

**FOCUS: In Which Long-Time Netizen & Programmer-at-Arms Dave Winer Records a Podcast for Me, Personally:**



â€œThe Fall of the Blogosphereâ€, by Stable Diffusion, via NightCafe

But since I have a Gutenberg-Galaxy brain, I feed it to text-recognition software <<http://otter.ai>>, and then edit the transcript.

But let me first link to a subsequent piece in which Dave muses about what he would like to see:

Dave Winer: [Textcasting](#): Like podcasting, for text. **Podcasting is great**: We can do the same for text. **Let's do it!**: In textcasting, the equivalent of an MP3 is a [document](#). Optional titles, Markdown support, Links, Simple styling, Enclosures (podcasting), Unlimited length, Editable. To support it you don't have to support every feature. But you shouldn't make it impossible to peer with a service that supports the full spec. We're at a good moment where there is no dominant feed reader or microblogging site. It's fluid. It's a good time to get in at the beginning of something that could be even bigger than podcasting, for text. I am Dave Winer, I created blogging, feeds and podcasting. I did it once, I'd like to do it again, only better this time.

The way I thought of this ten years ago, during the decline and fall, was that it all should work in the way that network communication worked in Vernor Vinge's amazing mindbending science-fiction space-opera novel [A Fire Upon the Deep](#) "HEXAPODIA IS THE KEY INSIGHT" sorry-not-sorry





The full message is pumped out from the source to the receiver, and the receiver displays as much of the full message as bandwidth, hardware, event, and contingency allow. I would write a blog post. My software would turn some of it into a header tweet, a (short) tweet thread, and a link back to the full version. My software would turn a paragraph or two into a Facebook-friendly version. And all other social media sites would receive whatever was the maximal component of it that they could grok, with a link back.

Of course, this was all a non-starter: the point of a social media company is to create a *walled garden*, and the point of a *walled garden* is to trap you in it and glue your eyeballs to the screen so that you can be sold the fake diabetes cures, and crypto grifts.

Allowing anybody other than badly desired super-creators to automate distribution of what the make to the social media site, and especially to easily create a path through which readers could bypass the social media site in the future, was 100% opposed to the venture-capital advertising-supported money-making purpose of Web2.

So Google kills its "very imperfect" Reader because it wants to trap readers into its *walled garden* called "you know, I actually forget! Google+. Total flop. Facebook and Twitter benefit enormously. Google doesn't t. But, still, it never brings it back, because the idea is figuring out how to trap the eyeballs and then glue them to the screen.

This is why I still hope-against-hope that Web3 is not merely a mindless, pointless set of grifters. And this is why I very much want to back Manton Reese <<http://micro.blog>> and Dave Winer <<http://scripting.com/>> and Chris Best and Hamish McKenzie <<http://substack.org>>, and backed Ev Williams <<https://ev.medium.com/>>, as people with at least a theory about how to make Web3 work, somehow, someday.

And then we might have a good system of an information utility network, and a well functioning public sphere for a modern democracy

Here is the Dave Winer <<http://scripting.com/>> transcript:

**Dave Winer:** I have a lot of thoughts! While Twitter was camped out on top of what remained of the blogosphere and to some extent [it] still [is] the problem was is that if you were writing for a web audience as I was continuously: never stopped then you were coming up against the limits of the distribution systems! Twitter, Facebook, Medium, RSS still, and blogs!. Those for me were the main ones. I wanted my writing to flow through all of those!.

Google Reader. RSS and Google Reader [were] two different things. Because Google Reader only supported a subset and became a very important part of the problem: that there was no common denominator of [a] document: that they would all understand titles, links, simple styling, unlimited or length restrictions, the ability to edit, and enclosures for podcasts!. I became immersed in these things, because I couldn't figure out why I couldn't get all to work together!. In 2017, I gave up, and I just said: I'm just going to make the blogging work the way I wanted it to work!. Very quickly [I] put together the content management system that I had in 1997: no, way better than what I had 97, let's be clear about that. But fundamentally, the same basic idea!.

I could decide whether or not an item was short or long, or [if] it was short and [could] become long. I had an editor that could accommodate all those! and allow me to reorder what was on the homepage!. I could edit it through the day. And then, at the end of the day, it would go out by email. Those were the basic features: unlimited length titles or not: edit[able]! enclosures for podcasts, style links, basic stuff!.

