google	13	15.49	-	8	1	3	1	-	-	-
Blogrolls	4	5.63	-	1	1	-	2	-	-	-
Library web site	10	14.08	4	1	5	-	-	-	-	-
Total	73	100.00	11	20	18	11	7	2	3	1

There may be more than the number listed found at each directory. The number reflects the blogs that were not already found through another directory. "School" in this case refers to primary and secondary educational institutions and not tertiary.

The sample for the survey, on the other hand, was entirely dependent on responses received. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent via email through the New Zealand Libraries mailing list and to Australian libraries found to have blogs through the directories above. Libraries not subscribed to the New Zealand library mailing list may not have been aware of the survey. The survey may therefore be under-represented by public and school libraries.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was undertaken of blogs found through searching directories and websites online by the researcher and may not include all New Zealand and Australian library blogs. Internal blogs were not included as these are generally not covered by

search engines. The high relatively high percentage of blogs (20%) found only through websites or other blogs indicates that there are still a number of library blogs with low online presence.

The blogs were visited between 22 October and 8 December. For each blog various elements and features present were recorded and identified.   These details were recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

The following were noted for each weblog:

- Library name

- Type of library

- Main content

- Start date of blog

- Frequency of update

- Last update

- Blog provider

Library name

In some cases it was not obvious from the blog title or URL that the blog was a library blog. 20% of the blog addresses did not mention the word "library" or the shortened "lib" and 10% of blog titles did not include the word "library" or the name of the library.
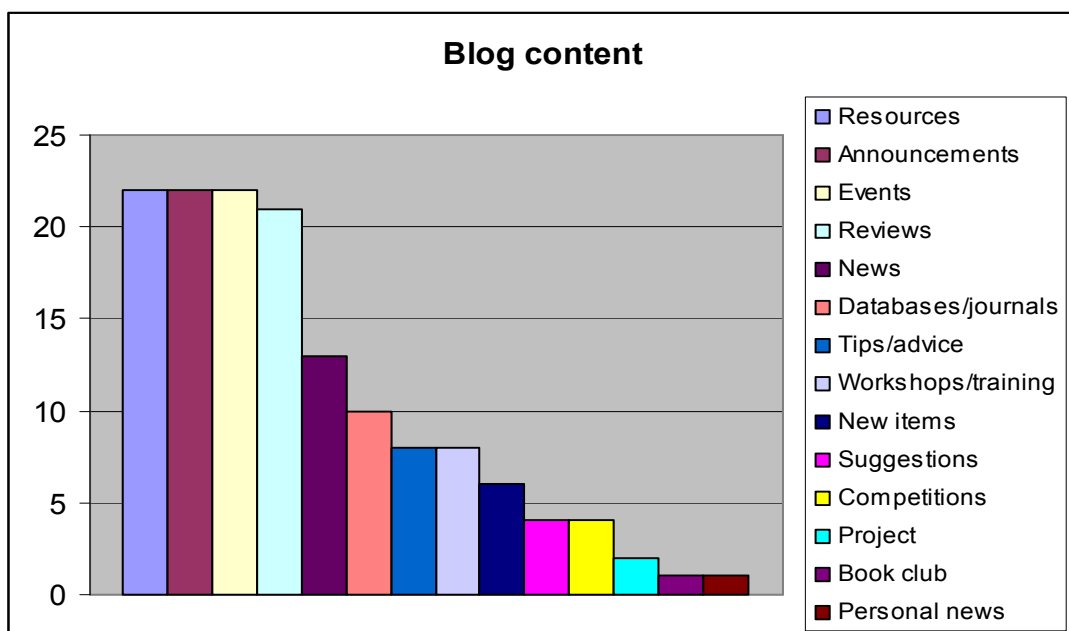
Type of library

The blogs found were fairly evenly spread between academic and public libraries, followed by a small number of school and special libraries.
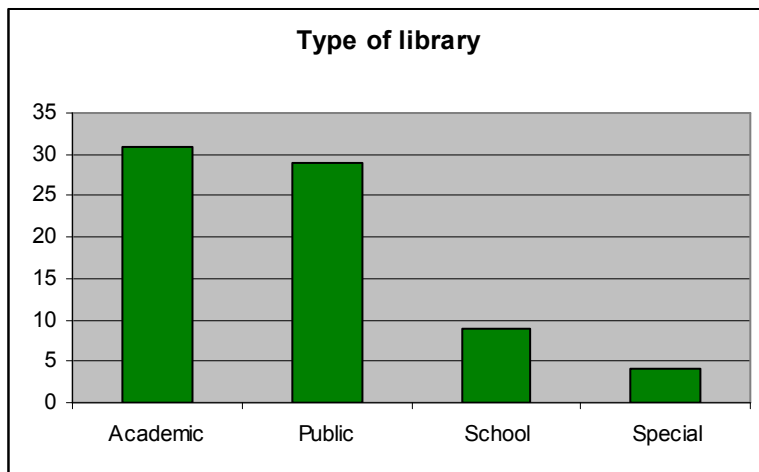
Figure 1 Type of Library

Content

The content of the blog was estimated by the subject matter of the posts, and the main categories if any, from the last twelve months of blog posts or less if the blog had been established less than a year ago. The researcher acknowledges that this is a rather inaccurate way of judging content but a potential blog reader would do the same. As one would expect, the content consisted primarily of information about, and links to, resources, announcements about the library and library events. Blogs often had mixed content.

Figure 2 Blog Content

Ingle (2006) found similar proportions of blog use, with news and information, promotion of events, and links to resources in the top five.

Start date of blog
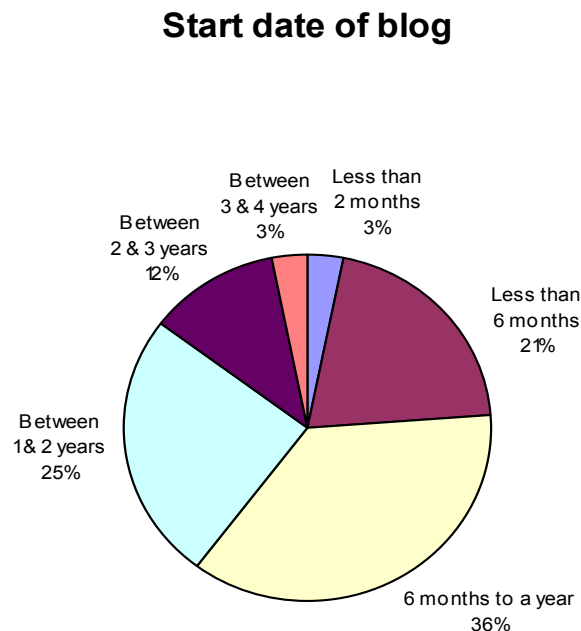
Start date of blog

Figure 3 Start date of blog

60% of library blogs found had been in existence for less than a year. This clearly shows that blog numbers have grown substantially and that library blogs are a new and growing phenomenon particularly in New Zealand.

Frequency of update

The frequency of update was estimated by finding an average. The total number of blog posts over the past year was divided by 12 months or by the number of months the blog had been in existence.

Frequency of update
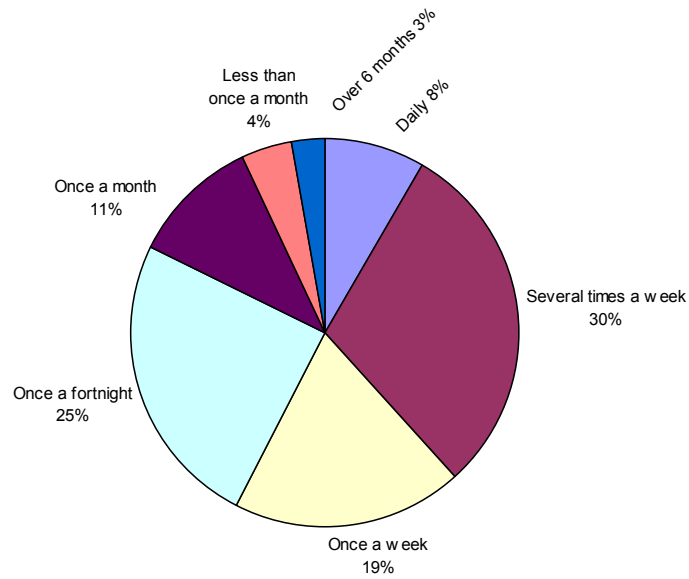
Figure 4 Frequency of update

82% of blogs were updated at least once a fortnight or more regularly. 15% of blogs were updated at least once a month. Seven percent were updated less than once a month or had not been updated in over six months. These blogs can effectively be regarded as inactive or abandoned.

