



Welcome to the Blogosphere

By *Scott Fegette*

You'd have to be living in a cave in Antarctica to have not heard the term **blog** these days, and if so, I'm reasonably certain one of the local penguins can fill you in. Blog is short for weblog, which at its core represents one of the most significant publishing revolutions in recent years. In a nutshell, blogs provide anyone with the means to publish his or her point of view (blog frameworks), discuss it (blog comments), and a way to easily syndicate it to the world (RSS and Atom feeds). Here in our developer relations group, we've been embracing the blogging culture for years—both through the **MXNA** weblog aggregator, where you can browse and participate in the collective conversations of the development community, and through the personal blogs that many staffers, myself included, maintain. So if you haven't been introduced yet, let me be your tour guide to the **blogosphere**. Welcome aboard!

First, I will provide a quick history lesson. Although the web has been used for personal and professional publishing since its inception (after all, **SGML** is a publishing markup language, and the precursor to the HTML markup we know today), it wasn't until official blogging frameworks and services became available in the late '90s that it really picked up steam—democratizing the process and allowing anyone with a web browser to publish what was on his mind. In the years that followed, many communities have rapidly adopted blogging as a way to build community and share opinions and information.

What does it take to publish a weblog? You really just need an application or service to host your blog, and a strong opinion to fill it with. **Google's Blogger** and Blogspot are popular blogging services that host and maintain your blog on a shared server, significantly lowering the technical bar of entry for the new blogger. Blogging applications such as **Movable Type** and **WordPress** (among many others) let you maintain a weblog on your own server with relative ease—in most cases with minimal technical knowledge required. You can be up and running with a blog in minutes these days. What are you waiting for?

Now it doesn't do any good to publish your thoughts, content, and opinions if people never see them. That's where RSS and Atom feeds come in. Arguably the most popular XML-based schemas today, RSS (Rich Site Syndication or Really Simple Syndication, depending on who you ask) and a newer variant, Atom feeds, simply provide an XML-based summary of the content in your blog that other sites and aggregators can read, thereby accessing a list of your most recently-published content. If you visit the **MXNA** news aggregator, the articles you'll see listed are gathered directly from the individual authors' feeds as they're published. There is a threefold process for informing aggregators that you have new content. First, you publish the content using your blogging framework or service. Secondly—and this is usually handled automatically by your blogging framework or service—you update and publish an RSS feed containing the summary information for your new content. And finally, you can let various news aggregators know you have updated content by “pinging” them directly, so they can come and pick up the updated RSS feed from your server or service, and show your new content to the world.

Aggregators don't just live on servers, however. Client-side aggregators like **FeedDemon**, and **NetNewsWire** are dedicated “feed-reading” applications that let you specify the feeds (and content) you want to watch, subscribe to them locally, and browse the news at your convenience. Many also allow you to download and manage RSS file attachments, most commonly used in **podcasting**, where an RSS feed cues client-side software to download a referenced MP3 audio file containing audio programming. (Think radio broadcasts—podcasting being a hybrid mating of the words iPod and broadcasting.)

The audience listens to the MP3 either on the desktop or external MP3 players. To greatly simplify the scenario, it's TiVo for radio programming. You subscribe to content you like, and listen to it at your convenience whenever new content is available. The basics are quite simple in principle, but amazingly effective in practice.

So why are blogs so important to us? Because they offer us something that mailing lists, newsgroups, and online forums cannot—the ability to present a singular opinion or message and raise discussions around it. In gross terms, it's like going from hunting down conversations by walking room-to-room in a huge building to standing onstage with a microphone, raising an opinion or topic, and letting a conversation unfold around it. This is very powerful. And whereas a company usually speaks through its printed or online materials, press releases, and support channels, our customers do not. We intend to be involved and stay involved in these discussions, and would like to welcome you along for the ride. In the blogosphere, you'll find independent voices syndicated widely, becoming as popular, if not more, as corporate sources. The playing field is leveling quickly, giving an individual voice the opportunity to be heard alongside large media players and news outlets. Companies like Adobe, Microsoft, Yahoo! and many others have internal staffers who maintain public blogs, which has both lent a human side to corporate communications along with new challenges of its own. Corporations with bloggers are having to strike a balance between the growing need to communicate with their customers and clients on a personal and human level alongside maintaining the traditional, official voices of their marketing and public relations departments. For some companies, this has been a natural next step, but for others it has been a difficult transition. But in all cases, corporate blogging has ultimately resulted in stronger lines of communications for all concerned.

What kind of content and information can you find in the blogosphere? Well, it's not just a phenomenon limited to the Adobe community, but crosses all interests, locations, topics, and genres. From independent and syndicated news sources, technology pundits, hobbyists, and professionals of all fields, you can easily zero in on just what you're interested in. There's a wealth of resources supporting RSS and Atom syndication feeds these days, allowing you to pull everything from news, TV listings, site update notifications, online forum postings, and the list goes on. What topics and content are you interested in? You'll likely find a wealth of RSS and Atom sources for it in the blogosphere. On [MXNA](#), for example, you can watch current blog postings by our community and staffers, new TechNotes and knowledge base documents fresh off the press from our support department, fresh articles in the Developer Center, and new postings on the web forums.

Now this all sounds interesting, but how can you get involved? Here's a suggested starting path for the blogging neophyte.

- 1) Start off by browsing [MXNA](#) or [Fullasagoog.com](#) daily to get an idea of what conversations are going on, how they're presented, and who's getting involved in them. There's something for everyone in blogspace!
- 2) Keep an eye out for RSS feeds at your favorite news, e-zine, and content sites and add them to a server-side or client-side aggregator. (You can also receive both direct and filtered RSS feeds from MXNA. Click the RSS link in the header to see your options. Current versions of the Firefox and Safari web browsers support RSS auto-discovery and browsing, as will the upcoming Internet Explorer 7.)
- 3) When you're ready to start talking, check out either one of the many blogging services, or if you have a site of your own, one of the variety of blogging frameworks available—freeware to commercial. Hook it up, and start publishing!
- 4) If your blog is related to Adobe technologies, submit your feed for consideration to [MXNA](#), [Fullasagoog.com](#), and other server-side aggregators to help get your voice heard.

The basics are actually quite simple, but once you're up and running, you'll quickly see the potential. The world is talking. Won't you join us?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Fegette is a product manager for Macromedia's Developer Relations group, focusing on Studio 8. His experience at Macromedia also includes positions on the Dreamweaver product team, the Community Support team, and as an engineering manager on the 2003 Macromedia in 2000. Scott spent half a decade as the webmaster and online services director with former Santa Barbara graphics software company MetaCreations, and in his ever-waning free time, Scott is a professional musician, independent photographer and gadget freak with a deep love for all things cinematic.

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Printed in the USA 10/05