Twitter said initially that posts could only be 140 characters! [and] could not have titles!. Google Reader said posts must have titles right there. You've now had an empty set created!. This is the explanation for why Twitter could not have RSS feeds!.

The problem was that Google Reader called [Twitter's] RSS feeds errors because they didn't have titles. So what they did was they repeated the text of the tweet in the title and in the body!. Google Reader just dumbly displayed both. And then the users complained!. Twitter: if I were them, I totally would have given up!. Google was being Google, the big company, and it didn't give a s#!. That was their positioning statement!. Whenever I tried to talk to the people at Google Reader all I got was a lecture about how busy they were and how they didn't have any time to do anything!. The undertone was: We hate our jobs. We got assigned this!. Here I was the guy who created the medium that they were using!. Those problems have been replicated!. The installed base of feed readers! all basically took their lead from Google Reader!. It's now nine years in and we're still dealing with it!.

Mastodon has RSS feeds. And their feeds do not have titles!. Manton Reese's micro.dot's wonderful work!. He talked them into doing it the right way. And, you know, I was stand up and cheer!.

It wasn't just Google Reader and Twitter!. It was also Facebook!. Facebook had no titles! couldn't do links! no styling, no enclosures. Just plain old text!. When I was cross posting to Facebook! [from] my blog, I was reluctant to use links, because I knew people reading it on Facebook wouldn't see the links!. All these limits and trade offs and bulls! become additive to the point where the writing becomes disgustingly bulls!.. Writing should flow!. I get into a zone when I'm writing!. And [if] you add a bunch of extra bulls"- to it!. I'm not thinking about the thing that I'm writing about. I'm thinking about how do I coax out of this complex, crazy situation of people not listening to each other, and! never listening to writers. It [is] just being stupid or ignorant!. Ignoring what is is what ignorant means, right?!

Now Medium comes along!. Pundits and politicians start treating Medium like it's the place of record!. Unfortunately, it's a money-losing startup! the worst possible choice for on-the-record writing!. It looked great, Medium, beautiful editor. It's a breakthrough in a lot of ways. The one thing you can't do is revise!. I post something to Medium and that's it. If I want to make changes to it, I have to go over there and make the changes by hand.

We may! [be] liberated! but only if we can get some kind of agreement! as to what a document is!. Just support the things!. The question is, what can we learn from the mistakes we made?!. There's no dialogue between developers and users. Users don't put any energy into trying to help developers that want to make software that's for them!. I went to several journalism conferences and said: Look, all I want to do is make software for you. Would you work with me on that?!. In the 80s. And 90s!. Things moved so quickly then! because users and developers were in constant contact!. We knew who we were making products for. And we knew what they wanted!.

There's a great story, Guy Kawasaki! Apple evangelist! comes to a reception that my company had! hands me a piece of paper! from! the new vice president of products at Apple!. The list was the features that every one of my users wanted and [they] were! in the next version of the product, because we were so in tune with them!.

[There] was it was a wonderful time, very brief period that Apple and developers really did do some stuff together, because there were users running the company, and seriously interested in making the software better!. We just need enough users to take an interest in what we're doing and use the product and respond to the new features that we add. And ask for more features. It's really all that we need. It's the food that makes our stuff grow. And then what we can do is we can pass back to you guys!.

We can give you an order of magnitude more functionality. And it works!.

The subtext here: Please don't ever let Google take control of a market again!. It's vulnerable right now!. They all have tried to dominate podcasting!. None of them can do it!. Podcasting is going to stay open. But right now! we're dealing with a post-war blogging platform. We've been through World War III!. Don't ever let them take control again!. When it starts to happen, make sure that you don't go with them. You go with independent developers that are working in your interest!.

I just simply can't believe that I see Google getting ready to come back into RSS land, and I also see users begging them to do it. And! I am shaking my head! that we're going down that road again. No way.

Anyway, I've been talking for 15 minutes and that's long enough. Thanks for listening!

