This Just In

Web Feeds for Enhanced Library Services

Gerry McKiernan
gerrymck@iastate.edu

Gerry McKiernan *is a
Science and Technology
Librarian and
Bibliographer at Iowa State
University, Ames, with
specialization in selected
fields of engineering. He
has also served as the
Museum Librarian of the
Carnegie Museum of
Natural History in
Pittsburgh, Pa., and as an
Assistant Librarian with
the Library of the New York
Botanical Garden in the
Bronx, New York.*

*Here a blog, there a blog, everywhere
a blog.*

It seems that every journal, newspaper, maga-
zine, and news Web site is highlighting weblogs.
In the first half of 2004 alone, dozens of stories
have appeared about blogs: *Time* invited read-
ers to "Meet Joe Blog," *Library Journal* profiled
the free UThink blog service recently initiated by
the University of Minnesota Library, and *PC
Magazine Online* reviewed the audio blog
service from AudioBlog.[1] The *New York Times*
reported on the proliferation of blog use by
teenagers and blog addiction.[2] Perhaps most
telling was the extensive coverage on the use of
blogs by presidential candidates in, for exam-
ple, *National Journal.* Equally striking is the
extensive use of blogs by the media themselves
as an "emerging alternative" to reporting and a
"new source of news."

As defined by the Wikipedia, a weblog (or
simply a blog) is "a website which contains
periodic, reverse chronologically ordered posts
on a common Web page. The format of weblogs
varies, from simple bullet lists of hyperlinks, to
article summaries with user-provided comments
and ratings. Individual weblog entries are
almost always date and time-stamped, with the
newest post at the top of the page."[3]

School Blogs

While politicians, reporters, and teenagers have
recognized blogs as an effective mechanism for
disseminating personal, institutional, or organi-
zational news, an increasing number of elemen-
tary, middle, and high schools have created blogs
to promote local events and classroom activities.
Students at the Randolph Elementary School in
Arlington, Virginia, publish their poetry on a
classroom blog. The Meriwether Lewis
Elementary School in Portland, Oregon, uses a
blog format for its homepage to provide school
news and links to related information, and at the
Hangleton Community Junior School in Hove,
East Sussex, England <www.hangleton-jun.
brighton-hove.sch.uk/index.htm>, teachers and
students have developed a variety of blogs. Will
Richardson, supervisor of instructional technol-
ogy and communications at Hunterdon Central
Regional High School (HCRHS) in Flemington,
New Jersey, and self-described "blogvangelist,"
provides a blog that offers not only regular news
for Journalism 1 at HCRHS but also links to class
information and notes, journalism sites and
resources, and major media Web sites.

Library Blogs

The use of blogs is not limited, however, to
school news and class assignments. An increas-
ing number of libraries at educational institu-
tions have created blogs to promote a wide
range of services and collections. The HCRHS
blog, for example, includes brief news items for
recent and future library events as well as links
to research guides, recommended Web sites,
and profiles of new books. In Illinois, the
Suburban Library System uses a blog format to
provide news to its membership of several
dozen academic, public, school, and special
libraries.[4]

Blogging Software

To create blogs, individuals, organizations, and libraries use specialized software or blog services, or they may design Web pages that have features and functionalities similar to those of a blog. Among the more common blogging tools or services are LiveJournal, Manila, MoveableType, and TypePad. One of the most common blogging tools is Blogger, a free or fee-based blogging service now owned by Google.

Web Feeds

Many blogs offer "[t]he latest headlines, with hyperlinks and summaries . . . in the RSS XML-format, to be read with a RSS feedreader." Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication (RSS), is an XML format for the sharing of content among different Web sites. Through an RSS web feed or other feed type, such as Atom, new and updated Web site content is sent automatically to subscribed users, thus significantly reducing the need to individually revisit sites of interest for changes or additions. In addition to

their availability within blogs, web feeds are offered as well by major state, regional, national, and international broadcast, print, and Web-based publications and services. Current news sites that syndicate all or part of their content include ABCNews.com, BBCNews.com, and MSNBCNews.com, as well as online versions of the *New York Times,* the *Wall Street Journal,* and the *Washington Post.* In addition, search engines such as Yahoo!, e-commerce sites such as Amazon.com, auction sites such as eBay, and presidential candidate blogs such as

