

Internet Graffiti:

Blogs, Wikis, YouTube, and How to Get Teen Voices Online

By Amy Paterson

Though adult patrons may primarily use the Internet as a passive information resource, for teens, it can also be an active creative outlet. Time Magazine's declaration of "You," as Person of the Year in 2006 (Grossman), marked a shift in the general public from Internet consumers to content creators. In a Pew Internet study from the previous year, 57% of teens reported creating some form of content for the Internet (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). Web 2.0 tools, in addition to connecting friends and family, provide resources to instantly create and publish content; even the most alienated, frustrated, and ignored teen can

share their thoughts and ideas with the world for free and with little technical know-how.

The library is safe, comfortable, and a great space for teens to experiment with blogs, wikis, or creating their own website or YouTube channel. Research has shown that content creation in virtual spaces creates community portals where teens can "engage in public discourse, explore identity, and acquire new skills" (Chau, 2010, p. 65). This section will discuss some of the major creative outlets available on the Web, as well as how libraries can capitalize on these tools to encourage and involve teen patrons.

Web logs

The major advantage of web logs—or blogs, as they are most commonly called—is that they allow users to create and update their own

unique web space without knowledge of HTML code. Before social networking websites, such as Facebook or MySpace, teens

could add friends on LiveJournal to see updates, make comments, and join communities with shared interests. In 2005, a Pew Internet study found that 19% of teenagers surveyed reported keeping blogs, and those who blogged were at least twice as likely to engage in other types of Internet content creation, such as creating a personal web page or sharing knowledge or creativity with other Internet users (Lenhart & Madden).

Some blogging sites, like the aforementioned LiveJournal, are geared towards social networking and following friends; many users will privatize their blogs, rather than showcasing them, which can be viewed as a distinct advantage of the site over other inescapably public social networking platforms. Others like WordPress, Tumblr, and Blogger link users to the global community; though friends can be added to a *Blogroll*—a list of links to favourite or frequently-visited blogs—entries are more commonly public than restricted or private.

WordPress, in addition to providing free blogs under the wordpress.com domain, is also a powerful open source content management system, available to users who have purchased their own domain. Existing layouts can be used or edited by anyone, and anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of PHP can try their hand at creating their own custom layout that can be incorporated into any web site.

Hot Tip!

Book Blog

Create a YA literature blog at the library. Teen patrons can submit reviews or thoughts on what they're reading to reduce or eliminate overdue fines. Or just for fun!

Recent studies show that blog use has decreased among teenagers since 2005; a 2010 study reported that now only 14% of teens blog. (Brodkin) This may be partially due to the growing popularity of social networking sites among the demographic: 72% of teen respondents reported using social networking sites, the most popular being Facebook (Brodkin, 2010).

However, though down among teens, the blog medium is growing overall, and teens still represent one of the largest user groups

Depending on the interest and tech savvy of the interested teen patrons, there are a number of ways that libraries can encourage blog use and content creation on the Internet. A first step would be publishing a simple how-to guide, so teens would be aware of how to set up a blog for themselves.

Alternatively, one of your more tech-minded librarians (or one of your teen patrons) could run a blogging workshop, showing teens not only how to set up a blog, but also

demonstrating some of the lesser-known or more advanced features. If your teens are already whizzes at blogging and blog-creation, they may be interested in learning how to create their own layout templates or in learning HTML to write their own websites.

Popular Blogging Platforms

WordPress

<http://wordpress.com>

A content management system as well as a blogging platform, WordPress is popular with those who want to add blog content to a website.

Blogger

<http://blogger.com>

Harder to customize than WordPress but still very popular and easy to use, Blogger is great both for casual use as well as for blogs with multiple contributors.

