

# Blogging for Change

By Rebecca MacKinnon

For regularly updated resources and discussion of blogging and participatory media tools, visit my blog at: [www.Rconversation.com](http://www.Rconversation.com).

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## WHAT IS A BLOG?

**Definition by the online peer-produced encyclopedia, Wikipedia.**  
(visit: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog> for more detailed explanation of blog features, plus relevant links)

"A weblog, or simply a blog, is a web application which contains periodic, reverse chronologically ordered posts on a common webpage. Such a Web site would typically be accessible to any Internet user. Part of the reason "blog" was coined and commonly accepted into use is the fact that in saying "blog," confusion with server log is avoided.

Blogs run from individual diaries to arms of political campaigns, media programs and corporations, and from one occasional author to having large communities of writers. The totality of weblogs or blog-related webs is usually called the blogosphere.

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. Because links are so important to weblogs, most blogs have a way of archiving older entries and generating a static address for individual entries; this static link is referred to as a permalink. The latest headlines, with hyperlinks and summaries, are offered in weblogs in the RSS XML-format, to be read with a RSS feedreader.

A weblog is often run through a content management system or CMS."

## EXAMPLES OF ACTIVIST/NON-PROFIT BLOGS:

Info-Commons blog at <http://www.info-commons.org/blog>

commons-blog

November 08, 2004

### More Maps of the U.S. Presidential Election Results

A few days ago I linked to a [collection of maps at The Big Picture](#) portraying the results of the U.S. Presidential election in various ways. How we represent the results of the election matters. The [dominant graphic image](#) of the outcome—a map showing a stark contrast between red Republican states commanding the center and south of the country and blue Democrat states that take up significantly less area on the coasts—reinforces the mistaken impression of a sharply divided country in which Republicans are an overwhelming majority with a clear mandate to govern as they see fit. That simply is not true.

No map can adequately present the complexity of national politics, but some of those linked above provide useful correctives to the simplistic Red vs. Blue model. Take a look at the [Proportional Electoral Map](#), which uses the number of electoral votes in each State to determine the size each should be in relation to the others. This map shows more accurately the balance of electoral votes between the two major parties. Another map, [Purple America](#), still portrays the States by their relative geographic size, but instead of using stark red and blue depending upon who won the state, it uses shades of purple to indicate the relative split of the vote. This map suggests we are living in a sea of purple (States more or less equally divided between Democrat and Republican) with just a few States tending to be a bit more red (Republican) or a bit more blue (Democrat).

Another site by some folks at the University of Michigan [demonstrates](#) how adjusting for both population and relative division of ballots takes us from the standard Red vs. Blue map to a much different picture.

XML  
[Subscribe this site \(RSS\)](#)

CALENDAR

November 2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

ABOUT

commons-blog is an American Library Association-sponsored site collecting news, discussion, and commentary related to the information commons in theory and practice, along with announcements of updates to the [info-commons.org main site](#). commons-blog is edited by Frederick Emrich, who posts with the byline [info-commons](#).

CONTACT

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## Public Knowledge blog at [www.publicknowledge.org](http://www.publicknowledge.org)

Public Knowledge

Take Action Donate Sign Up Login

Home About Issues News & Analysis Resources Press Room

Public Knowledge is a Washington DC based advocacy group working to defend your rights in the emerging digital culture. [More about PK](#) »

### Take Action

> **Join Our Fax Brigade**  
[Stop the Senate from Rewriting Copyright Law. Before You Become a Criminal!](#)  
The recording industry and Hollywood are making headway! Threatening bills may still come up for a vote in the Senate and we need your help, now.  
[Participate in the action](#) »

### Hot Issues

> **MPAA v. Alleged File Traders**  
Latest: [Statement of Gigi B. Sohn, president of Public Knowledge, on announcement by the Motion Picture Association of America that it plans to sue P2P File Traders](#) [Press Release]

> **The Intellectual Property Protection Act** PK OPPOSES  
Latest: [CREATE Act of 2004](#) [US Senate]

[More hot issues](#) »

### Breaking News

> **Music sharing that's free and legal**  
A new twist on file sharing is holding out the promise of allowing

### Resource Rooms

- > [Policymakers](#)
- > [Artists](#)
- > [Press](#)

### Essentials

- > [Why these issues matter](#)
- > [What is copyright?](#)
- > [What is the public domain?](#)

### Hot Issues

- > [MPAA v. Alleged File Traders](#)
- > [The Intellectual Property Protection Act](#)

### Upcoming Events

- > [Gigi B. Sohn at Communications Law 2004](#) Thu. November 18, New York, NY
- > [Patent &](#)

Desertlight Journal (on domestic violence awareness) at:  
<http://desertlightjournal.blog-city.com/>

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Desertlight Journal website. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <http://weblogs.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1>. The page header includes the site title "DESERTLIGHT JOURNAL" and the subtitle "Domestic Violence Resources for the Whole Community". The main content area features a post from 11-05-04 titled "OFFLINE" with a text update and a "read more" link. Below it is a post from 11-04-04 titled "EMPTY SHOES: A WAY TO REMEMBER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS" with a text update and a "read more" link. The left sidebar lists "FULL AWARENESS RESOURCES" and "DISINFORMATION SITES". The right sidebar lists "INFORMATION" and "ERIN PIZZBY".

