

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-WHITEWATER

RUNNING HEAD: GOVERNMENT USE OF BLOGS AND YOUTUBE

Use of Blogs and YouTube by Federal and State Governments

Alan-John J. Wheeler

9/22/2008

In the last decade two new web tools have changed how people use the internet in their everyday lives: blogs and YouTube. These two tools are considered web 2.0 technologies which is a term describing changing trends in the use of World Wide Web technology and web design that aims to enhance creativity, information sharing, collaboration and functionality of the web (Web 2.0, 2008). Blogging or a Web Log was started more than 10 years ago, but has ties that go farther back than that, as an online diary. Today it is almost impossible to track how many people use blogs but the website, Technorati, reports that there are roughly 112.8 million active blogs, but that number doesn't include the estimated 72.82 million Chinese blogs that the Chinese Internet Network Information Center claim to have counted (Helmond, 2008). In the 2004 paper, *The Power and Politics of Blogs*, authors Drezner and Farrell, explain how bloggers have "first-mover" advantages in formulation opinions as well as the low cost compared to "real-time" publications i.e. newspapers and magazines. In addition the authors talk about how blogs and bloggers have the ability to post immediate reaction to political actions before other forms of media can, examples they use are a presidential debate or terrorist attack.

Blogs have become one of the most powerful tools on the internet and it's hard to find someone in the public eye that does not use some sort of weblog to keep admirers locked into their everyday life. On the other hand, the online video sharing website, YouTube, allows users to upload, view and share video clips. In January 2008, nearly 79 million users had made over 3 billion video views (YouTube, *Wikipedia*, 2008). Having a YouTube page gives someone the ability to reach millions of people with a message by simply uploading a video for free. If

someone wanted to get a message out to millions of people it would cost them on average around \$400,000. YouTube receives 20 million visitors a day that watch 100 million videos a day (Niam 2007). So it became a natural money saving progression for the federal and state governments to start using these new web 2.0 applications, which encompasses social-networking sites, video sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies (Web 2.0, 2008).

A great example of how federal and state governments have joined in on the latest internet tools came in the middle of September 2008. On International Democracy Day, September 14, 2008, U.S. State Department announced to the world to make a 3-minute video to answer the question: “Democracy is...?” and to post it on the created YouTube page. (youtube.com/democracychallenge). The winners get to spend a week visiting New York, Washington and Hollywood. As well as meet with government officials and democracy-advocacy groups from the United States. Jonathan Margolis is the deputy coordinator of the State Department’s Bureau of International Information Programs and the man who helped organize the contest:

“We are creating opportunities for using emerging technology to engage in a discussion of democracy,” he added that he was excited that the contest would harness so-called Web 2.0 principles in the service of promoting democracy. “We are a convener for other people to speak. It is a networking approach. Answers can come from any kind of sources” (Cohen, 2008, p.1).

One of the most influential players in getting the U.S. government blogging was Bev Godwin, the Director of USA.gov, a website that links anyone to as much information of the U.S. government as possible as well as open blogs. She created USA.gov to make it easier to access

U.S. Government information and services on the web (Colgan, 2007). The site was launched in September of 2000, under the name FirstGov.gov. It wasn't till January of 2007 till the name was changed to USA.gov. That year the website had 99 million visits. The site has won over 100 awards and recognition, including: Innovations in American Government Award, Time's 25 Sites We Can't Live Without, Brown University's Rating of #1 Federal Site for the fourth year, and the President's Quality Award (Colgan, 2007). Later in September of 2007 Godwin launched a site specifically for blogging, GovGab, and she had some specific reasons for this. Here are the three reasons she wanted to open a site specifically for blogging and government:

- 1) To reach new audiences. There's a lot of interesting, really helpful government information out there that people just don't know about. The blog is a chance to bring it to people's attention in a fun, interactive way.
- 2) To put a human face on government by writing in the more personal, less formal style of a blog. We hope to dispel some myths about the impersonal nature of the federal government.
- 3) To open up more conversation between the government and the public. To join the conversation, readers are able to comment on entries and share bookmarks through social networking sites. (Godwin, 2007) <http://www.municipalist.com/2007/12/govgab.html>

In the age of immediate information the internet has become the centerpiece for a person's life, by accessing search engines one has the ability to locate information in mere seconds rather than go through hours of research. Having the ability to access millions of piece of data and information is a powerful tool. In the political world if you're not hooked into the internet you are a dinosaur, rumors and speculations can surround you and defeating them without some form of Web 2.0 application can be then end of someone's political career.

Politicians have become more aware of this in the last four years as can be seen by the increase of government blogs, located at the end of this paper, that the internet maintains communication and the information around an organization or person. One of the most interesting developments from the US government is the website, USA.gov. The whole website is instant information about the federal and state government. From here one can access blogs to key government agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and even the U.S. Government Printing Office. That is just a small sample, total there are 35 active blogs anyone can access.