Last update

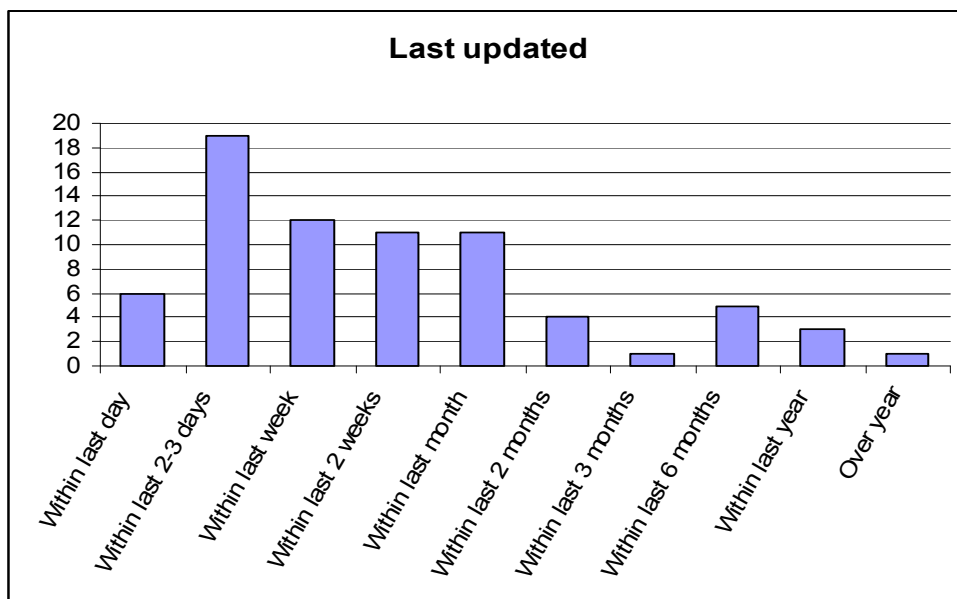**Figure 5 Last updated**

Only eight percent of blogs had been updated within the last day but a quarter had been updated within the last two to three days. Half (50%) had been updated within the previous week. This compares with Clyde's study in 2003 who found that just over half 54.5% of the blogs she analysed had been updated within the previous week while Ingle found that 53.59% had been updated within the previous week. In total 81% had been updated within a month. This is up from both Clyde and Ingle's studies in 2003 and 2006 (68.4% and 68.27% respectively). 19% had not been updated for more than a month. This compares with Clyde (2004a) who found that a quarter had not been updated for more than a month. Clyde believes that updating once a week is too little and that ideally blogs should be updated daily. This view is not shared by others in the literature who believe only that a blog should be updated regularly and consistently dependant on the type of blog (Stover, 2006; Weil, 2006). Only 12% of blogs had not been updated for more than 3 months and these can effectively be considered as abandoned.

Blog provider

Blogger still seems to be the main blog host for library blogs.   It could not be determined what software was used for those blogs which appeared to be hosted on the library's institutional website. Blogger and Wordpress are similar in ease of use and default features.
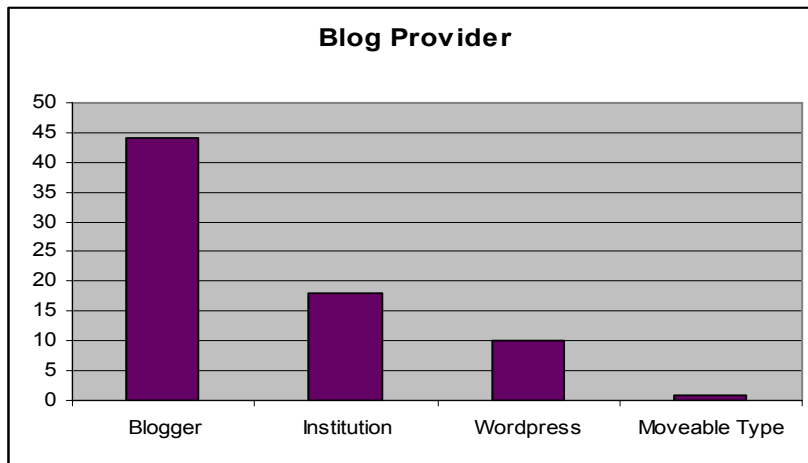
Figure 6 Blog provider

Blog features

In addition, the blogs were examined for the presence or absence of the following features:

- Blog intent

- Link to the library

- Link to the library catalogue

- Links to other information either within the blog posts or in the blogroll

- Whether comments were facilitated or received

- Whether RSS feeds or email updates were provided

- Blog post archives

- Blog post categories or labels

- Counter as an indication of monitoring by the library

- Any additional interactive Web 2.0 features

- Search facility

- Conformity to library website in either colouring or logo

- Contact information

- Blog easily found from the website

Table 2 Blog features

Feature	Academic (% of acad)	Public (% of pub)	School (% of sch)	Special (% of sp)	Total	% of total blogs
Blog intent stated	19 (63.3%)	14 (48.3%)	3 (33.3%)	3 (75%)	39	53.4
Link to library	24 (80%)	25 (89.3%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (25%)	52	71.2
Link to catalogue	8 (28.8%)	20 (69%)	1 (12.5%)	-	29	39.7
Links to other information	30 (96.7%)	23 (82.1%)	4 (44.4%)	3 (75%)	60	82.2
Comments facilitated	29 (93.5%)	27 (93.1%)	6 (66.7%)	4 (100%)	66	90.4
Comments received	13 (43.3%)	12 (41.4%)	2 (22.2%)	2 (50%)	29	39.7
RSS/Atom feed provided	25 (83.3%)	26 (89.6%)	6 (66.7%)	4 (100%)	61	83.6
Email subscription	2 (6.7%)	1 (3.6%)	1 (11.1%)	-	4	5.5
Archived posts	30 (96.7%)	28 (96.5%)	8 (88.9%)	4 (100%)	70	95.9
Tags or categories	16 (51.6%)	17 (60.7%)	4 (44.4%)	2 (50%)	39	53.4
Counter	7 (23.3%)	4 (14.3%)	2 (22.2%)	-	13	18.1
Institutional logo or colouring	24 (80%)	17 (60.7%)	1 (11.1%)	-	42	57.5
Contact	15 (48.4%)	7 (25%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (25%)	24	32.9
Blog link easily found from library website	13* (43.3%)	17* (60.7%)	4 (44.4%)	-	34	46.6

* 1 of which is not an obvious blog link but called *News*

Blog intent

The library blog's purpose or intent should be stated on a blog to help the reader determine if the blog will be useful.   Just over half (53.4%) the blogs analysed stated the intent or purpose of the blog. This figure has not increased much from Clyde's 49.1% in 2003 (Clyde, 2004c).

Link to the library

Clyde (2004a) found in 2003 that only half of the blogs she analysed had a link to the library's website or home page. Ingle (2006) found that 60.39% of blogs linked

back to the library. This figure has improved to 71.2% of blogs, found by this researcher, which had a link to the library.   However, this means that over a quarter (28.8%) of library blogs do not have a link back to the home page.

Link to the library catalogue

Even fewer libraries (39.7%) provided a link to the library catalogue. 60.3% of public library blogs did not provide a link to the library catalogue. However, of those, 9.6% provided a link to databases instead. While the blog's content may not need a link to the library catalogue it would still be useful to the library user.

Links to other information either within the blog posts or in the blogroll

One of the blog's characteristics, and a feature that is highly recommended in the literature, is the use of links, as links help with search engine optimisation (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006). 82.2% of library blogs analysed had links to resources and websites within the blog post or in the blogroll in the sidebar. Considering that the blog's main purpose in libraries is to help users find information, it is surprising that the figure is not higher.

Comments

The majority of blogs found enabled comments (90.4%). Of those, 39.7% appeared to receive comments. The presence or absence of comments was noted for blogs for a period of one year of posts or for the lifetime of the blog if less than a year old. Comments left by librarian staff were excluded. There seemed to be no clear reason why some blogs received comments and others did not. The blogs whose purpose was to deliver announcements or news tended not to get comments. Comments from

interviewees confirmed this – comments were not expected. Clyde (2004a) believes that a blog updated less than daily would find it "difficult, if not impossible… to maintain any level of user comment or discussion." With this in mind, blog comments were compared with frequency of update. All the blogs that received comments were updated at least once a month. Nearly half (48%) were updated more often than once a fortnight. 19% varied between several posts a week to once a month. The remaining 33% were updated regularly once a fortnight or once a month. It appears then that regular updating rather than daily updating is conducive to comments.

Whether RSS feeds or email updates were provided

   The majority of blogs analysed (83.6%) provided RSS (Rich Site Summary) feeds. This figure is up from Clyde's figure of 45.5%. The major blog hosts now include this feature as a default. The researcher found only one blog, however, which offered instruction on RSS use. For any blog readers not familiar with RSS this feature would not be used and is therefore wasted potential. Some blog readers would prefer to receive emails because it is more familiar. The ability to receive update notifications by email was only offered by 5.5% of blogs.