Tumblr

<http://tumblr.com>

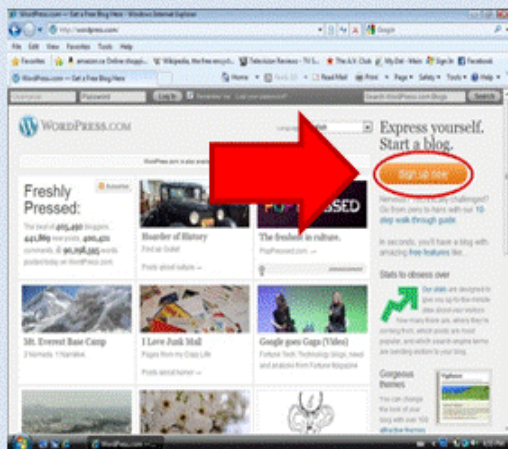
One of the newest players on the scene and one of Time Magazine's "50 Best Websites 2010," Tumblr is best-suited to users transitioning from micro-blogging platforms, such as Twitter. Its mobile application also supports blogging and reading on the go.

LiveJournal

<http://livejournal.com>

Incorporating many interest-based communities and groups, LiveJournal is a blogging platform built for teens who are focused on sharing information with friends than on showcasing their thoughts to the world.

Five Simple Steps to Setting up a WordPress Blog



Step 1: Choose "Sign Up Here" from the main page (<http://wordpress.com>)

 A screenshot of the WordPress registration form. The 'Blog Address' field contains 'iLoveMyLibrary' and the domain dropdown is set to '.wordpress.com'. The 'Username' field contains 'ilovemylibrary'. The 'Password' field has a strength indicator showing 'Good'. The 'Email Address' field contains 'libraryteen@dal.ca'. A 'Sign up' button is at the bottom right.

Step 2: Choose a blog address and a password, as shown above

 A screenshot of the WordPress registration form with the domain dropdown menu open. The menu shows options: '.wordpress.com', '.com', '.net', and '.org'. The 'Blog Address' field still contains 'iLoveMyLibrary'.

Step 3: For a free blog, make sure to choose ".wordpress.com" from the dropdown menu

 A screenshot of the 'Check Your E-mail to Complete Registration' page. It includes instructions to check the inbox for an activation email and a section titled 'Update Your Profile' with input fields for 'First Name', 'Last Name', and 'About Yourself'.

Step 4: Confirm your email address, and fill out your profile information

Step 5: Start blogging!

Wikis

Though wiki contribution is not an overtly creative act, it allows users to claim authority on a topic by popular consensus. Wikis combine diverse perspectives into a single knowledge repository meant to be shared with all. While primarily thought of as a repository of culture and knowledge, wikis are also a growing example of Web 2.0 culture, where the Internet is built around participation and community (King & Brown, 2009).

Unlike a blog, a wiki will not showcase any single voice from among its contributors. Contributors to the largest wiki, *Wikipedia*, get the opportunity to share in an information resource consulted—even relied upon—by millions. Other *Wikipedia* members will also comment on the validity and importance of every entry or edition, further fostering a sense

of online community.

Teens will never be singled out by contributing to a wiki, but it does foster a feeling of community and involvement, as well as a collective pride in the validity and the usefulness of their knowledge. Large regional library systems may want to create their own wiki with the help of teen patrons; pages may cover a variety of topics ranging from how to use the library to pages about popular Young Adult literature. Smaller library systems may not need an entire wiki; however, teens may want to create a wiki about the town or city where they live. Alternatively, create a page for the library on *Wikipedia* and allow teen patrons to write and update content for the page.

Hot Tip!

Wiki Topics

If your library system is too small to have its own, dedicated wiki, here are some other potential topics that teen patrons may want to start a wiki about.

1. YA Literature and authors: Teens can collaborate in researching and compiling information about their favourite YA books and authors
2. Town History and culture: Create wiki pages for popular places, events and people of your town
3. School Project topics: Consider partnering with a school, and creating a wiki that reflects the curriculum

YouTube

Many teens and young adults already use YouTube frequently as consumers, with some studies reporting YouTube use among teenagers as high as 94% (Moynihan, 2009). This already-existing investment in the site may make for a more natural transition from consumer to contributor or content creator. In fact, 2010 research shows that slightly more teens are creating their own YouTube channels (17%) than their own blogs (Chau, 2010).