One of the most interesting blogs is located on the U.S. State department website, from here anyone from anywhere in the world can comment on blog entries. This is an interesting idea considering that the website could have made it accessible to only American citizens but instead allows people from all over the world to express their opinion blog entries specifically dealing with international situations without being censored. From here there is access the U.S. State Departments YouTube page where there is 63 videos posted, most of them involving speeches and meetings of the current secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice. What this new media allows is for departments and politicians to help mold the public image and to have instant access for people to key information that they want the public to know.

Web 2.0 doesn't stop at the federal level some key states are getting into it as well. The State of California state government YouTube page allows access to the states different agencies and some of their recent film activities. Most of the material is pretty dry and most likely wouldn't be accessed by the average Joe but it is there for anyone to search for. These applications are not just being used in big states, since 2006 the Missouri Department of Transportation allowed anyone access to check road conditions, work zone locations, traffic incidents all on their Traveler Information Map. Local businesses are able to place bids online, download manuals and forms, and even contribute to their Engineering Policy Guide, a wiki that is always a work in progress (Municipalist, 2008). They became more involved when "MoDOT" hosted public forums on a plan to create dedicated truck lanes, a total of about 150 people showed up. When the department created a video on the issue and posted it recently to YouTube, it was viewed more than 8,000 times (Municipalist, 2008).

Some other success out can be found on the website www.Govtech.com, which is an entire website dedicated to the use of technology by the government on the federal and state level. The site offers blogs on dozens of issues involving government as well as a video feature that a variety of different channels that deal with everything related to government and technology. In a report from the website Chad Vander Veen discussed the government's use of YouTube, Second Life, which is a Internet-based 3D virtual world (Wikipedia, 2008), and other web 2.0 sites. In the report he interviews Paul W. Taylor or the Center for Digital Government, on specific successes of the use web 2.0 technologies, like in the state of Virginia. The state government there had been working on TurboVet, a site that helps veterans figure out which services are offered across various levels of government and which are available for them and which ones

there are eligible for (Vander Veen, 2008). Another example from the interview that Taylor gives is the state of California's DMV's putting up training videos on how to avoid accidents on their YouTube page. Another more experimental use of web 2.0 is The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has created a Second Life to recruit young people in order for them to explore the job market within the state.

Most controversies involving the U.S. Government and YouTube have to do with the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the September 11th attacks. One of the biggest criticisms of the online video-sharing site YouTube was the sites allowing of videos to be posted by al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.) made a list of videos that he claimed incited violence and criticized YouTube for allowing videos to stay on the website. The site took down most of the videos on Senator Lieberman's list but not all because they did not violate the websites guidelines against graphic violence or hate speech. What was the big concern from Senator Lieberman was that the controversial videos that he demanded come down were showing attacks on U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan and this is a growing concern for politicians and military leaders according to Lieberman, "YouTube was being used by Islamist terrorist organizations to recruit and train followers via the Internet and to incite terrorist attacks around the world, including right here in the United States..." (Lieberman, 2008).

While trying to ban terrorist's messages on YouTube, the government has also banned the messages of the soldiers fighting against terrorist. For most of the war soldiers were allowed to visit sites to blog and upload but in 2007 the defense department banned access to many

popular social networking sites like YouTube and MySpace from military servers. The Army claimed that allowing soldiers to share information with family and friends could be a "significant operational security challenge" (Melbar, 2008, para. 6). Operations Security (OPSEC) is the military's program to prevent soldiers from disclosing benign actions that might still provide useful intelligence to adversaries (Melbar, 2008). Major Ray Ceralde, who directs OPSEC, helped write regulations requiring soldiers to clear in advance potentially every blog post or personal e-mail with a supervisor. "The Internet, personal Web sites, blogs--those are examples of where our adversaries are looking for open-source information about us," he told the Army News Service. One Air Force briefing estimated that Al Qaeda members have created hundreds of false accounts on social networking sites, according to an April article on an official military site (Melbar, 2008). In the article Melbar discovered that there is a risk with allowing soldiers to use social networking sites is not the problem for the breaches. Melbar found an audit conducted by the army in response to a lawsuit filed by the Electronic Frontier Foundation in 2007, which found information breaches by blogs were dwarfed by breaches from the Defense Department's official sites. There were 1,813 breaches on the department's nearly 900 sites in 2006; the roughly 600 soldier blogs accounted for only twenty-eight breaches that year (Melbar, 2008). One of the most influential voices in allowing soldiers to blog and posts videos on YouTube is Lieutenant General William Caldwell who commanded the 82nd Airborne in Iraq. He wants the military to stop blaming the media for negative war coverage and wants them to "empower" soldiers to blog and interact directly with the public and the press, even if it leads to some critical stories (Melbar, 2008). Here is the entire

blog: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2008/01/changing-the-organizational-cu-1/>