Blog post archives

   Blog archives are a useful feature for blog readers wanting to check past events or information.   The majority (95.9%) of blogs displayed archives of past posts. This is an improvement on Clyde's finding that only 61.8% of blogs provided archives (2004a). Archives are also now a default feature of major blog hosts.

Blog post categories or tags

Only 53.4% of library blogs analysed had categories or tags. Categories or tags are a particularly useful feature to help blog readers look back on topics that interest them. An archive of posts is not especially useful without categories or a search facility.

Counter as an indication of monitoring by the library

The researcher noted the presence or absence of a website counter as an indication of possible monitoring by the library. Only 18% of library blogs were found to have one, but this does not necessarily mean that the rest of the blogs do not monitor blog usage or website statistics.

Conformity to library website in either colouring or logo

The literature for library blogs and business blogs recommend that blog design should incorporate the institutional website colouring or logo to integrate the blog into the library website. (Fichter, 2003; Goans & Vogel, 2003). A little over half of blogs analysed (57.5%) were found to have similar colouring to the library website or include the institutional logo. This could, in part, be due to the fact that Blogger (the blog host for most library blogs) provides fewer templates and some knowledge of HTML or CSS coding to modify the templates. Wordpress offer more templates which also appear to be easier to modify in order to integrate with the library website.

Contact information

It is surprising that only 32.9% of blogs provided obvious contact details on the blog itself avoiding the blog reader's need to visit the library website to find a contact (if a link was provided). A blog reader could possibly contact staff by leaving a comment

but as survey and interview findings show, most blog readers are reluctant to do so.

Blog easily found from the website

As most potential blog readers and library users are most likely to find a blog from the library website, the researcher looked at the library home pages to see if an obvious link to the blog was found. Only 46.6% of blogs had an obvious link to the blog from the home page. Of those blogs easily found from the home page 18 were from public libraries, 11 from academic libraries and four from school libraries. Some blog links were buried within the website while others couldn't be found at all.

Interactive facilities

Any interactive features on the blog were also noted. Comment facilitation has already been dealt with but is listed. As mentioned above, if categories are not provided, a search facility is useful, but only 16.4% of blogs provided a search box.

Table 3 Interactive facilities

Feature	Number	(%) of total blogs
Comments enabled	66	(90.4)
Search	12	(16.4)
Flickr/Slide	8	(11)
Clustr	6	(8.2)
Podcasts	4	(5.5)
Poll	3	(4.1)
Google/Frappr map	2	(2.7)
Recent posts in sidebar	2	(2.7)
Del.icio.us tags	1	(1.4)
Youtube	1	(1.4)
Meebo	1	(1.4)

Flickr and Slide are photosharing websites that enable users to show slideshows of their photos on their own website. Clustr is a map application which shows the reader where other readers are located. Google and Frappr maps showed the location of the library. Del.icio.us is a website which enables users to tag their bookmarked sites. One

library had a link to a video they had produced which appears on the video site

Youtube. Meebo is a very useful instant messenger application. A MeeboMe widget

installed on a website allows users to chat in real time. Few libraries are taking

advantage of these types of social software. However, more of these interactive features

are likely to appear on blogs as they become more familiar and as younger blogs

mature.

Survey

A total of 46 people completed the survey. The majority of respondents (38) worked in academic and public libraries and the remaining 8 worked in school or special libraries. The participants' roles in the blogs were assigned to broad categories.

Table 4 Role in blog

Responsibility	Number
Content	21
Creation	18
Coordinator/Editor/Moderator	12
Maintenance	10
Administration	7
Manager	2

Some respondents listed more than one responsibility for their role in the weblog. Most respondents were involved in the creation and content or authoring of the blog or blog posts while others had a more administrative or moderating role.

Start date of blog
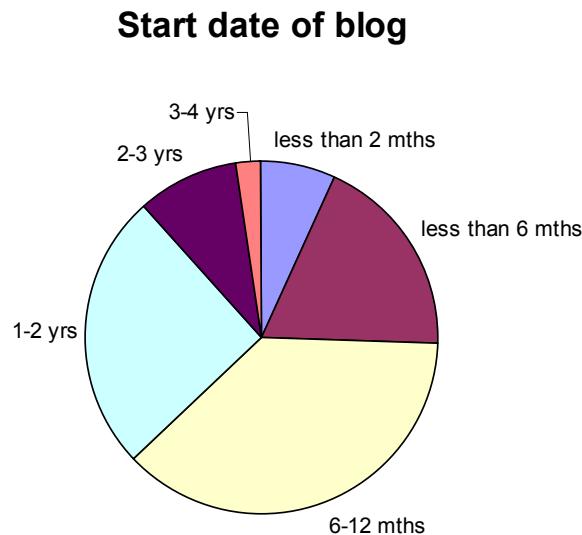
Figure 7 Start date of blog

Results from the survey mirrored those in the content analysis. One quarter of

respondents indicated that the blog had been in existence for over a year but less than 2 years, which was found to be the case in the content analysis. 37% of blog respondents indicated that the blogs had been set up between 6 months and 12 months ago (compared with 36% in the content analysis). A total of 62% of respondents indicated that their blog had been in existence for less than a year (compared with 60% in the content analysis).

Reason for setting up blog

The reasons for setting up a blog can be different to the ultimate purpose of the blog, while for some blogs the reasons for setting up are the same as the purpose of the blog. Initially the blog might be an experiment but may then lead to a core purpose such as providing information or having a better relationship with the library user. The different reasons are detailed below:

Table 5 Reason for setting up blog

Communication with library users	10
Provide or share information	8
Library staff feedback and communication	7
Provide or share news	5
Learn/play/engage with Web/Library 2.0	4
Awareness of resources	3
Experiment	3
More flexible than website	3
Promotion	3
Reach students in a familiar way	3
Provide access to resources	2
Searchable archives	2
Staff suggestion	2
Add interest	1
Add personal face to the library	1
Coincide with newly designed website	1
Enable users to become familiar with the technology	1
Opportunity for user feedback	1

Intended readers

Participants were asked about the intended readers of the blog. Knowing who the

readers are likely to be influences purpose and content.

Table 6 Intended readers

All	20
Library staff	18
Academic staff	12
Students	11
Teens	3
Children	2
Other	
Parents	2
Adult library users	1
Business customers	1
Distant staff	1
Other libraries	1
Visitors to site	1
Web developers	1

Overall purpose of weblog

Participants were asked what the overall purpose of the blog was. A purpose gives

focus to the content. As expected, the majority of participants said the purpose was to

provide information, and share news and events. Internal blogs are evident in the blog

purpose of providing staff information and getting staff feedback.

Table 7 Purpose of blog

Provide information	11
Share news and events	10
Promotion of library resources	8
Links to resources	5
Staff information and feedback	5
Communication with library users/develop a relationship	4
To enthuse and inspire/get students involved and interested	4
To share views and ideas	2
Book reviews	2
To replace newsletter or email updates	2
Experiment	2
User education/providing tips for finding information	2
Publicise new books	1
Online repository	1
To have an online presence	1
Put a human face to the library	1

Expectations

Surprisingly 10 participants said there were no expectations at all while another five said the blog was an experiment or pilot. There were a wide range of expectations with some participants listing more than one. Participants were later asked if expectations were met.

Table 8 Expectations

None	10
Pilot/experiment	5
That there would be interaction	5
Sharing ideas/discourse	3
Easy access/better contact with remote users	2
That it would raise awareness	4
Change perception of library	1
That it would continue to grow	4
That there would be regular posting/updating	4
Make interesting with constantly changing posts	3
Easy updating/timely information	5
Provide searchable archived resources	2
Cover broad range of topics with multiple authors	3
That it might be useful	2
That it would be used	2
Readers but no comments/few comments	2
More comments/opportunity to comment	2
Little use	1
As marketing/promotional tool	4
Staff enjoyment	3
Attract new users/readers to website	2
Practice using blog	1
Didn't understand the question	2

Survey of users before blog established

Only 8.7% of the libraries represented in this survey had surveyed potential users before the weblog was set up. 84.8% had not and 6.5% were unsure. This reflects an experimental approach that many libraries took in setting up a blog.

Ongoing user survey

Just 11% of participants indicated that users are surveyed while 89% do not.   Of those that surveyed users, the information they sought included: basic usage statistics and demographics; the type of magazines library users like to read; library users' information habits and computer use; blog readers' likes and dislikes about the blog; suggestions for blog content; and the usefulness of the blog. Such feedback about the library resources and use of the blog itself would provide valuable information which can be used to improve the service.

