

BLOGS-Another Online Resource.

By Bev Butula, reference librarian at Davis & Kuelthau, s.c. in Milwaukee.

Exposure to information is constant in the legal field. Keeping current on recent decisions, pending legislation and trends is imperative. A Weblog, the latest online phenomenon, may reduce scouring the Internet, newspapers, and topical resources for this type of knowledge. But, what is a Weblog? Why are they created? And most importantly, can reading a Weblog benefit a legal practice?

What is a Weblog?

Blogger.com (www.blogger.com), a site offering individuals the ability to establish their own blog, provides this simple definition – A Weblog (commonly referred to as a blog) “is a web page made up of usually short, frequently updated posts that are arranged chronologically – like a what’s new page or a journal. The contents and purposes of blogs varies greatly – from links and commentary about other web sites, to news about a company/person/idea.”¹

Posts to a blog commonly consist of a title, a brief commentary, excerpt or summary, and a link to the specific information discussed. Entries can be instantaneous, allowing bloggers (owners of a blog) to update their site as news breaks or decisions become available. To understand the format, here is an actual post from beSpacific.com (www.beSpacific.com), a blog maintained by Sabrina Pacifici, which focuses on law and technology:

January 06, 2004 – **Web Resource Guide for Researchers**

From blogger, author, speaker

Marcus P. Zillman, this well-vetted subject oriented resource guide (www.DirectoryResources.info) to portals, websites and blogs on topics that include economics and business, government and statistics, law, medicine, news and engineering.²

Why are legal Weblogs created?

The genesis of a legal blog (sometimes referred to as a “blawg”) usually falls into one of following categories: (1) the desire to provide a personal perspective on current issues the author finds important; (2) create a community of topical information, allowing news, decisions, etc. to be organized and accessed easily; (3) as a marketing tool to introduce others to the firm; and, of course, (4) a combination of all three.

Some bloggers start their page to voice opinions. These blogs may be politically based or solely an expression of the author’s views and interests. Blake Carver, a librarian and founder of LISNews (www.lisnews.com) an information science blog, explains that “blogs provide like-minded people with an endless stream of timely stories and links.”³

Many legal blogs serve as a central location for breaking issues in a particular area of law. Blogs exist for the real estate attorney, the IP specialist, the federal litigator, and the family lawyer. Many blogs contain links to information that may not be located easily. Researchers gather Web sites, evaluate them, and post them on a blog creating “one stop shopping” for topical resources.

A quality, easily read blog has been an inexpensive, but highly effective, marketing tool for some bloggers. A superior blog can get thousands of hits, resulting in recognition of the author as an authority in the area.

The motivation to create a blog can be as simple as the author’s need to communicate opinions. It may be the desire to centralize valuable information on a particular legal topic. It may be a marketing tool. Or, the person responsible may consider all these when starting the blog. Regardless of the reasoning, blogs get information out to the masses via the Web.

Can reading a legal Weblog benefit a law practice?

Blogs fashioned to report personal or political opinions can benefit individuals with similar beliefs. The focus of this section, however, will be on topical Weblogs. As with all information from the Web, authority is important – so check the author. Fortunately, legal scholars, judges, law librarians, and lawyers with reputations as experts maintain most of these specialty blogs.

A good blog can enhance professional development because keeping informed translates into good business. Law journals, newsletters, magazines and newspapers can accumulate in an office, often read only when a large block of time becomes available. Office routings can be slow in arriving. On the other hand, reading a Weblog (or possibly having it delivered to your email) offers a concise current

(continued on page 12 ►)

specialized summary of relevant information. And, unlike the routings or journals, a link (if included) supplements the piece by leading the reader to a decision, opinion letter, or full text article.

The structure of these practice-oriented blogs allows the reader to skim the summaries and quickly determine which entries to read and which to skip. The author has done all the searching and weeded out the false hits, saving the reader's valuable time.

Look at a few legal Weblogs to understand the structure and benefits:

Ernie the Attorney –
<http://www.ernietheattorney.net/>

How Appealing –
[http://appellateblog.blogspot.com\](http://appellateblog.blogspot.com/)

beSpacific – www.bespacific.com

Jurist – www.jurist.law.pitt.edu

Statutory construction zone –
www.statconblog.blogspot.com

Lawsites –
<http://www.legaline.com/lawsites.html>

Benefitsblog –
<http://www.benefitscounsel.com/benefitsblog/>

Inter Alia – <http://www.inter-alia.net/>

Securities litigation watch –
<http://slw.issproxy.com/>

SCOTUSBLOG –
<http://www.goldsteinhowe.com/blog/>

Employer's lawyer –
<http://employerslawyer.blogspot.com/>

May it please the court –
<http://www.mayitpleasethecourt.net>

bLAWg Search –
<http://blawgs.detod.com/>

The blog explosion does present some concern. Critics worry that the layperson may interpret the blog analysis as legal advice. In response, many bloggers have added disclaimers. Others worry that a blogger's commentary may appear as part of an opposing counsel's argument. Authors with topically based sites typically circumvent this problem by eliminating personal remarks.⁴

Topical blogs are a great resource for immediate access to "hot topics" and research hints. Reading a quality blog can translate into enormous time savings. It is important, however, to evaluate it for currency, authority and user friendliness.

Summary

Weblogs are a new trend in the online

world. Legal bloggers produce a compilation of facts and resources pertaining to a specific legal area. They search the web for current information and put it in a single location. As an offshoot, many have found their blogs to be great marketing tools. If currency is important to your professional growth, check out a blog or, better yet, start one!

Endnotes:

1 Blogger.com.
<http://new.blogger.com/about.pyra>
(accessed January 28, 2004)

2 Pacifici, Sabrina. beSpacific.com.
<http://www.bespacific.com/mt/archives/004666.html#004666> (accessed January 13, 2004)

3 Carver, Blake, *Is it time to get blogging?* Library Journal Winter 2003 NetConnect, v. 128 no. 1 p. 30, at <http://www.libraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=article&articleid=CA266428>

4 Stephanie Francis Ward, *Bemused about blogging*, 29 A.B.A. J. E-Report 3 (July 25, 2003) 

"Reprinted with permission of the May 2004 Wisconsin Lawyer, the official publication of the State Bar of Wisconsin, and the author."

Treasurer's Report

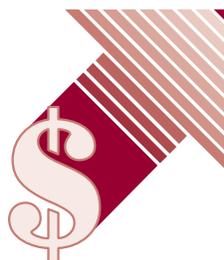
August 31, 2004

By Bob Miller
Murphy Desmond S.C.

1. 2004 Year to Date: Your Association is in the middle of a very successful year from both a program and financial standpoint. Strong Vendor and Member Support has allowed the Association to expand its offerings of member benefits. We are on solid financial ground which will enable us to continue our efforts to provide a wide range of member benefits. Your support of our vendors will help to ensure that we can continue to provide the expanded benefits.

2. Board Report: Financial Reports were presented to and approved by the Board for year to date 2004 activity at its August meeting.

3. Compliance Activities: Our bank statements are reconciled on a monthly basis by an independent administrator. We will be having an annual audit in the near future. 



CASPER
coffee & vending

Ron Mottl
vice president

6746 n. sidney place
glendale, wi 53209

414.228.6500
fax 414.228.6571
email ron@caspercoffee.com
www.caspercoffee.com

complete vending
office coffee service
water systems