

Information Overload

Issue 65, February 2008

Welcome:

Welcome to the February edition of Information Overload. Apologies for the delay in sending this to you.

Unless you have been residing at the bottom of a pond over the last couple of years, you will have heard of, and may even have participated in the world of web logs. While we have discussed the advent of technology on our workplaces and introduced the concepts of social networking as a way to get your message across, we have not looked at the world of “blogs” in detail.

Apologies in advance if you are a member of this community and already know what I am about to share with you.

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In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Into the blogosphere
- Consequences of blogging
- A Thought to ponder

Into the blogosphere

Type the word “blogs” into a search engine of choice and you will receive millions of hits, in my case 702,000,000.

With the creation of easy to use, WYSIWYG text editors and mainly free online* hosting anyone can become an instant author – and probably has. Which as you know can be both a good and a bad thing.

Blogs have allowed people to speak out about issues that are important to them. From the front lines in Afghanistan, through the conference delegates to the teenager contemplating suicide. People write about what they know and are sharing their views with the world. The beauty with WYSIWYG services such as Wordpress – <http://wordpress.com/>, Blogger – <https://www.blogger.com/start> and Squarespace – <http://www.squarespace.com> is that they are search engine friendly. Create a new entry, post it to your “blog” and then wait for the technology to do its bit. Once the entry has been posted and indexed it can be found by the “feed readers” and anyone who is interested in what you have to say will be able to read the

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latest news, views and ramblings. In some cases – the readership is enormous. Take the world of American politics for example – Not only does Hillary Rodham Clinton have her own blog site, other people are talking about her on theirs. <http://blog.hillaryclinton.com/> Of course, Hillary doesn't do much of the writing herself, she has a communications director to handle that side of things for her. The fact of the matter is, we have access to more information from more people than we have ever had before, and people are talking. In the case of the first post you see (newest posts first) 165 people have responded, and discussions are taking place.

And the reasons why are numerous:

- You can speak to your audience – no matter where you happen to be, if you have the technology to do so. You can post to your blog via your telephone or Blackberry. You can send an email to create the new post or you can respond to a message that you have received all while on the road, or away from your desk.

As information professionals, this is an exciting time. Now we can keep in touch with our client base even if they are not in their offices, or us in ours. It could be argued that we already have this capability with Corporate Internets and Intranets, and yes some of the capability is there, but not entirely. Your clientele can log in and view the regular kinds of information they might need, but for short communications such as the latest news, views, web links of interest, book reviews and articles, then a blog is a much better alternative. Your audience do not have to log in, the only thing they need is access to the “net” which can of course be re-directed to other mobile devices.

For those people who visit remote sites where Internet coverage may be a bit patchy, having the ability to receive valuable information pertaining to a particular job that you are doing, can save you and your organisation time and money.

- Your customer base has just increased. One of the best ways to increase sales is to create something that people want to purchase and then to tell them about it. Sounds obvious doesn't it? And it is. But generating quality traffic through your website can be a little hard if it's a little antiquated, is not search engine optimised, and has little or no dynamic content. However, if you have a feeder site – blogs that link to your main site act as funnels, you can improve the conversion rate dramatically. Assuming of course that you are employing the do's of web page creation within your blog:
 - Write headlines that catch people's attention
 - Write an abstract that contains keywords / keyphrases
 - Link to more information
 - And if you can be controversial at the same time, all well and good, because what you are really after is to get people to talk about you and link to you – so they will buy from you. But as with all things, make sure they are talking about you for all the right reasons!!
 - Create quality content and give people a reason to return.

** Note: While you don't pay to create a “blog” using services such as Blogger or Wordpress, you still have to pay for bandwidth when using your ISP (Internet Service Provider) unless you use work's bandwidth – but that's up to you and the organisation that you work for as to whether you should or shouldn't do that.*

Consequences of blogging

In our interconnected world it can be quite easy to find traces of our online selves, which can be both a good and a bad thing, as you may appreciate. Blogs, online diaries and personal websites tend to be in the public domain and are usually searchable by traditional search engines as well as the specific blog engines such as Technorati - <http://www.technorati.com/> which means you will be found by anyone who cares to look.