Where there are some government controversies with web 2.0 applications there are some strong success throughout federal and state government. In August of 2008 the website the *Municipalist* conducted an interview with deputy press secretary to the Director of the Office of Nation Drug Control Policy, Rafael Lemaitre about the agencies blog, the first of its kind in the Cabinet of the presidency. They originally started there blog as effort to become a focal point of there “[PushingBack](#)” blog, here one can find news and analysis of the current drug war. He believes that if his agency hadn’t done a blog they would have trouble keeping up:

“It was clear that if we did not do so, we would quickly lose our ability as federal officials to be effective influencers and communicators of public policy information in this new media landscape. My colleagues also understood that the emergence of Web 2.0 and social media meant that it was no longer enough to just have a static agency Web page to communicate online” (Lemaitre, 2008, p. 1)

The success of the website has gone far beyond Lemaitre’s expectations. As of July 2008 the site had 90,000 page views and over 300,000 hits (Lemaitre, 2008). What Lemaitre thinks is most important about the site is that it allows them to bypass news media and talk directly to the people. The biggest problem before having the blog was inability to talk directly to the people and help direct them to the real facts.

The success of the Office of Nation Drug Control Policy blog got other cabinets of the white house to get blogs of their own. The Department of Homeland Security’s blog, [TheLeadershipJournal](#), is “providing a forum to talk about our work protecting the American people, building an effective emergency preparedness and response capability,

enforcing immigration laws, and promoting economic prosperity” (TheLeadershipJournal, 2008, p. 1). In July of 2008, detractors of one of the initiatives, the Society for Human Resource Management, involving the department’s E-verifying program which allows employers to check immigration status of employees had been blogging and ripping the initiatives so the assistant secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Stewart Baker posted a response to the leadership journal blog which ripped the group saying they had being too close to human resource executives that do corporate hiring. So the group called members of the media and tried complaining but in the coverage of the story, more found interest in the unusualness of government agency taking a shot at the specific group and doing electronically using a blog (Frates, 2008). (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0708/11966.html>)

With all the success of the government and its transition using blogs and YouTube there are a few criticisms specifically coming from the website the [Municipalist](#), which claims on the site they ‘fearlessly investigating the dark and mysterious world of public sector blogging.’ On August 28th of 2008 the site ripped the Federal Emergency Management Agency for not having a blog and for their lack of any web 2.0 applications:

August 28, 2008

FEMA: Get a blog!

With two huge storms bearing down on the United States, where the hell is [FEMA](#)? Meaning: Why no blog? Why apparently no contact with the social Web whatsoever? When The Chosen One *finally* gets elected, will part of the promised vast new Web strategy include this mandate: the Federal Emergency Management Agency, among *all* federal agencies, will blog, all day, all night, and will use RSS, audio, video, chat, cell phone alerts, Twitter, and whatever else out there to engage the citizenry of this country? Especially for those in hurricane zones. This cannot happen soon enough.

It should be noted that FEMA does have a multimedia section on their website, fema.gov/multimedia but does not have a YouTube page or blog to discuss any issues. If one were to check YouTube there are over 4,000 videos related to FEMA most of them videos that put the agency in a negative light. What the Municipalist is pointing out is that FEMA is not looking very good in the public eye, especially after the hurricane Katrina disaster of New Orleans in 2005, and they have no way of communicating with the public. Something that would help FEMA would be a weekly blog on the successes within organization or issues pertaining to FEMA and its members, which could also be done with a YouTube page that contains videos of success and issues.

There are many key players in getting the government caught up with the 21st century such as afore mentioned Municipalist website and Bev Godwin, the Director of USA.gov but there are many others that have an opinion on the issue. Municipalist is a great website for researching anything to do with the government's use of web 2.0 content. The Municipalist reports and comments on government blogging not only here in the United States but in Europe and other countries from around the world (Colgan, 2008). Municipalist is a tech blog, a politics blog, a news blog, and a policy blog all in one (Colgan, 2008). Colgan uses the website to document and to reach out directly to bloggers who serve their communities, states, or nations in elected or appointed positions (Colgan, 2008).

On August 18, 2008, Colgan did an interview with another key player, founder of GovLoop.com, “the premiere social network connecting the government community”, Steve Ressler. In the interview Ressler talks about co-founding, Young Government Leaders and while with YGL, he began to meet a range of interesting people in the government community, from the state level to the federal level that had great ideas. So he created an online social network to connect everyone and then started sharing ideas. It took a few months to turn the idea into the actual GovLoop.com site but in June of 2008 the site launched (Ressler, 2008). The members range from federal and state employees to public policy students and professors (Ressler, 2008).

