



Welcome to the blogosphere

by Ursula Schoenberg

Everyone is doing it. Well, of course not everyone, but quite a lot of people are entering the world of weblogs (or 'blogs' for short)—either to read them or to write one themselves. For the uninitiated among you: A blog is a kind of online journal that anyone can create with a few clicks (for example at www.blogger.com) and that other web-users can access and comment. The content of a blog can be driven by issues personal, political, corporate, consumer, philosophical or anything else you can think of. A special format called RSS (for Really Simple Syndication) allows you to keep updated on favourite sites.

According to blog-monitoring services (www.technorati.com or www.blogpulse.com) there are almost 30 million blogs out there, and a new one is being added every second. That being said, even though the software makes a blog seductively easy to create, maintaining an interesting and effective blog requires a good deal of commitment and stamina. Surveys have shown that many blogs are abandoned after only one entry, and that the average life of a blog is four months. On average, most active blogs are updated every 2 weeks, and only a small percentage is updated daily [1].

So why would you want to take time out of your otherwise busy day writing, watering the cat and feeding the plants to read a weblog? Well, for one thing, informative professional blogs can keep you up-to-date on industry 'pitter-patter' and can also be a powerful networking tool. Our American colleagues have recently started the Medical Writing Blog (www.medwritingblog.com) which is a good place to start. I personally enjoy the Pharmablogger (<http://pharmablogger.blogspot.com>) who gives funny and opinionated insights from inside the pharmaceutical company in which he (or she) works.

More specialized blogs can also be worth visiting: Resources on the visual presentation of medical work can be found at the blog 'The Eyes Have It' (www.leepotts.com/tehi), and the editors at the *American Journal of Bioethics* tackle ethics issues big and small in their blog (<http://blog.bioethics.net>). If you suffer from writer's block or tend to procrastinate, you may find some helpful advice at www.lifehack.org. For pure fun, the current blog champion Boingboing (www.boingboing.net), which touts itself as 'a directory of wonderful things', is hard to beat for everything eclectic and ephemeral.

Whether to blog yourself is a moot point, and will depend a good deal on what you hope to achieve with the blog.

Any professional blog will require the commitment mentioned above, but if you want to keep in touch with friends scattered across the globe, a personal blog is a fun and efficient way of keeping them up-to-date. And maybe EMWA should join in on the AMWA blog or create its own?! What do you think?

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Reference

1. <http://www.perseus.com/blogsurvey/iceberg.html>

Is the 'Internet' a proper noun?

Foldoc at <http://foldoc.org/foldoc/index.html>, supported by the Imperial College of Computing, is an invaluable free on-line dictionary of computing. It is unambiguous in treating the 'Internet' as a proper noun and on searching 'Internet' you will be told that 'The Internet is the largest internet (with a small 'i') in the world'.

But other opinions challenge this—not that it is the largest Internet in the world but that it is written with an initial capital letter. Tony Long, the copy chief of the online computer journal *Wired* (www.wired.com), says there is simply no reason to capitalise 'internet', or 'web', and 'net' for that matter. Although he's aware that 'If It's Capitalised, It Must BE Important', he believes the move by his journal to use lowercase initial letters for these words should not be interpreted as some kind of symbolic demotion but thought of as a stylistic reality check. The Collins English Dictionary also changed its mind between its 2000 edition, in which Internet is capitalised, and the 2005 edition where it isn't. The *Guardian*, *Economist.com* and BBC likewise use lowercase initial letters for 'internet' and other web-related words. On the other hand again the *Zen Internet newsletter* still considers Internet to be a proper noun which should be capitalised ('Internet goes lower case' at <http://www.journalism.co.uk/news/story1040.shtml>).