Why does this matter?

Well, imagine that you are going to apply for a job. You hate your current position and you happened to mention the fact in your blog, not to mention the fact that because you hate your job so much you spend all your time writing your blog using work's time. Unless you reset the time / date stamp to reflect personal time, chances are going to be good that a prospective employer will put two and two together and come up with the fact that you are using work's time and work's computers to do non-related work (OK – personal stuff). While it could be argued that you are allowed to access the Internet during work time, and you posted the messages during your lunch break, and what about freedom of speech! Human Resources departments are searching the social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and the Blog lists for information about their prospective hires.

My question to you as you ponder this is, would your personal life and image stand up to the scrutiny?

Of course it could be argued that it is no-one's business but your own, what you do during your own time. But there have been cases whereby people's job offers have been rescinded as a direct consequence of the information found on these kinds of sites, there have also been instances where people have been asked to leave. And the reasons why are many.

If you don't like your job and you say so, if you don't like a certain person you work with and you tell the world what you think about them, you can be sued for defamation and / or libel. However, you know that you could be sued, so you decide to create a pseudonym, thinking this will keep your identity and therefore your bank account safe. What you might not know is that you can still be found:

"In Britain, a college lecturer contributed to a blog (not her own) in which she referred to a politician (who had also expressed his views in the same blog) using various uncomplimentary names, including referring to him as a "Nazi". The politician found out the real name of the lecturer (she wrote under a pseudonym) via the ISP and successfully sued her for £10,000 in damages and £7,200 costs." Gibson, Owen. "[Warning to chatroom users after libel award for man labelled a Nazi](#)", *The Guardian*, 2006-03-23. Retrieved on 2006-05-17.

And then there are the very public attacks for instance - [Mark Cuban](#), owner of the [Dallas Mavericks](#), was fined during the 2006 [NBA](#) playoffs for criticizing NBA officials on the court and in his blog. "[NBA fines Cuban \\$200K for antics on, off court](#)", ESPN, 2006-05-11. Retrieved on 2006-06-23.

However, there are other matters to consider with the world of blogging and the consequences of doing so.

During the course of your day you may come across many useful bits and pieces of information which will help you and your colleagues do your jobs. When you get home you chat with your spouse about your day and happen to mention these snippets. As it turns out your spouse is a “sleeper” and has been passing these snippets of information back to the handler. Pillow talk may seem like it is part of the fictional realm, but today there are more opportunities for “pillow talk” than ever before. What you may deem to be minor snippets of information you happen mention throughout your weblog– can be the pot of gold to people who have been monitoring these forums, and you’ve just saved the organisation they work for in both time and money in development time, and ultimately to the market place.

Say for example you work for a pharmaceutical company. When they employed you, you signed a confidentiality agreement, but that was so long ago, you’ve forgotten the exact terms of conditions. You’re frustrated about a certain chemical problem, you can’t get the reactions you were hoping for, and you mention these facts during a particular entry in your personal weblog. Other organisations whose scruples aren’t as good as the organisation you work for, have subscribed to the feeds (they get notified whenever a new entry is posted) and rub their hands in glee....you’ve just shortened time to market for them. Given that it can cost millions and many years to research a new drug, this is a significant cost saving to them. The first thing our scientist notices is that there is an almost identical drug on the market – and the other company got there first. Inquiries are started, computers are searched and there it is – the entry that you posted during a “bad day at the office”.

Leaking confidential information is not limited to the world of espionage or pills and potions for that matter. There have been many instances of confidential information added to the public domain through carelessness, accident and / or deliberate intent. For instance – “[Mark Jen](#) was terminated in [2005](#) after a mere 10 days of employment at [Google](#) for discussing corporate secrets on his personal blog” Hansen, Evan. "[Google blogger has left the building](#)", CNET News, [2005-02-08](#). Retrieved on [2007-04-04](#).

So unless you really don’t care whether you keep your job and / or get a new one, beware the blog entry – it may come back to bite you.

With many thoughts
Lorraine

A Thought to Ponder:

“In all large corporations, there is a pervasive fear that someone, somewhere is having fun with a computer on company time. Networks help alleviate that fear.”

John C Dvorak