

**„Go4job – e Skills Project Days & More –
Developing Competences for High-Performance Workplaces“**

Digital media for vocational education

Blog

Blogs and Blogging

1.1 Blogs Explained

This first session provides an introduction to blogs and blogging. The term 'blog' is a combination of two words: web and log. In simple terms a blog is an online diary or log that is usually published on the Internet and is viewable by the worldwide community. Blogs allow anyone to self-publish and tell the world what they are doing, the content of the blog is usually the owner's commentary on a particular area of interest such as a personal diary, sport, art or the news. Typically, a blog will contain text, images and links to other blogs. Blogs also allow the audience to make comments and give feedback to the blog's author or 'blogger'. Blogging really is about online communications on subjects of mutual interest, allowing people to both express what their views and comment on others' experience and opinions. The resources that have been assembled here are intended to further your understanding of blogging and the impact blogs have had on the world wide e-community. We begin with an example of a Blog to demonstrate how it differs from other websites.

1.2 The Basics of Blogging

This section shows an example of a blog and describes how you recognise a blog when you are looking at web content. The example is a blog for the Regional Support Centre (RSC) for Technology Enhanced Learning in Wales. On the surface it looks like any other website. However, there are a few things that tell us immediately that it is in fact a blog.

The first thing to notice is that it displays a historical sequence of messages or blog 'posts'. These show that it is in the form of a reflective diary relating to a particular subject or area of interest. Postings can be made to the blog that include photos, videos and other materials that make it an excellent online environment to share information.

With a blog you can submit comments on any of the blog posts. Everyone can also look at posts and the comments other people have made. This makes it ideal for online information sharing, communication and collaboration.

In other words, using a blog means that the web presence is much more two way than a standard, static webpage. While blogs are 'owned' by an individual or institution, whose ideas and opinions will be posted, the audience has the opportunity to comment it and share their ideas. This makes blogging much more organic and engaging than static websites. Also, Blogs enable you to take feeds from other Web 2.0 services such as YouTube, Delicious, and Flickr. These services will be covered in other sessions in this course. Blogs are now more and more commonly used instead of 'static' websites for personal

online networking, because they are easily updateable and can be used easily by someone with little or no technical knowledge. Also, as well as the audience being able to contribute and comment on any of the postings, blogs are able to make use of other Web 2.0 services such as YouTube to enhance the blog. So, for example, you could upload videos you have made into YouTube and feed them directly in your blog. This will update every time you add something new into YouTube. The next section provides some case studies that will introduce you to some general uses of blogging. These case studies will help you start to think about practical uses and implementations and uses within the classroom.

1.3 Blogs in Practice

In this section can be found informations that give a good overview of blogs and how they are used.

A short summary :

- Blogs are a way for anyone in the world to self-publish on the Internet.
- Blogs are websites that are organised by blog posts, these are individual stories like articles in a paper.
- Over time the blog becomes a collection of these posts; all archived for easy reference.
- Each blog post can become a discussion through comments left by readers, thus making blogs a two-way communications medium.
- The content of a blog reflects the bloggers' unique perspective on that subject.
- Blogger often create communities between them by commenting on each other's posts and link to each other's blogs.

It is a helpful to have a introduction to the effective use of blogs for communications, collaboration and information sharing. The tips will be useful when you are considering how blogging could be a resource for educational delivery.

A short summary:

As it can be seen from the video, there are many blogging services available to use. Blogger and WordPress are two of the most popular and they offer a range of options and a large choice of designs at no cost. Thus, creating and customising your blog in the way you want is really easy to achieve and can be set up very quickly.

You are now going to set up your own blog and gain experience in its use. You will firstly be invited to set up a 'Blogger' blog and will then be shown how to set up a WordPress blog. If you already have a blog, then you can skip this activity.

Micro-Blogging

2.1 Micro-Blogs Explained

A micro-blog is similar to a blog in that it allows users to post messages and information in an online space, and to comment on the postings of others. It differs, however, in that micro-blog entries are much smaller. Micro-blogging entries are a bit like instant messages, but broadcast generally, rather than sent to a specific person. When used socially they typically talk about what that person is doing at that time, what is going on in their lives, or what their opinions are on current topics. In a work context, micro-blogging is used for the ongoing sharing of information between colleagues about tasks they are collaborating on

whilst they are at different locations. These micro-blog exchanges are similar to the use of an online chat tool, but, again, broadcast to a broader audience and in a more spontaneous way.

Micro-blog entries are always relatively small, short sentences that relate to a specific current topic that is relevant to the user and the intended readers. Normally a limited number of characters are allowed for each posting.

Currently, the most popular micro-blog is *Twitter*. For the purposes of this session, when discussing micro-blogs we will be referring to Twitter, although the principles would apply to all similar applications. In the case of Twitter, blog posts are text-based entries of up to 140 characters long. These entries are called 'tweets'.

The next section provides an introduction to Twitter and gives some examples of its use in a social and a work context.

2.2 Introduction to Twitter

[Here](#) you can find a video gives a good explanation of the most widely used micro blog, *Twitter*. It also explains the difference between blogging and micro-blogging and why you would want to micro-blog.

