**Navigating the Blogosphere**

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Keeping written accounts of events or thoughts has been going on since human beings have been able to write. What may have started off as odd markings on cave walls has long since evolved into the world of blogging that we have today. The practice of blogging and of course the term “blog” are common jargon that anyone who has ever surfed the web has without a doubt come into contact with. Today blogs are used for a multitude of purposes, from personal journals and dialogue starters to product reviews and political battlegrounds. However, blogs have not been around nearly as long as people think; they’re relatively young in concept and continuously changing. In fact, it’s hard to read any article about social media (also a relatively new concept, in its current form) without mentioning blogs. Blogs are an important part of today’s internet culture. Understanding the evolution of the blog from where it started to where it is today allows us to conceptualize where the world of blogging takes us next.

In the early days of the internet the stepping stones for blogs were laid rather quickly. While most people associate the invention of the internet to 1992, the 1979 is really where things started to get interesting. USENET, a system of discussion boards was created leading to the first era of the internet’s online communities. (NPR) Much like the internet we have today where information is readily shared by billions of people across the globe, the initial roads of internet travel were walked with the intention of sharing information and creating dialogue. Fast forward to 1994 and Justin Hall creates Links.net, widely recognized as the first blog. In 1997 Jorn Barger coined the term “weblog” reflecting the process of logging the web as he browsed it, with his blog Robot Wisdom. A year later Jonathan Dube wrote a blog about Hurrican Bonnie for The Charlotte Observer and finally in 1999, a programmer named Peter Merholz shortened the word weblog to “blog”. (WDD Staff)

In the early days of blogging there weren’t nearly as many options or tools for people looking to create their own blogs. In fact, you pretty much only stood a chance if you had programming skills. Livejournal is recognized as being one of the first platforms for nonprogrammers to start their blogs, followed eventually by the now well-known site, Blogger. Blogger is pretty much responsible for bringing the concept of blogging to the masses. By the 2000’s, blogging was popular worldwide with over 32 million blog readers by 2005. (WDD) While many early blogs were mainly political forums where people could share their own thoughts and discussions, as time has passed blog genres have expanded to just about anything. In 2005, Garret M. Graff was the first blogger granted press credentials to the White House. (WDD) Blogging had officially crossed over the gap from being a hobbyist passion to having real-world affect.

Aside from giving users the abilities to share ideas and information, blogging also became incredibly easy to do. While becoming a journalist or accredited writer may take years of school, hard work and experience, starting a blog only requires an email address. As technology evolves, the ability to create and share with anyone willing to read or listen grows exponentially. Blogging has come a long way since its creation and has changed in many ways. While many people are turning more towards getting information from web sites such as Wikipedia, blogging still remains a viable and powerful solution. Platforms such as the website Medium.com and the more well-known Wordpress offer a much sleeker style, allowing users to create essentially their own website minus the costs and knowhow of maintaining an actual site. According to Julie Fanselow of the National Civic Review, “Community blogs are having a sizable impact on traditional journalism. Many serve a watchdog function, just as investigative reporters from the "legacy" media used to do (and sometimes still do, newsroom budgets and corporate ties permitting).” (National Civic Review, 2008) Blogs do have the ability to shift public opinion and that’s a huge accomplishment in the area of free speech. In 2006, a powerful storm rocked Seattle and knocked out power in parts of the city for almost a week. A blog run by a pair of journalists provided block-to-block information on the power outages and storm related posts that neither the city’s government officials nor the daily newspapers could match. (National Civic Review, 2008) These journalists and their blog were able to make an impact on their own neighborhoods by being active users of the *blogosphere*: the world of personal blogs.