

@WORK

Lost in a Blog

By William Powell

By now, you've probably heard a thing or two about Weblogs or blogs, as the kids call them. But for many people, first experiences with these online journals are underwhelming. The Weblog is supposed to be about community, peer-to-peer interaction, but in most cases the community is so tight, or so unfamiliar, that the blog holds little to no interest for the casual visitor.

So, where's your community, and where are the voices that speak to you,

your profession, and your interests? With more than a half-million Weblogs out there, it can be difficult to separate the neat from the daft. There is no quick way to search for Weblogs by content. There are, however, a few sites that will help you get in touch with like-minded folks.

Portal.eatonweb.com portal.eatonweb.com "the original blog portal," lists nearly 7000 Weblogs by popularity, interest, and location. It currently lists 69 blogs relating to education, and another 102

sites dedicated to education and research.

Another popular site is BlogStreet.com blogstreet.com. This site offers a search function that lets users enter the URL of a blog and then gives them a list of related blogs based on a Weblog's blogroll, which is a collection of links to other Weblogs.

A similar phenomenon to the Weblog is the Webring, which is a specialized blog that groups Websites around one topic. WebRing.com is a portal for these sites webring.com. It currently lists 63,000 rings with links to more than 1 million active sites. However, the distance-learning section of Webring currently lists a comparatively small 25 rings. But, hey, that's better than nothing.

Education-related Weblogs, especially those focusing on the corporate environment, are still a nascent community in the blogging and Webring world. Most are less than two years old. But this small group of edubloggers, as they call themselves, is dealing with some serious issues in an informal way. Here's a selection of their blogs.

Edublog WebRing. If you've ever considered integrating a Weblog into one of your classes, this Webring's community

of teachers, technologists, and librarians has invaluable advice on tap. It's moderated by Sarah Lohnes, a technical instruction and support specialist for the Center for Educational Technology at Middlebury College

 <http://alterego.manilasites.com>.

Weblogg-ed. Weblogg-ed is maintained by Will Richardson, a high school teacher living in New Jersey. He describes it as "my place to collect ideas for Weblogs in the classroom, to ask questions to the teacher Weblogging community, and to reflect on my teaching." Richardson's blog is a clearinghouse for sites and issues relating to Weblogs in education weblogg-ed.com.

DV for Teachers. Created by Tim Merritt, this blog focuses on the utilization of digital video in education. Merritt works with digital video at the Instructional Technology Center in the College of Education at Georgia State University

 <http://dvforteachers.manilasites.com>.

Elearningpost. Elearningpost is a digest of daily links to articles and news stories on such topics as corporate learning, instructional design, and knowledge management. The site www.elearningpost.com includes special reports.

Seblogging. Created by Sebastian Fiedler, a consultant on Web usability, information architecture, and educational design, this blog has a strong community of edubloggers, many of whom have their own Weblogs. Fiedler rants and trades thoughts with a host of contributors on Weblogs, CMSs, and dynamic Web publishing for learning and education <http://seblogging.cognitivearchitects.com>.

EdGames blog. EdGames is moderated by Bernie Dodge, a professor in the education technology department at San Diego State University. The EdGames blog covers the "musings and discoveries by the EDTEC 670 learning community." EDTEC 670 is a university course that covers exploratory learning through education and games;

 <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/Courses/EDTEC670/index.html>.

I've only listed a handful of blogs here, but just by visiting those you'll enter a community made up of hundreds of interlinked voices sounding out through the fog of the Web. Take the time to visit at least one. You might even feel compelled to contribute—or start your own blog.

Free Free, Set Them

For anyone in the field of education and training, a favorite book is a cherished possession. But as the song goes, "If you love someone, set them free...."

That's the basic premise behind BookCrossing.com

 bookcrossing.com. The site is the creation of Rick Hornbaker's HumanKind Systems, a software and Internet development company based in Kansas City, Missouri. The catch with this site is that you hope your beloved book never comes back to you. Users register a book at the site, print out a label that explains the process, attach, and then leave the book in an area where it's likely to be picked up.

Sounds crazy, right? Who would want to give away a perfectly good book? Well, so far 16,000 people have registered with the service and 38,000 books have been registered and released.

But that's just the beginning. Users are notified when people receive a book, visit the BookCrossing site, and post a journal entry regarding their find. The process fuels users into releasing more books. Many people release dozens into the wilds of movie theaters, park benches, and public



restrooms (not sure how successful that was, but one user tried it). And though the general premise is that users let go of books they love, a quick scan of the releases shows that some are just happy to get rid of books they couldn't stand. One reader's *Bridges of Madison County* is another's *Ulysses*.

Users can browse through a list of members to find book lovers in their area, go on a hunt for released books by searching release notes, and participate in online or email discussion groups.

Conferences and other industry gatherings would be a perfect opportunity to release a copy of Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* or whatever your favorite, or not-so-favorite, training title happens to be. Think of it this way: For what you lose in store credit at the local bookshop, BookCrossing.com just might earn you a little good karma.

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@Work covers Internet technology trends, news, and tips. Send comments, questions, and items of interest to atwork@astd.org.



MuVo-ver iPod

There's no longer any excuse for avoiding the use of MP3 audio files. Creative Technology, the well-known manufacturer of sound cards and other computer audio peripherals, recently released the Nomad MuVo portable MP3 player. What's special about this particular model isn't its size, though it is small enough to slip easily into a shirt pocket; it's how easy you can store and transfer files.

The MuVo eschews the various cables and software found on typical MP3 players in favor of a much simpler, detachable flash memory module. The module connects to your computer via a USB connection, and when connected, appears as just another drive on your computer. To transfer an MP3 file, drag the file and drop it onto the drive icon. It's that simple.

Connecting the thumb drive to the MuVo is a snap. Slide it into its integrated port and you're ready to go. Controls are Spartan, allowing for forward and back skip only. Storage capacity, considering MuVo's size, is a respectable 128MB.

Professionals will find the MuVo handy for storing and transferring audio files of articles frequently found on Web-sites and offered through services such as MobileSoft.

The MuVo retails for US\$170. For purchase information, visit the Creative Website www.creative.com.

Off *the* Shelf

In June, I wrote about the plague of e-trash—the tons of obsolete hardware that has environmentalists and recyclers concerned. But it seems we have a problem with the soft stuff, too. **Shelfware**, unused software gathering dust on shelves and going unused on employees' hard drives, has many companies clamoring to cut their number of software licenses. In fact, AMR Research reports that a mere half of software purchased since 1998 is currently in use. The cause? It seems companies are dealing with the legacy of Y2K and over-enthusiasm with moving everything to the Web; both of those trends over-inflated software purchases in the late 1990s.

According to Gartner Research, annual growth in software sales slowed to a trickle in 2001, at 1.9 percent. Compared to nearly 30 percent growth in 1998, it seems that companies' thirst for new software has been slaked. Though the Gartner study projects **modest growth** for 2002, 5.7 percent, economic uncertainty isn't doing software manufacturers any favors, as clearly witnessed by the failures and mergers in the e-learning segment.