Here is the backstory he is reacting to:

- **John Scalzi:** [How to Weave the Artisan Web](#): "1. Create/reactivate your own site! 2. Write or otherwise present work on your site at least once a week! 3. Regularly visit the sites of other[s]! 4. Promote/link the work of others, on your own site *and also* on your other social media channels! Now, *why* should we bring back that artisan, hand-crafted Web? Oh, I don't know. Wouldn't it be nice to have a site that's not run by an amoral billionaire chaos engine, or algorithmically designed to keep you doomscrolling in a state of fear and anger, or is essentially spyware for governments and/or corporations?"
- **Matthew Yglesias:** [What I learned co-founding Vox](#): "There was and is an audience for explanatory journalism. [But] there weren't customers. Vox was an ad sales business. To serve the needs of advertisers, you needed to serve the needs of the platforms. Everyone complains about having to read through a few hundred words before getting to the recipe. That was because Google gave priority to recipe pages that were structured like real articles. Platform dependence made product innovation essentially impossible. It was also editorially constraining. Most of the media trends [are] direct consequences of Facebook's influence over journalism in the mid-2010s. Hard-core identity politics and simplistic socialism performed incredibly well on Facebook. You ended up with this whole cohort of discourse structured around Bernie Sanders perfect in every way or is it problematic to vote for a white man? as the only possible lens for examining American politics and society!"
- **Brad DeLong:** [A Lost Hope Azt Was Vox.com](#): "When Jackie Calmes moved from the *Wall Street Journal* to the *New York Times* she rapidly went from one of my must-reads to a rarely-read. [Dan Froomkin](#) interviewed her, and she explained why: beat reporting: the pressures you're under to maintain sources; and I felt more pressure of both sidesism! [at] the *New York Times*! [which] bends over backwards. If you're saying Republicans do something wrong you have to indicate that Democrats bear some blame too. It seems to me that it would be much more fun to write explainers than clickbait or beat sweeteners, and find yourself working for your sources first, your bosses second, the advertisers third, and the reader not at all. And yet I have no reason to disbelieve Matt's observation that vox.com could not hold onto reporters by promising them a better-suited if worse-paid place to be their best selves!"
- **Brad DeLong:** [Old-Style Blogging Should Be New Again!](#): "Calls to virtuous collective action need to be carefully crafted to not ask more of the audience than it will be willing to deliver. We need to have an accurate theory of what caused the Fall of the Blogosphere in the first place. Why did the audience and, yes, the creators too succumb to the Siren song, and wind up doomscrolling through clickbait so that their glued-to-the-screen eyeballs could be sold to advertisers convincing them that the worse is actually the better product as they sell their fake diabetes cures and crypto grifts? People shrug and say "attention economy" and "ohuman rapid, response, dopamine loops". Some of them hope Apple's advertising tracking transparency puts us in enough sand in the gears of the advertising-attention machine that we humans can then escape!"
- **Dan Drezner:** [Back to Old School Blogging?](#): "The incentive structure might be shifting back to blogging! Three things killed the old blogosphere: money! Twitter! the smartphone! [which] further encouraged tweet-length ideas over anything longer. Each of these trends has now been partially reversed. The *Washington Post* focus[ing] on news and investigations at the expense of analysis or commentary. Substack has enabled some to earn an income. As for Twitter, well. Finally, Substack's subscription-based distribution has also conquered the phone problem. Folks read blogs as newsletter emails straight to their phone! Maybe incentives are shifting back. And yet, it is not in fact, 2002, but 2022. The money hasn't shifted all that much. I have my doubts about the sustainability of the newsletter economy. Blogosphere superstars [may not be] possible in such a polarized political climate. Consider Mickey Kaus, Andrew Sullivan, and Josh Marshall. It's hard to imagine any of them having a civil conversation these days!"
- **Brad DeLong:** [Aze Washington Post Decides Azt It No Longer Has to Fear Aze Blogosphere. Do Hjinks Ensue?](#): "I disagree that Twitter was a far superior focal point for "finding quick links, reactions, and responses". RSS was the One True Protocol. Admittedly, RSS had a problem amalgamating in presenting a combination of micro, blocking and longer form. But it always seemed to me that hashtags and feed-filtering could easily take care of that: #Microblog, #BlogPost, #Longform. But then Google killed Google reader, and Twitter was there, and became the clown car that stumbled into a gold mine. So perhaps, now we have another chance? Do remember that the original aspiration for <<http://vox.com>> was to take the energy of the blogosphere and expand it out into an organization that would make money and transform the public sphere. [But] you can't do explainer journalism and still be a money-making subcontractor for Google and FaceBook ads unless you already have Ezra's audience and reputation. We are very confident that getting into the advertising-supported game makes it all about impossible to continue doing your best work. And distributing it all for free, well, it is a nonstarter to hope that you can gain a reputation which will then open other doors one of which will be remunerative!"

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