Comments

In the content analysis of 73 blogs, 90.4% had facilitated comments and of those only 39.7% appeared to have received comments which were not from staff. In the survey 97.8% of respondents said that comments were facilitated and 67.4% said they received comments. The disparity may be due to inclusion of internal blogs for staff, which may be more active, and to the inclusion of comments from library staff.

Responding to comments

In answer to the survey question "how do you respond to blogs?" 19 participants (41%) said they comment back on the blog. 10 participants (21%) said they respond in a conversational tone. Seven participants (15%) comment back by email where relevant. Three participants (6.5%) use the comment to start a new discussion or blog post. Two participants said they comment back when necessary. One participant each said that they comment back verbally when they see the author of the comment (possibly another staff member); respond promptly and positively; phone; make adjustments to the blog; or don't generally respond to comments.

RSS (Rich Site Summary)

Nearly three quarters (73%) of participants said they provide RSS feeds while 17.8% said they do not. A quarter of participants said they were not sure if RSS feeds were provided and one participant was not familiar with RSS. This compares with 85% of blogs found for the content analysis providing RSS feeds and 15% not providing RSS feeds. RSS feeds are useful for any library user wanting to keep-up-to-date with the blog posts.
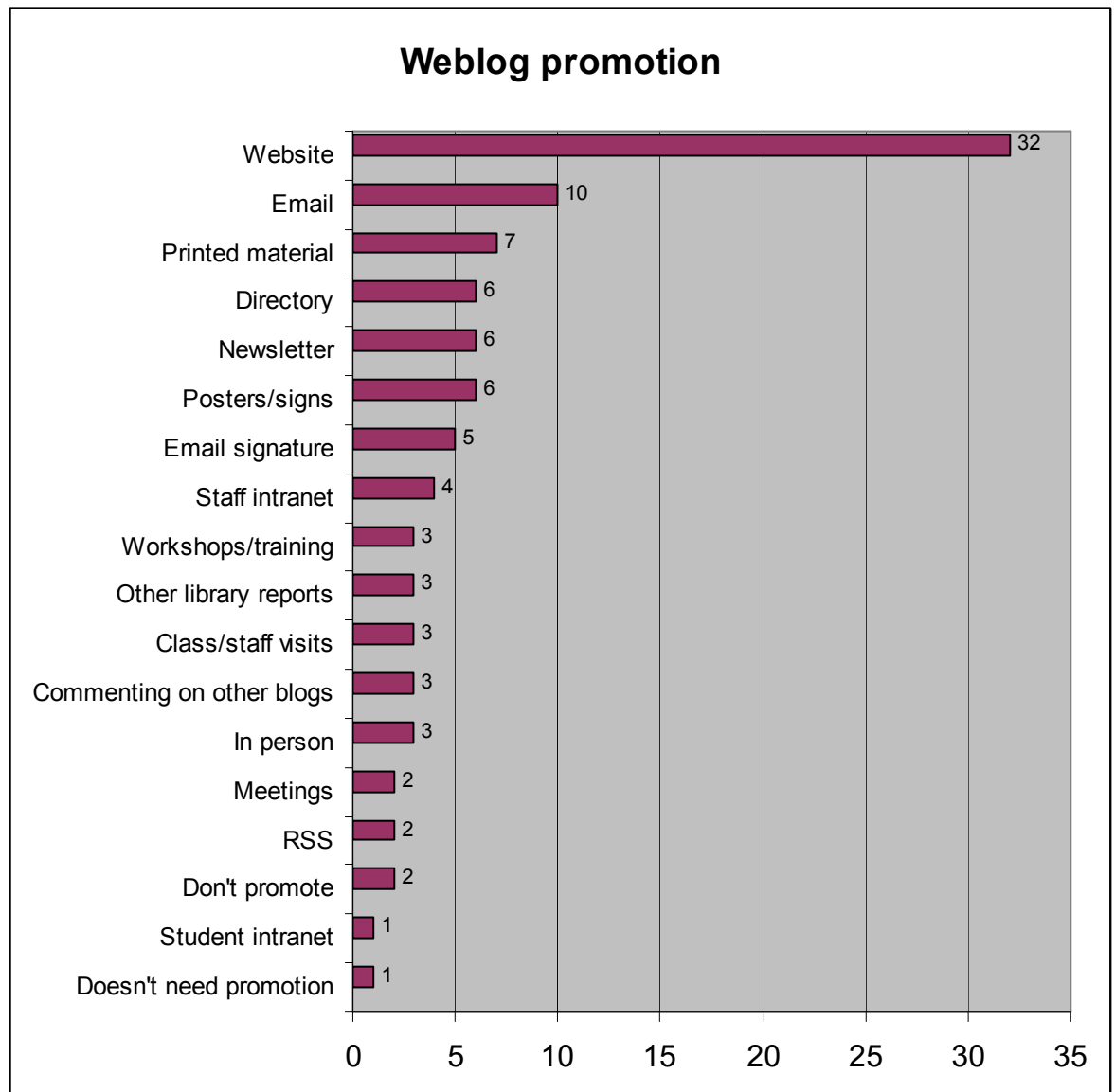
Other feedback

Feedback from blog readers can often come through channels other than comments. Nearly half or 48% of participants said they receive feedback, while 39% said they did not and a further 14% were not sure if any feedback was received. Of those that said they received feedback, most was by word of mouth (44%) while 37% received feedback by email. Two participants said they received feedback through the website feedback form. One participant said they received feedback through surveys, one through a Messenger program used by staff, and one participant said they received feedback from staff but did not specify the medium.

Promotion

Participants were asked how the blog was promoted. The majority of participants (69.7%) indicated that the blog was promoted on the website. Others promoted the blog through email and printed library material and in person through presentations and meetings, for example. Two participants said the blog is not promoted while another said the blog did not need promotion. This comment was from an internal library blogger. The methods of promotion listed conform with recommendations in the

literature (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006).

Weblog promotion

Promotion method	Count
Website	32
Email	10
Printed material	7
Directory	6
Newsletter	6
Posters/signs	6
Email signature	5
Staff intranet	4
Workshops/training	3
Other library reports	3
Class/staff visits	3
Commenting on other blogs	3
In person	3
Meetings	2
RSS	2
Don't promote	2
Student intranet	1
Doesn't need promotion	1

Figure 8 Promotion

While internal library blogs may not need promotion, blogs intended for external library users need more aggressive marketing in order to gain more readers. (Goans and Vogel, 2005; Ochman, 2004). Relying on a link from the website alone is not enough.

Directory

When asked if the blog was listed on a directory nearly a quarter of participants (24%) said yes, 29% said no and nearly half (47%) were not sure. This appears to

indicate that blogs are not specifically listed on directories but are thought they might be present on search engines. Participants who indicated the blog was listed on a directory were then asked on which directories the blogs were listed to better indicate if they were placed there specifically.

Table 9 Blog Directory

Directory	Number
http://theaustralianindex.com/	2
http://librariesinteract.info/	1
http://www.buggerall.com.au/buggerall/	1
Google	2
Google blogsearch	2
Library website	1
Te Puna	1
Technorati	1
"Several" (not specified)	1

It appears that Australian libraries are more pro-active about specifically listing on directories.

Finding the blog

When asked if they thought their blog was easily found, 67.4% of participants said yes, 15.2% said no and 17.4% were unsure. Internal blogs are not intended for general readers so this could account for those that said they are not easily found. Looking more closely at the negative and unsure responses revealed the following.

Table 10 Finding the blog

Type of library	Not easily found	Unsure if easily found	Intended readers
Academic	4		Library staff
	2		Academic and library staff
		2	Students, academic and library staff
Public	1		Library staff
		2	All
School		2	All
Special	1	1	All

This confirms that blogs that were not considered easily found were internal blogs

intended for staff only. This compares with the content analysis which revealed that only 46.6% of the blogs were easily found from the library website.

Updating the blog

One of the supposed drawbacks to maintaining a blog is the amount of staff time spent updating it. Participants were asked how much time they spent on updating per day, per week or per month as relevant. Per day the time spent updating varied from 5 minutes to 2 hours (spread between multiple authors). Time spent is dependant on how many posts were week bloggers were expected to write.

Table 11 Time spent updating the blog

Per day

Time spent	Number	(%)
5-10 minutes	2	15.4
15-30 minutes	3	23.0
30-60 minutes	4	30.8
1 hour	1	7.7
2 hours (spread between multiple authors)	1	7.7
Varies	2	15.4

Per week

Time spent	Number	(%)
2-5 minutes	1	3.7
5-10 minutes	1	3.7
15-30 minutes	3	11.1
30-60 minutes	5	18.5
1 hour	5	18.5
2 hours	3	11.1
1-5 hours	1	3.7
2-3 hours	2	7.4
Less than 3 hours	1	3.7
3-4 hours	2	7.4
3-5 hours	2	7.4
20 hours	1	3.7

Per month

Time spent	Number	(%)
30-60 minutes	1	25
1 hour	1	25
2 hours	1	25
1 week	1	25

77% of participants estimated that one hour or less per day was spent on updating a blog. This does not include the responses from participants who said the amount varies. 67% of participants estimated that less than two hours per week was spent on updating a blog. Time does not seem to be an issue in contrast to some claims in the literature.

