

DIARISTS HAVE APPEARED from generation to generation relating their experiences and ideas for us to learn from, admire, or just

be amused by. Great names that spring to mind are author Samuel Pepys, Roman emperor Julius Caesar, and marine captain R. F. Scott. What made these people stand out was that there was a publishing process standing between their thoughts and the general public. In order for their writings to have reached a larger audience, they had to be deemed worthy.

The Internet has changed all that. Compare these two entries: “I am just going outside and may be some time.” – The last words of Captain Lawrence Oates (1880-1912) as quoted in R. F. Scott’s diary. And: “Wow, have I not updated my journal since September? Unbelievable! [sic] So much to tell! Vacation was great.” – Extract from “Dougie’s Journal” on LiveJournal.com.


These days, all you need for your thoughts to be published for a wide audience is an Internet account and a “blog” (short for weblog). Broadly, blogs are diaries posted on the Internet for the world to read.

The blogging trend has become enormously popular in recent years. “Blogosphere” is a new word that has been coined to describe the world of blogging. To give you an idea of how many blogs there are, Blogcount, a website that gauges the size of the blogosphere, estimated in June last year that there were 3,471,464 registered blogs, with 1,631,535 of those being actively updated.

They come in all sorts of languages, even Icelandic – with an estimated 3,542 blogs in that language. Not bad for a country that boasts a population of just under 300,000 people. Obviously the human desire to be heard is not going away.

Most individual blogs are very personal in nature, with entries such as: “...my mother is annoying me to no end as usual. I never have time to get anything done anymore.” Entries like this, which is taken

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Just finished the piece... gonna shoot it off by email as soon as I've put up this entry. Hope she likes it, but you never know. Got in most of the points that she wanted... I heard somewhere that smileys are out of fashion, but I like them anyway so I'll finish with one :) Mood: chilled.

from a blog that popped up after a random search on Google, are commonplace. Or how about: "for the first time in my life I am not looking forward to christmas [sic]. I don't know what to buy anyone". In the best traditions of the Internet, correct punctuation and spelling are optional.

But it would be unfair to tar all blogs with the same brush. While a cursory glance through the majority will reveal personal subject matter, there is such a wide variety of blogs that it should be possible to find at least one to suit any palate. Even US presidential candidates are posting their thoughts in blogs.

Famous writers such as Dave Barry, columnist with The Miami Herald, maintain their own blogs. Other blogs are used as travelogues for friends and family to keep track of their loved ones as they tour the world, presumably from cyber café to cyber café. And travel blogs can be very handy in that they often include useful links, such as accommodation and tour recommendations.

Almost all blogs have fans. Just like reality TV has become required viewing for many people, so blogs have become required reading. It is a strange collision of voyeurism and narcissism, but, like many things on the Internet, it has found its own ecological niche and has grown and grown.

Despite the bathos of the sort of entries quoted above, there is a more serious side to blogging. Some businesses are adopting the process as a way to disseminate ideas and information among their staff. Blogs in business are a great way for project team members to keep each other updated about recent accomplishments and directions. After all, one of the main problems with internal communications these days is that people are overwhelmed by the volume of email

and some just get buried in the mass. With a blog the questions and answers are there for all to see.

Got a problem with your software, a question about the project, or just want some general info? Add an entry on your company's internal blog and maybe someone out there has the answer, without clogging up the email system. It's like a new, improved and, above all, constantly updated FAQ.

The year 2003 even saw the business community getting together to discuss how best to use blogs. ClickZ Weblog Business Strategies 2003 Conference & Expo was billed as "the first business-oriented forum to address the recent emergence of weblogs into the business world and their rising importance as a medium of communication".

Supplying the solutions to make blogs happen is a serious business. To run a very basic blog you need HTML skills and a space on the Internet to put the pages housing your erudite thoughts. If you are a little more serious, you might want to join a blogging community such as LiveJournal.com. Here you will be amongst others who, at the very least, share your interest in blogging, and likely whatever other hobbies or habits that you have. ■

GETTING STARTED

There are three ways to enter the blogosphere.

First you can have your own web page, which you can update regularly. The second way is to sign up with hosts such as LiveJournal.com, which offer free memberships, with limited features. If the blogging bug takes hold, you might want to upgrade to a paid membership and get more advanced features such as customisable pages and email addresses. People can read your thoughts by logging on to the host site.

If blogging is for business purposes, companies need to buy or create their own blogging software and set it up on their servers for internal staff use.

Pages from the blogosphere:

A blog collection – www.livejournal.com

Blog related resources – www.theblogsite.com

CNN journalist's blog – www.kevinsites.net

The business of blogging – www.bloggingworks.com

blogswww.worldhum.com/weblog.cfm