

Voters flock to blog awards site

Voting is under way for the annual Bloggies which recognise the best web blogs - online spaces where people publish their thoughts - of the year.

Nominations were announced on Sunday, but traffic to the official site was so heavy that the website was temporarily closed because of too many visitors. Weblogs have been nominated in 30 categories, from the top regional blog, to the best-kept-secret blog. Blogs had a huge year, with a top US dictionary naming "blog" word of 2004. Technorati, a blog search engine, tracks about six million blogs and says that more than 12,000 are added daily. A blog is created every 5.8 seconds, according to US research think-tank Pew Internet and American Life, but less than 40% of the total are updated at least once every two months.

Nikolai Nolan, who has run the Bloggies for the past five years, told the BBC News website he was not too surprised by the amount of voters who crowded the site. "The awards always get a lot of traffic; this was just my first year on a server with a bandwidth limit, so I had to guess how much I'd need," he said. There were many new finalists this year, he added, and a few that had won Bloggies before. Several entries reflected specific news events. "There are four nominations for the South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami Blog, which is a pretty timely one for 2005," said Mr Nolan.

The big Bloggies battle will be for the ultimate prize of blog of the year. The nominated blogs are wide-ranging covering what is in the news to quirky sites of interest. Fighting it out for the coveted award are Gawker, This Fish Needs a Bicycle, Wonkette, Boing Boing, and Gothamist. In a sign that blogs are playing an increasingly key part in spreading news and current affairs, The South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami Blog is also nominated in the best overall category.

GreenFairyDotcom, Londonist, Hicksdesign, PlasticBag and London Underground Tube Blog are the nominees in the best British or Irish weblog.

Included in the other categories is best "meme". This is for the top "replicating idea that spread about weblogs". Nominations include Flickr, a web photo album which lets people upload, tag, share and publish their images to blogs. Podcasting has also made an appearance in the category. It is an increasingly popular idea that makes use of RSS (really simple syndication) and audio technology to let people easily make their own radio shows, and distribute them automatically onto portable devices.

Many are done by those who already have text-based blogs, so they are almost like audio blogs. Three new categories have been added to the list this year, including best food, best entertainment, and best writing of a weblog. One of the categories that was scrapped though was best music blog. The winners of the fifth annual Bloggies are chosen by the public. Public voting closes on 3 February and the winners will be announced sometime between 13 and 15 March.