Blog Resources

Aggregators <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/tech/directory/5/aggregators>
AmphetaDesk <www.disobey.com/amphetadesk>
Atom <www.atomenabled.org>
AudioBlog <www.audioblog.com>
Blogger <www.blogger.com>
Blogging software <http://radio.weblogs.com/0107846/stories/2002/10/03/blogSoftware.html>
Bloglines <www.bloglines.com>
Chicago Multitype Library System <www.chilibsys.org>
Edmonton (Canada) Public Library web feed <www.winterstorm.ca/download/epl_video.rss>
FeedDemon <www.bradsoft.com/feeddemon>
FeedReader <www.feedreader.com>
Hangleton Community Junior School <www.hangletonweblogs.org>
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library web feeds <http://lbxml.ust.hk/na/books.xml>, <http://lbxml.ust.hk/na/media.xml>
Hunterdon Central Library blog, <http://central.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/imc>
Hunterdon Central Regional High School <www.weblogg-ed.com>, <http://weblogs.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/journ1>
Library blogs <www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/index.shtml?links.html>, <www.libdex.com/weblogs.html>
LiveJournal <www.livejournal.com>
Lunar and Planetary Institute library <www.lpi.usra.edu/library/new.xml>

Manila <http://manila.userland.com>
Meriwether Lewis Elementary School <http://lewiselementary.org>
Metropolitan Library System <www.mls.lib.il.us>
Minneapolis Public Library 'The List' web feed <www.mplib.org/listnew.rss>
Moraine Valley, Illinois) Community College Library web feed <www2.sls.lib.il.us/MVCC/searchtips/index.xml>
Moveable Type <www.movabletype.org>
National University of Ireland, Galway, Library web feed <http://rss.library.nuigalway.ie/rdf/all-new-books.rdf>
NetNewsWire <http://ranchero.com/netnewswire>
News aggregator definition <http://davenet.scripting.com/2002/10/08/whatIsANewsAggregator>
NewsDesk <www.wildgrape.net>
NewsIsFree <www.newsisfree.com>
NewsIsFree Top News <www.newsisfree.com/sources/bycat/1>
Ohio University, Athens, library web feeds <www.library.ohiou.edu/subjects/businessblog/wp-rss2.php>, <www.library.ohiou.edu/refblog/wp-rss2.php>
OhioLINK Electronic Journal Center <http://journals.ohiolink.edu/rsshelp.html>
Pluck <www.pluck.com>
Radio UserLand <http://radio.userland.com>
Randolph Elementary School <www.arlington.k12.va.us/schools/randolph/weblogs>

Royal Holloway, University of London web feed <http://library.rhul.ac.uk/rss-feeds/recentlibraryserialissues.xml>
RSS definition <www.webopedia.com/TERM/R/RSS.html>
Safari RSS <www.apple.com/macosx/tiger/safari.html>
SharpReader <www.sharpreader.net>
State of Hawaii, Legislative Reference Bureau web feeds <www.hawaii.gov/lrb/rss/art.xml>, <www.hawaii.gov/lrb/rss/req.xml>, <www.hawaii.gov/lrb/reports/libdocs.html>
Suburban Library System <www.sls.lib.il.us>
TypePad <www.typepad.com>
University of Alberta (Canada) library <www.library.ualberta.ca/studenttraining>
University of Louisville Libraries web feeds <www.library.louisville.edu/users/mopurc01/rss/index.asp>
University of Tennessee Libraries, Alpha Channel web feed <www.lib.utk.edu/mt/weblogs/studio/index.xml>
University of Winnipeg Library and Information Services web feed, <http://blog.uwinnipeg.ca/InfoResources/index.rdf>
UThink <http://blog.lib.umn.edu>
Weblog definition <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog>
Wikipedia <www.wikipedia.org>
Will Richardson <www.weblogg-ed.com/about>

John Kerry for President <www.johnkerry.com> also offer web feeds. The availability of a web feed for a site is indicated by one of more button icons, which are usually found near the top, bottom, or side of a page. A web feed also may be noted with a hotlinked word or phrase, such as "Syndicate" or "Syndicate This Page."