In Summary

- Twitter is free
- Twitter allows people to post short bite-sized updates
- A Twitter page looks a bit like a blogs with lots of short posts
- Each page is personal has contains all the updates from and for people you follow
- Update are a maximum of 140 character long
- Updates can be sent via the Twitter website, software on your browser, on your mobile phone

Twitter Examples

The following examples of Twitter sites show how it is being used both individually and in business. They show the general layout of the Twitter page and indicate how the limited length of the postings is being used effectively.

The first example is the Twitter page of Barack Obama. It shows a series of postings about to his activities and related political events. The thing to note is that each post contains a link for further information, which makes each short sentence a gateway to further information on the subject.

The second example is the Twitter page for a Small Business promoting its food products. Again, each posting contains a link to a website for additional information about the subject covered.

There are many other examples available on the web and also a lot more information about how to use Twitter. The following website provides an online guide book that will allow you to explore the application and its use in much more detail.

Having introduced Twitter, the module will now move on to setting up a twitter account and using it.

2.4 Tweeting and Following Others in Twitter

Now that you have an account you can start adding messages, or tweets, and also setting your account up to follow the postings of other Twitter users.

Tweeting in Twitter

Adding a tweet in Twitter is really easy. All you need to do is to type whatever you want to

say in 140 characters and then click on tweet. This message will then appear in your timeline and in the timeline of anyone who is following you. Your message or 'tweet' appears immediately in the timeline of your Twitter page. It's important to remember that once you've tweeted something, anyone following your Twitter account will be able to read it (although you can delete tweets if you want to).

Following other people's tweets

One of the really useful features of Twitter is the ability to follow other peoples' postings automatically. By adding people to your 'Following' list you automatically get an update on their latest postings when you log on to your account.

You can have a look at [this video](#) that explains the process:

This can be very useful both socially and at work. You can keep track of people's social activities (as they can of yours if they follow you) and use the facility for instantly sharing the outcomes of work activity.

Using the 'Hash Tag'

There is another very useful feature of Twitter that allows not just people, but events and activities to be followed by tagging any tweet with the 'hash' symbol #. When you and a group of colleagues or friends want to share just the postings about a particular subject or event, then all that has to be done is to agree a keyword that characterises the subject and to prefix it with a #. When this is then used as a search name in Twitter, all messages with that 'hash tag' will appear in chronological order, the latest posting first.

This is commonly used at educational conferences, for example, where typically the hash tag will be '#<the conference name>'. When delegates search for this in their Twitter account, all the comments from other delegates that include this hash tag will be displayed as they are posted.

2.5 Security Settings in Twitter

Like other social networking site you can choose to secure your account / profile to people vetted by you. This means that your tweets will not be available publicly and only be seen people who you have approved to follow your tweets.

To change your security setting is easy, all you have to do is go to your profile page and click on Edit Profile. This will then display various options, such as:

- Add a location to your tweets
- Show photos and videos from everyone
- Protect my tweets. To protect your tweets just click on the tick box next to the 'Protect my Tweets' option and then save your changes.

Once you have done this, anyone who wants to follow you automatically will send a request permission. You can either accept or decline this request. This setting is really handy when using Twitter with students. It allows you to keep your followers to a community of people you choose.

This concludes the Micro-Blogging session. You will now move on to explore how Blogs and Micro-Blogs are being used in education.

Educational Uses of Blogging and Micro-Blogging

3.1 Educational Uses of Blogging

By now you will be aware that blogging is a popular way for people to communicate, share resources and collaborate online. Blogs are used by individuals as reflective diaries; by societies, clubs and special interest groups to share their interests online; and by companies and government agencies to communicate with their customers and workforce.

You will have seen that the key feature of a blog is that it is a live networking tool that can enable groups to communicate and collaborate from wherever they have internet access. It is not surprising, therefore, that educators have seen the potential in supporting learners in more flexible ways and that there are many educational blogs set up for that purpose.

To conclude this introduction to blogs you are invited to undertake a personal research exercise into the current use of blogs in education. Using [this website](#) as a gateway to information, spend some time exploring other people's educational blogs. Consider the messages about use and usefulness and reflect on how this might be applicable in your area of responsibility. Exercise: to reflect on the potential uses of blogs in your teaching by examining the experiences of other teachers. Although the examples are from across the educational spectrum, from schools to universities, the messages they offer are equally applicable to vocational education and training.

Time: 30 min (Try to be agile. Spend no more than 5 min on any one blog. Make notes of your thoughts).

To conclude the exercise, summarise your thoughts, both on the perceived value of blogs in teaching and also any thoughts you have about your need for further information. Share your thoughts and views with others on the [discussion forum](#).

The next section introduces micro-blogging and its educational uses.

3.2 Educational Uses of Twitter

It has been shown in this module how micro-blogging with Twitter has grown in popularity as a social networking communications medium and grown in use as tool for management communications and company promotion. You have been encouraged to consider its potential for teaching and use in your area of responsibility.

In this section you are invited to undertake a practical exercise, similar to that in the previous section on the use of blogs that involves you exploring how others have used micro-blogging in education and reflecting on how you might use it in the future.

Exercise: Explore some of the resources accessed through the links in [this website](#). Each of them relate to the use of Twitter in education and provide information on the experience of other practitioners.

Time: 30 min (Try to be agile. Spend no more than 5 min on any one blog. Make notes of your thoughts).

In the final session of this module you will be invited to summarise your thoughts, both on the perceived value of micro-blogs in teaching and also any thoughts you have about your need for further information.