

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Queer blogs: DIY publishing on the Internet

by Tori Stratton

"I had something to say about being a gay American and our right to full equality," declares Keith Daly in stating his inspiration for creating the blog "Gay American."

Daly is one of a handful of queer Portlanders contributing the fastest-growing form of self-publishing known to date: blogging.

In late December 2003, Daly began musing on a survey conducted by the American Family Association, titled "America's Poll on Homosexual Marriage," because he felt it positioned the sexual minorities community as a behavior rather than as a segment of fellow Americans.

Daly's interest in gay politics was sparked, and he continued writing, posting daily updates on national and local issues. "It all comes back to wanting to voice my opinion that we are all equal and there is no reason to accept anything less than full equality," he says.

The number of bloggers has increased significantly during the past five years. According to the Internet group Technorati, an estimated 3 million blogs were active last year in the United States alone.

Despite the large number of blogs being published, and a wave of recent media frenzy surrounding them, much of the general public has no idea what a blog is.

The blog (short for "Web log") is typically a personal Web site featuring Internet links and editorial commentary. Most blogs are a personal information archive, providing a daily record of its creator's thoughts, interests and opinions. Oftentimes they are organized chronologically and are part of a larger blog community. This usually involves a collective list of links featured on the blog—a format known as Really Simple Syndication.

RSS allows sites to syndicate news and the content of newlike sites and personal blogs. The format solves myriad problems Web masters commonly face, such as increasing traffic and gathering and distributing news. RSS saves users from having to repeatedly visit favorite Web sites to check for new content or be notified of updates via e-mail.

Much like the zine revolution of the '90s, blogs have become a catalyst for do-it-yourself self-publishing. In a culture dominated by mainstream media, blogging allows a method of knowledge production outside that dominant system, one that puts the power of publishing in the hands of anyone with Internet access.

Blogging also has the advantage of allowing writers to communicate with a worldwide audience. One of the major contributions of the Internet during the past 10 years has been its unhindered ability to connect people from diverse locations through shared interests, and

blogs continue further online community networks through their expansive use of links and commentary on Web-based content. Blogs offer low production costs and a kind of immediacy unique to other forms of publication, as they can be readily accessed through any Web browser and updated as frequently as one chooses.

Queer blogs have important implications for the sexual minorities community because they let the writer and reader have both individual expression as well as the chance to interact (and create) with larger communities. The Internet can leave many Web users dumbfounded in their attempts to search for blogs with specific content because of the sheer amount of information. Moreover, affiliations between bloggers and online sources are often obscure, leaving most queer blogs virtually invisible.

"Queer Filter" became the first Web-based directory to feature blogs from the sexual minorities community. The site, which uses a method of combined syndication, allows users to submit their blogs to the directory manually or through RSS feeds. Its creator, Matt Kingston, originally began the list to promote the visibility of gay bloggers.

"With so many young people on the Internet now, I wanted to help them find and read about the lives of queers and find some positive role models," he says. "Recent political events convince me that there is still a lot of work to be done educating the world about the reality of everyday life for GLBT people. Blogs can provide a window into that life."

Blogs became explicitly political tools during the 2004 election when candidates, lawmakers and citizens began using them as a device for posting campaign updates, critiques and predictions. Both presidential candidates sponsored blog sites (in addition to the unofficial blogs created by staffers and other observers). For the first time, bloggers were allowed into the Democratic and Republican National Conventions as legitimate members of the press.

In Oregon, No on Constitutional Amendment 36 began a blog to provide information regarding same-sex marriage and campaign updates. Although the blog was short-lived (a mere 20 entries), it provided a new medium for information and served as a companion to the No on 36 Web site. 

For a good introduction to WEB LOGS, visit www.blogger.com, the most widely used site on the Internet. If you want to try your hand at blogging, go to www.livejournal.com.

TORI STRATTON is a Portland free-lance writer. She does not have a blog of her own.

OTHER BLOGS OF INTEREST

"Marriage Matters," marriagematters.blogspot.com, created in early October 2004, continues to be updated with both local and national information on marriage equality.

"Gay News," gay_blog.blogspot.com, continues to be one of the most popular and frequently updated blogs, with a wide variety of subject matter from politics to thought-provoking queer films.

For a lesbian perspective, try sisterstalk.tblog.com, authored by Genia Stevens, offering a witty take on politics and women's issues.



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