For low-income teens with no access to proprietary video-editing software, the library can be an invaluable resource. Librarians can help both by providing lists of open access video editors or by installing video-editing software on library computers

for patrons to use. Even higher-income teens, though they may have the monetary resources to access software, may not have a thorough knowledge or understanding of what is available to them.

Like with blogging, library encouragement of YouTube content creation may depend on the level of interest and technological capabilities of teen patrons. Simple information sheets may be published on how to set up a YouTube channel, or lists of open access video editors can be distributed or posted on the library's homepage. In-library workshops could introduce teens to the video-editing resources available at the library and give them a chance to try some simple editing first-hand.

Hot Tip!: Free Video Editing Software

Windows Moviemaker

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/updates/moviemaker2.msp>

(Included on all new Microsoft PCs)

Apple iMovie

<http://www.apple.com/ilife/imovie/>

(Free with every new Macintosh computer)

Wax

<http://www.debugmode.com/wax/>

Zwei-Stein

<http://www.thugsatbay.com/tab/?q=zweistein>

Virtual Dub

<http://www.virtualdub.org>

Jahshaka

<http://www.jahshaka.org>

And Many More!

Programming Alert!: Library Video Contest

What you will need:

- Promotional posters
- One librarian to collect the videos and organize the judging
- Volunteer judges (perhaps some of your teen patrons)
- A cool prize
- A library YouTube channel to broadcast the winners

Timeframe: Submit videos by email over the course of 1-2 months; make sure to choose a time when teens will not be completely bogged down by schoolwork.

How it works: Over the run of the contest, teens submit a short video (2-3 minutes) about any aspect of the library, their favourite book, or another theme of your choosing. The entries are judged by the panel, and the winner receives a cool library-themed prize! Runners-up may receive smaller participation prizes, such as books.

What to do:

Before the Contest:

- Recruit judges from among your teen volunteers
- Make posters and promote the contest on your website, blog and Twitter feed. Don't neglect word-of-mouth!
- Provide lists of free video editing software available either at the library or at home
- Optional: Hold a workshop for teens demonstrating some of the best editing programs and how to use them
- Set aside an email address to receive contest entries and requests for further information; appoint one librarian to monitor this address and respond to emails

During the Contest:

- Continue promotion! Make sure teens know about the deadline
- Make sure that all email requests are answered and that all submissions are working and free of profanity or other inappropriate content
- Once the deadline has passed, confer with the judges. Allow all of the judges to watch the videos. The judges can either decide collectively on a winner, or everyone can vote for their favourite
- Notify the winner!

After the Contest:

- Post the winning video or all of the videos on the library's YouTube channel
- Host a public screening of all the videos for your teen patrons; you can serve refreshments and present the winner with his/her prize

Have Fun!

Obviously the resources mentioned are only a few potential outlets of teen creativity; however, all of these outlets have three distinct advantages that will appeal directly to teens. First, they are, of course, free; second, Web 2.0 tools are all the rage, and teens like to be on top of current trends; and finally, posting on the Internet *immediately* allows content to be

seen and appreciated by people all around the world. Under proper direction, the library can play a valuable role in encouraging the creativity and talents of its young patrons. Teens don't need to write on walls anymore to get noticed; they can write on the Internet instead.

W3Schools

<http://www.w3schools.com/>

Offers easy to follow tutorials in HTML, CSS, PHP, and other programming languages

Open Source Alternative

<http://www.osalt.com/>

Suggestions and reviews of open source alternatives to proprietary software

Zotero

<http://www.zotero.org/>

A free citation tracking site, similar to RefWorks

Audacity

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Free audio and sound editing software; great for making your own audio books!

GIMP

<http://www.gimp.org/>

A popular Open Source alternative to Adobe's Photoshop

Linux

<http://www.linux.com/>

A powerful open source operating system, for those who cannot afford Windows or Mac.

Apache

<http://www.apache.org/>

A popular web server, as well as a supporter of numerous open source projects

Open Office

<http://www.openoffice.org/>

Probably the most popular open source alternative to Microsoft's popular Office Suite

And the Rest... More Educational and Open Source Sites for
Savvy Teen Patrons and Librarians

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