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# Jury's still out on blogs

## Only top 100 of 65 million make money, says tracker

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BUSINESS REPORTER

For some, it's a trend that refuses to go away.

Others believe blogs are the frontiers of citizen journalism.

But are blogs making money?

It's a case of déjà vu for Robert Thompson, a professor of television and popular culture at Syracuse University.

In fact, the runaway success of blogs reminds him of the heady days of radio in the early part of the 20th century.

"They had this invention, knew it was going to be revolutionary, but they had to figure it out first," he says. "We often invent these things, then we need business models to figure them out."

He sees blogs as the early period of a business model.

Many blogs do make money but a vast majority of them don't, according to Derek Gordon, vice-president of marketing for Technorati, a San Francisco-based Internet search engine for blogs. The site tracks about 65 million blogs. It also ranks them.

"Typically, the top 100 blogs do some form of monetization," says Gordon.

Depending on how big their audiences are, some blogs make money through Google ads or through their own sales staff but most "do it merely for the love of doing it," he says.

Consider Technorati itself: A herding ground for other blogs, often seen as a one-stop shop to explore the best ones.

The site generates revenue through display advertising and Google text ads that are related to keyword searches, according to Gordon.

The company also creates citizen journalism-type sites within sites. Last year, Technorati worked on the website for the Dixie Chicks documentary, *Shut Up and Sing*, creating a live stream of blogs that talked about the documentary.

"They became a more compelling site because we were able to pipe in through syndication on the most current blog posts," he says.

The success of YouTube can also be attributed to "herding," according to Thompson, where a site that collects data from a number of sources becomes a one-stop shop.

It also demonstrates the need to manage the vast amount of content generated every day.

YouTube, which claims to have 70,000 uploads a day, is filled with millions of videos most people never see, thus leading a scramble to the top of the home page.

A Vancouver-based website, Orato launched last year claiming to provide the first ever platform for first-person journalism.

Part-blog, part news reporting, the site culls good writing from blogs while asking readers to submit first-person essays related to current affairs.

"We're encouraging eyeballs from other blogs to Orato," says Paul Sullivan, editor-in-chief of Orato.

"We're also asking blogs to link to us. So far, I would say it's working as well as we planned if not better, in terms of audience growth."

Advertising space currently features only Google text ads but Sullivan says they hope to build enough audience to attract advertising.

In July 2006, the site had 5,000 views, by November it was up to 20,000.

The site also plans to add vlogs, or video blogs of first person reporting.

"We lovingly refer to phase two in our office as the next YouTube," he says. "If we generate revenue, which we plan to ... they'll be story driven, unlike YouTube, which is whatever you like."

The realm of citizen publishing is here to stay, says Gordon. While the growth of blogs will slow down, other forms, such as vlogs, photo and video game publishing are on the rise.

"We're going to see an explosion of that sort of material," says Gordon. And all of it will affect mainstream publishing, he adds. "From entertainment to news, professional publishing will have to figure out how they're going to live side by side and the degree to which they can come together to create a better whole," says Gordon.

But Thompson argues that first-person journalism on a blog comes with its own set of disadvantages, including validity of sources and lack of proper fact checking.

"As great as some of this reporting is, with blogs, I have to take it in the same vein as someone talking in the barbershop. What he has to say is interesting but I can't take that necessarily for the truth. People make up stories, lie about it, exaggerate," says Thompson.

But Gordon is confident in the future of blogs and their ability to make money. "There's a lot of exciting change in the air and I am not sure someone knows all the answers."

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