RESEARCH ESSAY

Developing a University-Wide Instructional Design Blog for Information Sharing and Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

As an interactive communications tool, work-related blogs can offer professionals a way to reflect on their practices and connect with other professionals around the world who have similar backgrounds and interests. Reflection helps practitioners make connections between various information streams, their work experiences, and interactions with clients. Reflection can also help connect educational research with applied practices. This essay focuses on the development and evolution of the Instructional Design Open Studio (IDOS) blog, which started in early 2006. The IDOS blog was designed as a professional and academic blog to serve the faculty community as a way to disseminate information about e-learning. The author discusses the steps that went into developing the blog, as well as a range of specific issues, including technological, organizational, policy-based, and design. In conclusion, the author shares insight into the overall experience and provides directions for the future.

Keywords: Blog, Information Sharing, Instructional Design Open Studio (IDOS), Interactive Communications Tools, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The speed of modern life often disallows practicing professionals to reflect on their work, yet reflection is a critical part of professional development and growth. Reflection helps practitioners make connections between various information streams, their work experiences, and interactions with clients. Besides, reflection helps in connecting educational research with applied practices. One strategy to enhance professional practices is by using a subject-specific blog.

As an interactive communications tool, work-related blogs can offer practicing professionals a way to reflect on their work and connect with other professionals around the world through asynchronous communication. Professional blogs can help practitioners not only reflect on their own work but also make logical connections and identify patterns and trends. The indirect connection with the larger community of practitioners adds another im-

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portant motivation. It provides a sense of larger reality of diverse work than could be seen by a local practitioner.

Instructional design can be viewed as a process-based and purposive approach to the design of online learning, whether human-facilitated or automated, real-time or asynchronous, individualistic or group-oriented. The Instructional Design Open Studio was started in February 2006 to bring together the disparate individuals who work in the design of e-learning in higher education, private industries, the government, and the military to share expertise, evolve ideas and practices, and raise the quality of instructional design work through mediated human connections. With the colloquial interchanges and wide publishing reach, IDOS has served as a fine professional sounding board on a wide range of issues in instructional design: technological, pedagogical, ethical, social, legal, policy-based, and strategic. This has expanded awareness of practices beyond the local to the global.

This essay focuses on the development and evolution of the Instructional Design Open Studio blog as a socio-technical space. The author examines the steps of creating this collaborative academic and professional blog, from its early conceptualization to implementation. The article first reviews the pertinent literature on blog use in professional and academic realms. It then dwells on the issues of design and development of the IDOS blog, including technologies, content classification, branding, publicity strategies, audience engagement, and lessons learned. In the conclusion, the author shares her insight into the overall experience and provides directions for the future.

EXISTING RESEARCH

Web 2.0 offers networked platforms for connecting various devices and allows for more easeful sharing and remixing of data from multiple sources (Miller, 2005). The term “Web 2.0” refers to the more recent iteration of the WWW with more functionalities that include sharing opinions, attitudes, and digital resources as well as the growth of online communities. A culture of “social openness” (Lin, 2007, p. 101) pervades the current incarnation of the Web. Using these technologies requires the discipline of staying on point even in a flood of “open communication, decentralization of authority, and freedom to share and re-use Web content” (Barsky, 2006, pp. 33-34). This phenomenon has been built on the base of service-oriented architectures for intellectual resource discovery, the mashup of technologies, and tagging (Schroth & Janner, 2007). As part of the phenomenon of user-generated contents that came with Web 2.0 technologies, blogging emerged as a means for audiences with prior-existing shared interests, both personal and professional, to share their knowledge, information, and experiences.

Interactivity has been described as “reflective expressiveness” (Hasenblas & Nack, 2007), often built up around shared interests and information. Web 2.0 has also been called “the wisdom Web, people-centric Web, participative Web, and read/write Web” (Murugesan, 2007, p. 34). These technologies promote “socialization, communication and participation” (Tijerino, Masaki, & Igaki, 2006). Communities of practice often require “collaborative efforts by consumers and producers of knowledge to exchange ideas and experiences” (Yang, Chen, & Su, 2007), and in so doing would be stronger with more dispersed controls.

Blog technology can be considered a transition between the so-called Read/Write Web (Richardson, 2007) and Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005). A blog is an online journal (“web log”) authored by an individual or group of individuals, usually around a defined topic. Even with small group blogging, there is often a certain style or “voice” that may emerge. While blogs have become more inclusive of video, audio, imagery, and GIS information, there are limits to this technology. Knowledge sharing in blogs is multi-stream but still dominated by a few personalities. However, in an “attention economy,” those who blog in professional workplaces and do not receive sufficient attention tend to stop sharing (Yardi, Golder, & Brzozowski, 2009).
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