Examples of other blogs:

political blogs:

Instapundit – leans Republican. (300,000 readers per day) [www.Instapundit.com](http://www.Instapundit.com)

Daily Kos – very liberal Democrat (800,000 per day) [www.dailykos.com](http://www.dailykos.com)

“Milblogs”: GI’s blogging from the field:

Sargeant Hook: <http://www.sgthook.com/>

Mudville Gazette: <http://www.mudvillegazette.com/>

General blogs by “influential” people who have been blogging for years:

Joi Ito: <http://joi.ito.com>

Dave Winer: [www.scripting.com](http://www.scripting.com)

International blogs:

“Healing Iraq” by an opinionated Iraqi dentist <http://healingiraq.blogspot.com/>

“Hoder” the Iranian dissident blogger: <http://hoder.com/weblog/>

My blogs:

North Korea zone: [www.NKzone.org](http://www.NKzone.org)

Personal notebook: [www.RConversation.com](http://www.RConversation.com)

## WHAT BLOGS CAN DO FOR YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION THAT ORDINARY WEBSITES CAN'T:

- Handy blogging tools and blog-hosting services enable small groups (or individual activists) with little or no funding to set up a professional-looking site in under an hour without needing to pay web design or other technical professionals.
- Blog-tools enable non-technical people in your organization to update blogs – from the office, home, or field - without the help of webmasters, web-designers or other “tech” people.
- Blogs help you to build your “information community” with like-minded individuals and organizations by cross-linking to their sites.
- “Google juice:” The traffic generated by cross-linking creates much higher Google-search rankings for blogs than for all but the most popular websites.
- If you enable visitors to leave comments to your entries, blogs allow you to easily interact with the people who visit your site, enabling them to participate in a discussion about what you do, thus encouraging their participation or support for your activities.
- The easy way in which weblog content can be syndicated and read in newsreader programs (like My Yahoo! or Bloglines) enables you to get your information out there on a more equal footing than ever before.
- Password-protected blogs can be used for internal communications and knowledge management within an organization, or between funders and grantees. (More effective in some instances than email listservs.)

## ELEMENTS OF A GOOD BLOG:

- **Message:** You must know what message or messages you want to communicate and why.
- **Desire and need:** You must have a desire – and the need – to do a better job at communicating. (In other words, if you are totally happy with the way in which you communicate your message to your colleagues, funders, constituencies, and the public, then there is no need to have a blog!)
- **A clear goal:** Know what you want to accomplish with your blog. It may evolve over time to accomplish things you hadn't expected, but without a clear focus at the beginning you won't develop traffic because people who visit the site will see it has no focus.
- **An audience:** This may just be your funders, your members, or the people in your immediate community – or it may be a global community of people who share concern for your issue. But you need to have some idea who you are speaking to. (If your blog is public you'll gain audience from unexpected places, but you must at least start out knowing that you have something to communicate to SOMEBODY who is interested in hearing about it.)
- **Commitment:** You need at least one person in your organization who is committed to updating the blog regularly with clear, interesting writing and useful links. The material may be pre-existing, it may or may not be a full-time job, but the blog will not succeed without somebody's committed efforts.

## RESOURCE LINKS:

A CONSTANTLY-UPDATED RESOURCE PAGE: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/xdev/cgi-bin/wiki.pl?BlogWiki> (or go to [www.RConversation.com](http://www.RConversation.com) and click on the 1<sup>st</sup> link at the top right).

### BASIC HOW-TO'S:

- Blogging for Nonprofits: <http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/section/466.html>
- How to increase your blog's readership:  
[http://wolves.typepad.com/wolves/2004/04/getting\\_noticed.html](http://wolves.typepad.com/wolves/2004/04/getting_noticed.html)

### Blogging tools:

- (for a more complete list see: <http://www.lights.com/weblogs/tools.html> and <http://www.globeofblogs.com/?x=tools>)
- For a very detailed breakdown of blog tool features see:  
<http://www.asymptomatic.net/blogbreakdown.htm>

### Incomplete list of some popular tools:

**1. Easy "Hosted" blog tools (on the blog-service provider's server, so you don't need to have your own server-space or know how to install programs on it).**

Blogger: <http://www.blogger.com>

Typepad: <http://www.typepad.com>

Blog-City: <http://www.blog-city.com>

Blogware: <http://blog.blogware.com/blog> (via re-sellers listed on their site)

### 2. "Community-oriented" blogging tools:

Livejournal: <http://livejournal.com>

Xanga: <http://xanga.com>

Diaryland: <http://diaryland.com>

Journalspace: <http://journalspace.com>

### 3. For "Advanced users" or those who have IT professionals working with or for them:

Movable Type: <http://www.movabletype.org/>

Manila: <http://manila.userland.com>

RadioUserland: <http://radio.userland.com>

ExpressionEngine: <http://www.pmachine.com>

pMachine Free and Pro: <http://www.pmachine.com>

### 4. "Open-souce" tools:

Bloxsom: <http://www.bloxsom.com>

Wordpress: <http://wordpress.org>

Scoop: <http://scoop.kuro5hin.org/>