Ease or difficulty in updating content

Finding content for updating a blog as well as the time to update a blog can be difficult. The participants were asked how easy or difficult it was to do so, on a scale of 1-5, 1 being easy and 5 being difficult. 2 can be regarded as fairly easy, 3 neither easy or difficult and 4 fairly difficult. One participant did not respond to this question. One participant did not answer the question on content as they were not responsible for content.

Table 12 Ease or difficulty in updating

	1 (easy)	2 (fairly easy)	3 (neither)	4 (fairly difficult)	5 (difficult)
Creating content	18 (40.9%)	16 (36.4%)	8 (18.2%)	2 (4.5%)	-
Finding time	12 (26.7%)	13 (28.9%)	11 (24.4%)	4 (8.9%)	5 (11.1%)

Creating content to update the blog did not seem to be a problem for the majority of participants (77.3%). Finding time appeared to be difficult for one fifth of participants. However, well over half (55.6%) of the participants did not have difficulty finding time to update the blog.

Monitoring weblog use

In order to gauge the success or otherwise of a blog, some type of monitoring for external blogs at least, is usually advised.   28 (61%) participants said that they monitored weblog use. 13 (28%) said they did not, while 11% were not sure. Of those that said they did not monitor weblog use, three were for internal staff blogs, six were

blogs at academic libraries, two were blogs from public libraries and two from school libraries.

How weblog usage is monitored

Table 13   Monitoring method

Statistics counter through blog host or 3rd party	21
Google analytics	4
Internal webpage statistics	4
RSS subscriptions	3
Observation	2
Clustr map	1
Number of comments	1
Spam filter	1
User survey	1
Verbal feedback	1

Of the 28 participants who said that weblog use was monitored, the majority said they used a statistics counter provided by the weblog host or a third party such as Bravenet or Sitemeter. Four used Google analytics. Many participants responding mentioned a combination of the above methods of monitoring weblog usage.

Enjoyment

When asked if updating the blog was an enjoyable task, of the 45 participants who responded to this question, 42 participants, or 93%, said it was enjoyable. Two participants said they were unsure (perhaps not responsible for updating), while only one participant said it was not enjoyable.

Meeting expectations

When asked if the weblog met the expectations of the library, the majority of participants (70%) said yes, 4% said no and a quarter (26%) were unsure. The participants who were unsure may not be aware of what, if any, expectations the library has.

When asked if the weblog met the expectations of the library user, less than half (48%) said yes, 9% said no and a substantial number (43%) were unsure. This seems to indicate a strong need for obtaining feedback from both library users and blog readers to find out what their expectations might be.

Experience of blogging

Finally participants were asked what their previous experience of weblogs was. 30.4% of participants had previously written and maintained a blog. 41.3% of participants had previously read blogs. Only one of these did not enjoy blogging. 28.3% of participants were aware of blogs but had had no previous experience with them prior to being involved with the library blog. All participants were aware of blogs before being involved in the library blog. The majority (71.7%) had some involvement with blogs, whether reading or writing, before their involvement with the library blog. Previous experience with blogs seemed to have had no bearing on the enjoyment or otherwise of blog updating.

Participants' Comments

Participants were given the opportunity to comment at the end of the survey. 24 of the 46 participants left a comment. These comments reflected the advantages of blogging as well as issues encountered. Blogs were seen as a "great way of communicating with library members and promoting the resources". They helped librarians "explore new ways of communicating with our customers while at the same time educating ourselves".

The potential of the blog was understood "It's a fabulous tool… there are so many possibilities", "fantastic for reviews and following a project through", "it allows users to

see a more personal side to the library".   Another responded that "the librarian's human side can be revealed". Some were aware that the full potential of the blog was not being achieved. "I know the blog could be better but it's a matter of time", "I hope to continue working on it …[achieve] wider audience", "I wish I could work out how to customise the blog better", "Not yet fully explored the possibilities of the uses of the blog.. we hope to create an online library community.", "Our blog is still an under utilised part of our operation".

There seems to be little evidence of community. Lack of feedback was an issue that worried some who wondered if the blog was being read. "We receive very few comments – I doubt if the blog gets much readership" "I don't know if anyone is reading it", "Comments are rare, spam is not", "It is hard to engage users into commenting." However, some blogs do receive feedback. "The blog is gaining traction and we get positive feedback and discussion arising from it" Fear of negative feedback, a reason given in the literature for not allowing comments, seems unfounded. "Comment moderation was switched on at first, but now…staffers that comment are generally behaving OK."

Libraries are encouraged to use blogs because their customers and potential customers are using the technology. But one participant commented "Blogs do not seem a technology that many of our users want to use." Trying to get library staff to use blogs is also a problem. "To educate [staff] to use a blog is to basically promote an alien culture as they mainly have not been exposed to the technology." "It was a bit of push and pull effort to drag some staffers away from a 'weekly' and 'official' newsletter to a more updated, interesting, timely, interactive forum for discussion and idea exchange." To get staff to blog is also a difficulty. "I tried to get more staff involved in

blogging but many of them hold back." If librarians themselves are reluctant to use a

blog or be involved, how can potential readers be expected to be enthusiastic about

blogs? It is therefore important to educate potential users (both staff and library users)

and market the blog more effectively. Time is needed for this. "Marketing the blog… is

most difficult because I am not given time to train users."

The reluctance to write for a blog is understandable. It requires passion and
commitment.

"It can be quite hard to provide entertaining content for the readers." "We are lucky that

so many of our staff are able to write well and with personality." This may be where a

policy is required. "The blog was without articles… we didn't have an official policy

and one needed to be created before proceeding." If library staff are aware of the main

purpose of the blog and have guidelines in place they may be more willing to

participate.

Some participants revealed their perceptions about a blog's characteristics.

"Our blogs to colleges are not "true" blogs – but they work ok at the moment as a

means of communicating information."

.."Specific purpose blog which doesn't get updated as frequently as 'standard' blogs,

but it serves its purpose well."

"It was generally felt that we should avoid… too much of a "what's new at the library"

feel to it… can be easily covered within the main library website. Some library blogs

lack personality."

"We take a different approach from many library blogs - we focus on books, publishing

and things to interest users – not necessarily library specific events."

A "true" blog is more than just communication. "Standard" blogs are updated

frequently. News blogs can lack personality. Nevertheless, these blogs reflect the wide

range of blog uses by libraries and they "work ok" and serve their purpose well.

Generally the advantages of a library blog outweighed any potential problems that can be worked on. "Blogging is fun.", "I really love blogging – it is like being the editor of your own newspaper.", "It's been a great experience to the point where we have started a second library blog." Internal blogs are also "it's a great way for staff to interact and share their interests." Blogs are "the way of the future" and ultimately "only one method for encouraging 'human group' communication".

Interviews

Five survey participants responded via email to the interview questions. Email was regarded as the easiest way to undertake an interview due to the distance involved and time constraints. Participants were also sent a consent form which was signed and sent back.

One of the respondents was involved in two blogs – a staff blog and a blog intended for academics. Two respondents represented two public library blogs, and the other two were involved in a staff blog and a blog intended for academics and students.

"Finding a voice" is an important aspect of the blog as it determines the tone. With this in mind, the interviewees were asked how they determined who writes for the blog. Four were group blogs. Responses varied from "anyone on the group can post", "all staff have access" so they can "spread the load" to the more organised collaborative effort "one staff member writes one post per fortnight" the point being to update regularly "four to five times a week" as blog updating is "too time consuming for one person." One interviewee said that a volunteer looked after the blog but others posted on an irregular basis. The remaining blog was a one-person effort – the person who "suggested and drove the project." The group blogs would have a "plurality of voices" (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006) so the tone would vary.

Interviewees were asked how they determined the content of the blog, as the survey revealed that finding interesting content can be difficult. Overall, the purpose of the blog determined content.
"The blog has been set up as an education news dissemination service" so "relevant information" was put up with "links to the full article/webpage". "Providing a news service blog means we have a definite 'voice' and purpose to the blog", which "makes it

clear to the audience what sort of information they can expect to find." "We chose not to go with the personal stream-of-consciousness-what-i-am-doing blog as we felt this would be too hard to maintain and of little interest to our prospective audience. There is no point starting a blog unless we could keep it going"

This raises an interesting point about the reason for difficulty in finding content. It appears that the more informal a blog is, the more difficult it is to maintain.