News Aggregators and Feed Readers

One of the more common methods by which news feeds are read is through use of a news aggregator, or reader. As defined by David Winer, a developer of original and current web feed formats (scriptingNews, RSS 0.92, and RSS 2.0), a "news aggregator" is "software that periodically reads a set of news sources, in one of several XML-based formats, finds the new bits, and displays them in reverse-chronological order on a single page."[5] AmphetaDesk, Bloglines, FeedDemon, FeedReader, NetNewsWire, NewsDesk, NewsIsFree, Radio UserLand, and SharpReader are among the popular free or fee-based aggregators for news feeds. With the incorporation of a newsreader in Apple's forthcoming Safari RSS web browser, one can anticipate similar enhancements in other Web browsers, and an associated increase in the use and application of feeds.

Feeds need not be limited to news or accessible from news aggregators. Using many of these readers, as well as others (such as Pluck) individuals can subscribe to web feeds of interest to create a customized, personal portal. Depending on the particular reader, users can subscribe to select web feeds in a couple of ways: by double clicking the RSS feed option; or by clicking and copying the URL from the displayed page and pasting the associated address into the reader. Some readers also allow users to subscribe to a web feed by simply dragging and dropping the associated web feed icon into the reader.

School and Library Web Feeds

The current major use of web feeds by schools and libraries is to alert subscribers to current activities.[6] For example, the Suburban Library System features a web feed on its site, as do many libraries with blogs. The HCRHS central library not only offers offer a web feed for announcements and news, but students enrolled in Journalism 1 at the school can also subscribe to an associated feed for course updates.

Enhanced Services

Some libraries have also recognized the potential of feeds for enhancing conventional library functions or services. For example, in addition to providing Internet resource guides in HTML (or other formats), some libraries provide feeds for their Internet resource guides, such as that made by the Minneapolis Public Library for The List, its compendium of Web resources. A number of libraries provide web feeds that notify subscribers of new acquisitions, including books, CDs, and videos. Libraries that offer such services include the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the National University of Ireland library in Galway, and the University of Louisville Libraries. Feeds for newly added videos have also been created from records available from the online catalog of the Edmonton Public Library in Canada. The State of Hawaii, Legislative Reference Bureau, selects feeds for agency reports and recent acquisitions, while the library of the Lunar and Planetary Institute in Houston, Texas, offers a feed that includes recent additions to the collection as well as new and noteworthy items.

E-Journals and Table of Contents Services

Feeds for new acquisitions are not limited to books, other monograph works, or media. For example, Hawaii's Legislative Reference Bureau supplies a feed of citations for select professional journal articles in addition to feeds for institutional publications, while the library of the Royal Holloway, University of London, offers feeds for all recently received journal issues and feeds for individual titles. OhioLINK, the statewide consortium, provides feeds for all journals available from its Electronic Journal Center.

Instruction and Reference

Several libraries have begun to use web feeds to promote instructional and reference services. The University of Alberta library added a feed for its library and instruction program page, while the University of Tennessee (UT) libraries offer a feed for Alpha Channel, a "guide to library multimedia services for the UT teaching & learning community." In the arena of reference services, Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, includes a feed for its business blog as well as one for its general reference service. The Moraine Valley (Ill.) Community College library provides a feed for resources and search tips that profiles key print, electronic, and Internet resources, and the University of Winnipeg Library and Information Services department offers a feed with descriptions of major reference sources.

Potential Possibilities

Other library functions and services could also be enhanced through a broader application and implementation of web feeds. The review of newly published and forthcoming titles by selectors and bibliographers could be significantly expedited if publishers and book vendors provided feeds for individual titles and disciplines.[7] If electronic journals syndicated their content, users could choose to receive desktop notification for all potentially relevant articles by journal title or discipline.[8] Ideally, such services would also allow subscribers to receive personalized feeds based on a saved search strategy. Likewise, the assessment, use, and integration of search results could be significantly improved if database and OPAC vendors offered a web feed option.

As observed by Roddy MacLeod, senior subject librarian at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland, "there are several practical ways in which the LIS community can both exploit the content of RSS, and improve their services through the presentation and re-presentation of RSS feeds. These do not amount to a revolution, but rather represent a step on the path to better information services, and one which takes advantage of advances in technology."[9] ●

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