The fact of the matter is the government is now a part of the web in new way that couldn't have been seen 20 years ago. More and more state and federal agencies are becoming more accessible via internet. Many of the key players in the government's use of blogs and YouTube as well as other web 2.0 technologies have a opinions on what the future holds for the government. There are some that think the agencies and departments shouldn't become to web oriented like afore Director of the Office of Nation Drug Control Policy, Rafael Lemaitre. He believes social media tools are a great tool for communicating with the people and solicit input but cautions other presidential cabinet agencies, to make sure that a blog would be appropriate for them because it could take away from their whole communication effort i.e. replacing press releases as an important tool (Lemaitre, 2008). Others within the government like the editor and chief at Dipnote, the State Department's blog, Heather Kern Gibson, who thinks blogs will be one of the main modes of communication in the future. Contrary to Lemaitre's comments Kern Gibson stated that eventually communicating through blogs could be as routine and frequent as

issuing press releases (Kern Gibson, 2008). The overall consensus with experts is federal and state government agencies and department's use of the web 2.0 applications are here to stay and will continue to grow for many years to come.

References

blog. (n.d.). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved September 13, 2008, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/blog>

Web 2.0. (2008, September 21). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 03:19, September 22, 2008, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Web_2.0&oldid=240069974

YouTube. (n.d.). *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved September 13, 2008, from Reference.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/YouTube>

Helmond, A. "How Many Blogs Are There? Is Someone Still Counting?" The Blog Herald. 11 Feb. 2008. 13 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.blogherald.com/2008/02/11/how-many-blogs-are-there-is-someone-still-counting/>>.

Web 2.0. (2008, September 12). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 17:50, September 13, 2008, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Web_2.0&oldid=237923164

Ewing, P. "State politicians discover YouTube." Stateline.org. 16 Oct. 2006. 13 Sept. 2008 <<http://archive.stateline.org/weekly/stateline.org-weekly-original-content-2006-10-09.pdf>>.

"Q & A: Web 2.0 works wonders for Missouri Department of Transportation." Municipalist. 09 Sept. 2008. 15 Sept. 2008 <<http://http://www.municipalist.com/2008/09/mdot.html>>.

Cohen, N. "A Video Contest to Illustrate Democracy." NewYorkTimes/Media&Advertising. 14 Sept. 2008. 15 Sept. 2008 <http://http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/15/business/media/15democracy.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=web%202.0&st=cse&oref=slogin>.

Steinhauser, P. The YouTube-ification of politics: Candidates losing control. *Cnn.com/Politics*.

Retrieved September 19, 2008,
from <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/07/18/youtube.effect/index.html> [More Details](#)

Naim, M. The YouTube Effect. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved September 19, 2008, from

www.foreignpolicy.com/story/files/story3676.php [More Details](#)

Drezner, D. W. & Farrell, H. THE POWER AND POLITICS OF BLOGS July 2004. 16. 27p.

Kaus, M, "The Case Against Editors," *Slate*, 28 October 2003.

Whoriskey, P. YouTube Bans Videos That Incite Violence. *WashingtonPost.com*. Retrieved

September 20, 2008, from
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/11/AR2008091103447.html> [More Details](#)

Melber, A. Web War. *The Nation*. Retrieved September 15, 2008, from

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20080915> [More Details](#)

Caldwell, L. B. Changing the Organizational Culture. *Small Wars Journal*. Retrieved September

20, 2008, from <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2008/01/changing-the-organizational-cu-1/>

Frates, C. (2008, July 28). *Government's blog post stings group*. Retrieved September 21, 2008,

from Municipalist.

Wyld, D.C. "The Blogging Revolution: Government in the Age of Web 2.0"

(IBMCenter for the Business of Government) 2007.

Colgan, C. (n.d.). Retrieved September 21, 2008, from <http://www.municipalist.com/>

Ressler, S. (2008, August 18). *Q&A: GovLoop Founder Steve Ressler*. Retrieved September 21, 2008, from Municipalist.

Drapeau, M. (2008, August 24). *The Sunday Read: Mark Drapeau on the imperative of government 2.0*. Retrieved September 21, 2008, from Municipalist.

Vander Veen , C. (2008, January 14). *Report: Government Should Use YouTube, Second Life and Other Web 2.0 Sites*. Retrieved September 22, 2008, from <http://www.govtech.com/gt/241670>

Kern Gibson, H. (2008, May 12). *Feds discover gold in blog posts*. Retrieved September 22, 2008, from http://www.fcw.com/print/22_13/management/152465-1.html

Second Life. (2008, September 22). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 04:17,

September 22, 2008,

from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Second_Life&oldid=240138531