Two other blogs had the same purpose so the content had to "be relevant". "It is about keeping them informed of new resources and other newsy stuff" and "the aim is to disseminate library information, so relevant content." While another blog was about disseminating news, its content was "news not readily or easily available about the library, its services or changes to them, via other means". The news was blogged about "before it comes out in the monthly newsletter". The content also promoted "not easily identified resources or services".

The content of a public library blog was "determined by staff members and their interests". "Because the blog is on the children's website the main criteria for content is that it be suitable for children". If staff "had enough leeway to write about things that they found interesting"… "they would be more willing to write more regularly".

So for more informal blogs where the challenge was to make content more interesting, it was important that bloggers could write about their interests. This reflects Solomon's point in her online article that "passionless blogging leads to bored readers" (Solomon, 2005).

General comments in the survey seemed to reflect a desire to have more time to develop, market and update the blog. With this in mind, interviewees were asked if

blogging was reflected in their job description and whether time was allowed for updating. While blogging was not specifically listed in the job description it fell into general descriptions such as "tactical objectives"; "maintain regular contact with [patrons] and ensure they are aware of relevant library services and resources" which includes "facilitate interlibrary and departmental communications"; "maintain awareness of current developments in information service provision and electronic resources". Finding time to blog appeared to be left up to the blogger to manage "as long as it is a moderate amount and all other tasks are done". This seems to indicate that a blog is not perceived by management as important work. "My library manager expects the blog to be updated so that means I allow time to do so in my schedule". "Staff do this whenever they have the time, so while time is allowed it's not specifically allocated or timetabled". Blogging was "added on to normal duties".

Much is written in the literature about measuring the effectiveness of blogs. The interviewees were asked if they were able to measure effectiveness or if they thought it was possible to measure. "Effectiveness would have to depend on the purpose of the blog so I think that it would be hard to evaluate. If the purpose of the blog was to share information and/or ideas and create a sense of community then you would have to know who was part of the community you were trying to create and see who was contributing and who wasn't".

"Hard to judge. You can get an idea of hits, but how the content is impacting your readers is nearly impossible to judge, unless they leave comments to that effect – which they rarely do."

"Yes – we measure by page hits" which were increasing in number, and comments were received. "Our purpose was to increase use of the kids webpage by having constantly changing content, therefore encouraging users to visit frequently to check for new

content. The fact that the blog is being used is evidence of this." "The amount of spam that we're getting also indicates that we're able to be found…"
Stastistics tell "how many times the blogs have been accessed. I can see if the people are repeat users or first time users." "… the more repeat users we get the more we could assume the blog is effective".

   Two interviewees were confident that they could measure effectiveness while three felt it was difficult to evaluate. User surveys and effective monitoring of weblog usage could better determine weblog effectiveness.

   It is hoped that a library blog would increase use of library resources and services. Interviewees were asked if they were able to measure this. Three interviewees said "no" or "not really" and another said it was "difficult to determine how much increased usage [of the website] is attributable exclusively to the blog." The other interviewee saw the blog as a service and resource in itself. "Each person that checks out the blog uses a library service. So, in this way the blog has increased use of library services as it is gaining customers in an online area that we did not have before. Every hit on the blog is increased patronage from the online community." The interviewee points out that the hits may not come from people who have access to the physical collections but asks "Are we only setting up an online blog to reach an online community to try and coax them into using the physical collection?" If this were the point of the blog, the interviewee felt, it would be doomed from the start. "… the blog {is a] service in its own right". While it is difficult to measure increased use of physical resources, every hit on a library blog can increase awareness of resources and is a suitable access point for online resources.

The survey revealed that there were definite advantages to using a library blog. The interviewees were asked if there were any disadvantages. One interviewee said "no" while another said "not so far". Updating was not a problem. "The content is very quick and easy to put up due to the style of the blog we decided to go with.. it only takes about 5-10 minutes each day." Other responses mirrored the difficulties found in the survey responses. "It does need to be constantly updated… [which is] time consuming and not all staff members provide posts as frequently as they should". "Some people are shy about having their comments in a public forum. Can be hard to maintain the momentum/enthusiasm, and can be hard to keep checking it when you become busier." Another interviewee pointed out the problem surrounding creating conversations "To get discussion you have to have participants. The majority of readers don't comment so don't contribute ." This is a problem encountered with any medium of communication. Blogs are promoted as a medium of two-way communication and dialogue with customers (Bryon, 2006; Kaushik, 2007; Stover, 2006) but customers have to be brave or passionate enough to be motivated to comment or enter discussion.

With regard to lack of feedback and two-way communication, interviewees were probed for their thoughts about the lack of comments. It was felt that a news dissemination blog's function was not to generate comments but to "push information out" and a lack of comments was not an issue. "We do not expect comment on newspaper articles and such like." As regards the staff blog, one interviewee was disappointed in the lack of comments as it seemed to show that other members of staff "don't care about creating a sense of community". The public library blogger said that comments were "slowly building up. While I would like more comments, I do appreciate any and all that I get! I'm hoping that as readership increases so will our comments." This interviewee was particularly frustrated with comments that appeared

to be genuine but proved to be spam. Some blog hosting sites provide word verification for comments which filters some spam. The remaining interviewee reiterated views expressed about lack of conversation, saying that "there are lot of lurkers who will never comment" and while it was disappointing not to receive comments, it was not surprising.

On a more positive note, interviewees were asked what they found were the benefits of blogging. One interviewee had personally found that she had increased her technical skills and was sent on a Web 2.0 course that she might not otherwise have gone to. Blogging shows that "we are moving with the times" and was a little bit like "'keeping up with the Jones's'… every other library on the planet seems to have a blog and we do not want to be left behind." She also saw it as "good PR for the library" and that it is "another arena where we can try and make a valuable contribution to our community". The librarian involved with the public library blog for children said that "children are interacting with us and leaving comments." "We're promoting library services and resources." Another benefit was staff becoming "more comfortable with establishing an online presence". With regard to a staff blog, an interviewee said that the blog "stimulated discussion not normally had with some members of staff" and that it was "a bit of fun". Keeping staff "as well as the public up-to-date" was seen as a benefit. It also made the blogger think about "what the library is doing or should be doing" and gave the blogger personal satisfaction through "plenty of writing practice". Lastly, an interviewee confirmed the library literature's touted benefits that the blog was "timely and easy to use".

Blogs are said to "build relationships" (Stover, 2006), so interviewees were asked if they felt that a blog builds relationships between librarians and library users. The

interviewer received mixed responses. The responses ranged from a very positive "yes" to "They could. Has not been my experience." One interviewee felt that it does "albeit a fairly superficial one" and that the blog built an online relationship that ensured users were "aware that we have an electronic presence." One interviewee was "not entirely sure" while another said "who knows?" and went on to voice suspicions that "we would never be able to prove anything". The feeling was that "the library has to move into spaces that its users are in.. and the online world is one of these spaces". "The blog is just another way of getting the library 'out there'" increasing the library's visibility with the assumption that "with a higher profile, we will get more use. We want to show the users that the library is about more than books and mortar." "Building relationships with customers takes time", a view also expressed in the literature. "They need to perceive us as being useful and of value… and the blog is one way, among the many, that we can work towards achieving our goals."

Findings

Blog Use

Library blogs in New Zealand and Australia are still new. In both the content analysis and the survey it was found that approximately 60% of blogs are less than a year old. Content analysis of blogs and survey responses revealed that library blogs in New Zealand and Australia are being used in ways recommended in the literature. This includes blogs for staff communication (Cohen, 2003; Skinner, 2002), library news and events (Fichter, 2003; Skinner), advice and tips (Farkas, 2007) and links to resources (Fichter; Cohen) among others. The 2007 OCLC report "Sharing, Privacy and Trust in our Networked World" revealed that book clubs were one of the social services that the majority of the public would like to see their library adopt. A blog is a perfect medium for this service. Only one blog found for the content analysis used a blog for a book club. The content of blog posts found in the content analysis, correlated with the purpose of the blog indicated by survey participants.

The blog's potential

Throughout the literature on blogs, the most important feature highlighted is that of the potential to engage readers (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006), to invite conversation (Weil, 2006), and to encourage an interactive audience (Bryon, 2006). The core purpose of some blogs included in this study is to push information out to library users. This is a one-way medium and does not utilise the conversational potential of blogs. Such content does not generate comment and so it is impossible to build a relationship with the library user. Such a blog is more akin to a bulletin board.

To be useful a blog should be updated regularly. The content analysis and survey revealed that most blogs are regularly updated, with the majority of blogs being updated within the past month. However, nearly one fifth had not been. Weil (2006) recommends that if a blogger is going to take a break from blogging then the reader should be informed. Similarly, if a library blogger finds it too difficult to maintain the blog, the blog should be deleted. Although only a small percentage of inactive or abandoned blogs were found, they were still listed on directories and search engines. This reflects badly on the library or institution.

