

Effective Library Communication? Brief, Informal Interviews with IUB Libraries Blog Administrators

by Jennifer Liss

Encouraging quality communication among library staff members and/or information users is a challenge librarians tackle daily. Moving library communication to an online environment, in the form of a blog, poses a whole new set of considerations. Is the blog being visited by the intended audience? Is the blog serving its stated purpose, whether one-way communication or meaningful, ongoing dialogue? I spoke informally with four blog administrators to gain insight into how they use their blogs and how they measure success of their blogs. I found that each blog has a unique intended audience and purpose, making it difficult to construct a metric by which to measure the success of library blogs as communication devices.

A number of Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) Libraries blogs are hosted by the IUB Libraries Digital User Experience (DUX) Department, which hosts eleven blogs in all: <https://blogs.libraries.iub.edu>. I asked blog administrators for the Indiana University Archives, the In Libris Veritas, the reDUX, and the Scholarly Communication blogs the following questions:

- Who is the intended audience for the blog you manage?
- What is the intended purpose of the blog you manage: predominantly one-way communication (news, announcements), predominantly discussion, or a combination of both one-way communication and discussion?
- How do you measure the success of the blog you manage?

Intended audiences for blogs ranged from fellow staff to researchers to a general audience. Intended purposes of blogs varied greatly. About half of the blog administrators I consulted said that their blogs were intended to be informational in nature. All other blog owners reported intentionally crafting posts to provoke comment or discussion. Overwhelmingly, discussion-focused blogs had far fewer comments than blog administrators hoped.

Blog administrators measured their blogs' success in different ways. Those who intended their blogs to be informational or instructive in nature didn't once mention web traffic statistics, nor did those administrators seem concerned about qualitative metrics. In one instance, a blog administrator found that her department's blog has helped her and her staff better understand their own attitudes on topics relevant to their service area, which was an unforeseen though welcome benefit. Of those administrators expecting a higher level of discussion on their blogs (i.e., more comments), two administrators pointed out that they would rather see quality discussion than a large quantity of "fluff." One administrator responded that even "fluff" can evolve into meaningful dialogue.

My quick, informal interviews did not include all of the blogs hosted by DUX, nor did I attempt to contact administrators who maintain IU Libraries blogs not hosted by DUX. A survey of blog users was outside of the scope of this inquiry. In spite of the limited scope, this investigation has yielded a few observations worth passing along to those considering a blog for their units:

- Make sure you have staff members who are willing and able to carve out time to post or moderate student posts on a regular basis
- Define your audience—will your blog primarily address other librarians and staff (on campus or beyond)? Researchers? Undergrads? A general audience?
- Make sure that your audience favors online communication and/or online discussion
- Define the blog's purpose: are you instructing, informing, or engaging your readers in a discussion? Reflect upon how purpose will dictate content and writing style
- Ensure that you can publicize your blog in a manner in which your audience will see and act upon. Many users ignore email blasts and newsletters; many do not use RSS to read news and blogs; do you need to send links to your unit's Twitter and/or Facebook account?
- If you're on the Bloomington campus, tap into an established service, such as the one hosted by DUX. DUX will setup the blog (or import your current blog hosted elsewhere) and handle all of the upkeep and maintenance thereafter
- And one final word, one that may make many a librarian cringe upon hearing: branding. Online communities are just that—small pockets of culture unto themselves. Consider this an opportunity to demonstrate your institution's strengths, vision, and commitment to service.

List of IU Libraries Blogs

IUB Libraries Blogs (hosted by DUX):

- [Business/SPEA Information Commons](#)
- [ET2: Government Information, Maps, and Kent Cooper Services](#)
- [GLBT Library](#)
- [Indiana University Archives: Blogging Hoosier History](#)
- [IU Bloomington Chemistry Library Blog](#)
- [In Libris Veritas](#)
- [Metadata Discussion Group](#)
- [OLE@IU](#)
- [reDUX](#)
- [Wells Reference Blog](#)
- [Scholarly Communication](#)

Other IUB Libraries Blogs

- [Black Grooves](#), Archives of African American Music and Culture
- [bLAWg in Bloom: the Indiana Law Library Blog](#)
- [Center for Disability Information & Referral](#)
- [HPER Library @ Indiana University](#)
- [IUL Preservation Lab Blog](#)
- [Lilly Library News and Notes](#)
- [Wylie House Museum Blog](#)

IU Libraries Blogs

- [Herron Art Library Blog](#)
- [IU Library East Blog](#)
- [Ruth Lilly Medical Library News Blog](#)