For a blog to be fully utilised it should include a lot of links. At the very least a library blog should have a link to the library website or catalogue. Nearly a third of blogs found for the content analysis did not have such a link to the library website and less than half provided a link to the catalogue. This seems surprising if one of the aims of the blog is to increase use of library resources. The majority of blogs did, however, include links to information in general, either on the blogroll or within the content of blog posts.

One of the main benefits of blogs is the ease with which timely information can be posted. This information can then be archived for future reference. The majority of blogs found did display archives but a small percentage did not. Access to the archives is made easier by using categories, tags or a search box. Just over half of blogs analysed had categories or tags but only 16% of blogs had a search box. This means that a substantial percentage of archived posts and the information therein are unlikely to be referred to.

The OCLC report found that an increasing number of libraries are using social software and interactive facilities. Use of such applications may not necessarily appear

on a library blog but there was little evidence of such use on blogs in New Zealand and Australia. However blog use in New Zealand libraries is still very new. Australian library blogs were more likely to include such applications. As blogs mature, more use of such applications is likely.

Marketing and Promotion

Comments from survey participants and interviewees indicate that blogs provide good public relations and increased visibility for the library. This is only true if the blog is adequately publicised. Local library blogs are fairly difficult to find on a directory or search engine even if a library user was motivated to search. Library users are more likely to find a blog from the library home page. The majority of survey participants indicated that they promoted the blog on the library website. The majority also believed that their blog was easy to find. However, the researcher had difficulty finding an obvious link on the library home page for over half of the blogs analysed. This lack of prominence is also noted by Farkas (2007).

A number of survey participants were unsure if their blog was listed on a directory. This may be because responsibility for promotion falls to someone else or that they believe a search engine may or may not list it. There are now more specialised directories for library blogs than there were just a year ago, yet there are very few New Zealand blogs listed. Australian blog directories enabled the researcher to find a number of library blogs. Neither of the specialised New Zealand or Australian directory listings were comprehensive, however. A listing on such a directory would increase visibility not only for library users but also for other librarians for professional interest.

If library blogs are to promote the library, it is interesting to note that one fifth of blogs found for the content analysis did not have the name of the library or indeed the word "library" in the URL of the blog or in the blog title. A little less than half of the blogs stated the blog's intent or purpose. It would therefore be difficult for a blog reader to know at a glance what institution the blog is associated with and whether the blog might be useful. Just under half of the blogs had no visual integration or conformity with the library website.

The blog has enormous potential for marketing library resources and services. Stover states that blogs can suffer from a lack of readers if the blog is not marketed properly and some participant comments indicate doubt that the blog is being read. A minority of libraries appeared to actively promote their library blog. The blog is an ideal medium for relationship marketing and fits well into the marketing mix of the four P (price, place, product and promotion). The marketing potential of the blog does not appear to have been picked up on by libraries.

The cost in time spent updating a blog receives little mention in the library literature. It is, however, frequently mentioned in the literature for business blogs in which blogs are said to take a great deal of staff time. Weil (2006) states that updating a blog does not take as much time as feared. This appears to be the case as revealed in responses by survey participants, the cost in time appearing to be minimal. Time spent updating varied from an estimated five minutes a week to one week a month depending on the type of blog and the number of bloggers. While time spent updating was not a problem, more time was needed for marketing the blog and training library users. Time was allowed for updating a blog by management but only as an addition to normal duties or if other duties had been completed.

The placement of the blog is important to enable easy access through obvious links and conformity to the website. Such applications as RSS or email updates help push the information to users.   However, while the majority of libraries provide RSS feeds, few provide guidance on RSS use, which is still an unfamiliar technology to many library users.

Stover calls the blog the product but the blog also pushes library products to the user. As a product the blog should be appealing in design and content and, as a Web 2.0 application, should be user-centred and encourage participation.   There is evidence of user participation in only a minority of blogs in the study but this may grow with increased blog use and encouragement.

Interaction

The presence or lack of comments is often referred to in illustrating the success or failure of interaction with blog readers. Clyde (2004a) suggests that a lack of comments indicates that users are not particularly involved with the library. While the majority of blogs in the content analysis and respresented by survey participants enabled comments, only a minority (39.7%) of blogs were found to have received comments in the content analysis. Survey participants indicated that they received more (60%). Internal blogs were not analysed and staff comments were excluded in the analysis so this may account for the discrepancy. The interviewees, however, indicated that few comments were received. This could also be a reflection the general public view revealed in the OCLC report that social networking sites (and by inclusion blogs) were personal spaces and they had little interest in participating in conversations with

libraries (2007). News dissemination blogs are unlikely to receive comments and for those blogs the lack of comments was not perceived to be a problem. While it was desirable to some bloggers to receive comments, feedback from library users was nevertheless received in other ways as indicated by nearly half of the survey participants. Comments by survey participants and interviewees indicated that there is some reluctance on the part of library users and staff to engage in conversation on the blog. It is therefore important for library bloggers to respond to genuine comments received to encourage users to continue. The majority of survey participants did so.

Evaluation

Holtz and Demopoulos say of blogs that "unless you measure its effectiveness you may not be reaping its full benefits" (2006, p. 220). Clyde (2004a) asks that, of libraries that have weblogs, "how many have been evaluated to measure the extent to which they are meeting user needs?" Understanding the needs of users helps drives content for a blog. Less than 10% of survey participants said that users had been surveyed before the blog was set up. Often this is because the blog is an experiment or pilot and the libraries are either testing the waters or letting staff play with the technology. The opinion of authors in the literature differs with regard to planning a blog (Holtz & Demopoulos, 2006) or jumping right in and starting (Bryon, 2006). However, ongoing surveys of blog readers were only carried out by 11% of library blogs represented by survey participants. Lack of feedback about user needs could account for why less than half of the participants think the blog meets users' expectations. Nearly two thirds of participants said they monitor blog use but this may not give them accurate information about what users want.

Measuring Impact

Some interviewees found it hard to judge if blogs led to increase use of library services or resources. Measuring the impact or the ROI (return on investment) can be difficult. The ROI on blogging, or the ROB (return on blogging) as Weil calls it, is like to be of an unquantifiable value such as receiving an email of thanks from a blog reader. Quantity is not as important as the quality of impact. If just one person benefits from reading the blog then the blog has added value to the library user. As noted in comments in the survey and interviews, if there is some evidence the blog is being used and readers returning, then the readers must be getting some value out of it.

Conclusion

This study revealed that New Zealand and Australian libraries are using blogs in all the different ways recommended in the literature. Blogs work well in disseminating information and highlighting resources and events. That the information can be updated quickly and easily helps ensure that the information is current. Library blogs represented in this study are being updated regularly. The library bloggers enjoy updating the blogs and perceive them as a successful medium for the purposes they were set up.

However, the blog's potential as a user-centred interactive medium is not being fully utilised. While the majority of blogs in the study included links in the blog post content or blogrolls, a substantial number neglected to provide a link to the library website or catalogue, thereby denying blog readers the opportunity to explore library resources. Most blogs in the study provided archives, but the addition of categories or a search box would greatly enhance the blog reader's ability to find the information included in the blog. Blogs can easily incorporate other interactive facilities such as instant messaging or podcasts but few blogs are doing so. Blogs that purely push information without inviting feedback are a one-way medium. While some comments are received by more informal blogs, perhaps more could be done to encourage conversation such as specifically asking for feedback. With more use, more comments and feedback may be received resulting in more discussion or conversation.

To get more use, there could be more proactive promotion. The majority of blogs in this study were being promoted in various ways but there was perhaps too much reliance on the library website as the only form of promotion. The blog link on the library home page may need to be given a more prominent spot. Libraries could also

list their blogs on specialised directories. As Stover says, to be marketed effectively "librarians must capitalize on a blog's potential for personalizing the library experience and fostering relationships with patrons" (2006, p. 165).

The fact that libraries are establishing more blogs indicates a measure of success. Libraries are finding that blogs are extremely useful and serving the needs of some library users. However, more could be done to ensure library users are aware of the blog and that the blog give the users the types of information they require.   Many New Zealand and Australian blogs are still very new and have yet to fully explore the potential that blogs offer.

Suggestions for further research

Blogging in New Zealand and Australian libraries is still in its infancy so there are still opportunities for further research. The numbers of library blogs have increased since the start of this research project. As I write, more library blogs are being established.

A major avenue of research would be to find out the blog reader's perspective of library blogs. Very little is known about how many people are reading library blogs and what they want from a blog. What prevents them from interacting with the librarian or leaving a comment? What would induce them to enter into conversations? Are blog readers happy with their local library blog? Does it meet their particular needs? While some of these questions may be answered in library surveys of their readers, a wider in-depth study would be extremely valuable.

Research on staff use of blogs would also be useful. There appears to be some reluctance by some staff to be involved with blogs, either reading them or writing them. Why is that? Holtz and Demopoulos (2006) commented that there is resistance to the idea that any employee can publish. Weil (2006) mentions management fears that employees will waste time on blogs or that they are a distraction. These are issues that require some investigation. If libraries are to make full use of blogs and other social software, then staff have to be willingly involved.

The researcher noticed an increasing use of other social software applications on blogs. These applications included real-time messaging, podcasting and photosharing among others. How are these being used? Are they value-added tools that more librarians would find useful? Are libraries branching into video blogging (or vlogging)

or mobile blogging (moblogging)? To what extent are they being used?

    This researcher found little evidence of libraries using social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook. The OCLC report indicated that the majority of library users were not interested in participating in social networking sites provided by libraries. Would a survey in New Zealand and Australia reveal similar disinterest? There are many related topics which offer possibilities for further research.

Appendices

Appendix I   Websites

Directories

Ambient Librarian Wiki	http://ambientlibrarian.org/index.php?title=Blogs
Blogging Libraries Wiki	http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/links/index.php?title=Welcome_to_the_Blogging_Libraries_Wiki
Directory of Australian, New Zealand and Pacific libraries	http://lists.webjunction.org/libweb/Aus_main.html
Dmoz Open Directory Project (Organizational Weblogs)	http://www.dmoz.org/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Weblogs/Organizational_Weblogs/
Google	http://www.google.com, http://www.google.co.nz, http://www.google.com.au
Google blogsearch	http://blogsearch.google.com/
Icerocket	http://www.icerocket.com
LIANZA ITSIG wiki	http://wiki.lianza.org.nz/index.php/Resources/NewZealandLibraryBloggers
Libdex Library Weblogs	http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html
Librariesinteract	http://librariesinteract.info/australian-library-blogs/
Library Zen wiki	http://libraryzen.com/wiki/index.php?title=LISZEN
Sphere blog search engine	http://www.sphere.com/
Yahoo directory	http://dir.yahoo.com/Reference/Libraries/Weblogs

Websites of applications mentioned

Blogger   http://www.blogger.com

Bravenet   http://www.bravenet.com/webtools/counter

Clustr   http://www.clustr.com

Delicious   http://del.icio.us

Flickr   http://www.flickr.com

Google analytics   http://www.google.com/analytics

Meebo   http://www.meebome.com

Sitemeter   http://www.sitemeter.com

Slide   http://www.slide.com

Survey Gizmo   http://www.surveygizmo.com

Wordpress   http://www.wordpress.com

Appendix II

Information sheet for participants

Library Blogs Survey

Researcher: Judi Kercher, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington

I am a Masters student in Library and Information Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project. This project is to determine the use and expectations of weblogs in libraries and will inform those interested of the issues surrounding weblog usage. The University request that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants.

I am inviting library staff involved in the creation and maintenance of weblogs to participate in this study. Participation is entirely voluntary. Participants will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Completion of the questionnaire implies consent to take part in the study. If willing, participants may be asked to take part in a brief interview at the participant's convenience. The interview may be undertaken by telephone or email. A consent form is provided for participants who agree to be interviewed. Notes taken during the interview may be checked by the interviewee before inclusion in the study. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, without giving reason, before data is analysed in early January.

Responses collected will constitute the main material required for the research project. This material will be analysed on an anonymous basis and participants will not be personally identified. Information provided by participants will be kept confidential. Only my supervisor, Philip Calvert, will have access to the material besides me. The report, once written up, will be submitted to the School of Information Management for marking and a copy deposited in the university library. Any further use of the information will require participants' written consent. Information obtained during the research, in the form of questionnaires and interview notes, will be destroyed one year after completion of the report. Feedback in the form of a summary of results will be offered to all participants at the conclusion of the study. Please email me at the address below to request such feedback.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the projet, please contact me at kerchejudi@student.vuw.ac.nz or my supervisor, Philip Calvert, at the School of Information Management at Victoria University, PO Box 600, Wellington, phone +64 6 4636629 (philip.calvert@vuw.ac.nz).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Judi Kercher
23 November 2007

I accept the conditions and would like to complete the questionnaire

YES
(clicking on this button will take you to the questionnaire)

I would also like to participate in an interview.

Contact

Appendix III

Consent Form

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wānanga o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui

SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Consent Form

☐ I have read the information sheet relating to the nature of this research project and understand its purpose. I have been provided with the opportunity to seek further clarification or explanation.

☐ I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time before data is analysed in early January, without giving reason.

☐ I understand that information obtained through me will be kept confidential and will be accessed only by the researcher and supervisor and will be destroyed one year after completion of the project.

☐ I understand that any information I provide will be anonymous and that I will not be personally identified. I may check notes made by the researcher during any interview I agreed to take part in.

☐ I understand that any information I provide will be used only for this research project and that any further use will require my written consent.

☐ I hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature (participant)   Date:

☐ I would like to receive a summary of results at the completion of the project. Please send to:

………………………………………………………..

Appendix IV

Survey questions

1. Type of library
   Academic
   Public
   School
   Special
   Other

2. Job Title

3. Your role in the library weblog

4. When was your weblog set up and why?

5. What is the overall purpose of your weblog?

6. Who are your intended readers?
   Students
   Academic staff
   Library staff
   Children
   Teens
   All library users
   Other

7. Were potential users surveyed before the weblog was set up?

8. What were the expectations in setting up a weblog?

9. Do you survey your weblog readers?
   Yes
   No
   Not sure

9a. What information do you seek from readers?

10. Does your weblog facilitate comments?
    Yes
    No
    Not sure

10a. (if no) Why are comments not facilitated?

10b. (if yes) Do you receive comments?
    Yes
    No

10c.   How do you respond to comments?

10d.   Do they provide useful feedback?
 Yes
 No
 Not sure

11. Do you provide RSS feeds?
 Yes
 No
 Not sure
 Not familiar with RSS

12. Apart from comments do you receive feedback from readers?
 Yes
 No
 Not sure

12a. In what form is feedback received?

13. How do you promote your weblog?

14. Is your weblog listed on a directory?

14a. If so, where?

15. Are library users able to find your weblog easily?
 Yes
 No
 Not sure

16. How often is the weblog updated?
 Daily
 Several times a week
 Once a week
 Once a month
 Other

17. Approximately how much time is spent on updating your weblog?
 Per day
 Per week
 Per month

18. If you write content for the blog how easy or difficult is it to:
 (1=easy, 5=difficult)
 Create content
 Find time to update

19. Is updating your weblog an enjoyable task?
Yes
No
Not sure

20. Do you monitor weblog use?

20a. How do you monitor weblog use?

21. Do you feel the weblog meets the expectations of the library?
Yes
No
Not sure

22. Do you feel the weblog meets the expectations of the user?
Yes
No
Not sure

23. What was your experience of blogging before the library weblog was set up?
I had my own blog
I read blogs but did not write them
I knew about blogs but had no direct experience
I hadn't heard of blogs

24. Do you have any comments to add?

Appendix V

Interview questions

How did you determine who updates the weblog?

How do you determine the content of the weblog?

Is blog updating currently reflected in job descriptions or is it just something that's fitted in when there's time? (Is time allowed for blog updating?)

Are you able to measure the weblog's effectiveness? (Do you think it's possible to measure weblog effectiveness?)

Are you able to measure increased use of library services as a result of the weblog?

Do you think there are any drawbacks or disadvantages to using a weblog?

What have you found are the benefits?

What are your thoughts regarding a lack of comments?

Do you think weblogs build relationships between librarians and library users?

Appendix VI Emails

Email sent through NZLibs listserv

```
Hello library bloggers

As part of my MLIS I am researching library blogs and, as such,
would welcome your feedback!  For those involved in library
weblogs, interested in filling out my brief questionnaire (5-10
minutes'worth), please visit my information page at:

http://www.geocities.com/kercheraus/infosheet.html

I would be most appreciative!

Many thanks in advance.

Judi Kercher
MLIS student
International Pacific College Library
57 Aokautere Drive
Palmerston North
```

Email sent to blogging libraries.

```
Hello there

My name is Judi Kercher and I am currently working on my
research project for the MLIS in New Zealand.  The research
project is about library weblogs and I am looking for
participants to fill out my brief online survey on
experiences with library blogs that librarians might be
involved in.


For further information, please visit my page at

http://www.geocities.com/kercheraus/infosheet.html

The link to the survey can be found there.

Thank you for reading this email and I would welcome your
consideration to take part or forward to the relevant staff
member.  With thanks,

Yours sincerely

Judi Kercher
MLIS student
University of Victoria
PO Box 600
Wellington
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