



## HOW BLOGS AND PODCASTS FOSTER INNOVATION

A podcast with John Patrick

Interviewer: David Poole

Interviewee: John Patrick

DAVID: Hello, this is David Poole with IBM's On Demand Business Team, and I am here with John Patrick. Hi, John.

JOHN: Good morning.

DAVID: We are here to talk about innovation. John, thanks so much for sharing your insights on innovation.

JOHN: It is a pleasure.

DAVID: Could you talk a little bit about where we are with blogs?

JOHN: Blogging is probably the most underestimated technology I can think of right now. There are many underestimated technologies currently, and people always like to talk about what's the next big thing. And I think there are a lot of next big things right now. In fact, this feels like 1994 to me. And it is very exciting. A lot of venture capital is flowing, a lot of new companies are starting, a lot of people are putting new ideas together and it is a very exciting time.

And I would say that most of the really big next things are already here, we just don't know it. And the way I have been able to spot the next big thing is to look at what people are skeptical about. If they are skeptical about it, it is pretty likely one of the next big things.

It is hard to imagine about a dozen years ago people were very skeptical about the Internet. Oh, that's very interesting, John, but we will never connect our bank to the Internet. Well, of course, now we know that banks couldn't be banks without the Internet.

So blogging is in that category. I would say we are 5% of the way there. Blogging is one of those things that people like to say, oh, blogging, you know, it is like the hula hoop or CD radio, and I think still it is being underestimated because blogging is not about John writing his opinion or Sally writing her opinion, blogging is a way to communicate.

And what is unique about blogging is it provides context. So we have billions of Web pages and they have a nice format but they have no context. Blogged pages are different than regular Web pages. A blog page has context. In other words, it has a subject, it has a date, it has a category or multiple categories, it has an author and it has some content. And those five tags give that document context, which means that it can be found, it can be archived, it can be organized, it can be printed, it can be syndicated. And syndication is part of the magic of the blog. Syndication means that person can subscribe to a Web page, a blog, without giving their email address. And we all know that people do not want to give their email address. Email newsletters are dead.



Why would you subscribe to an email newsletter and give your email address to somebody, and you don't even know if there is anything worthwhile in this? You don't, you won't, if they are going to die.

Blogs on the other hand are something that you can search for, because they have context, and you find a blog and you say this person has a point of view that is very interesting. I would like to subscribe to this. And you just click on that little orange XML symbol on the blog, and you are subscribed in your blog reader.

So what's a blog reader? Well, it is sort of like an email reader but it is different. It is specialized capability and it might be in your browser, it might be a separate program – there are many different kinds of blog readers that people use. But what do they have in common? What's common about these blog readers is that it is content that you want, that you specifically say, I want to follow this person's point of view and you subscribe to it. So this is a very subtle but profound aspect of blogging.

Another powerful thing about blogs is that in addition to people being able to express their opinion it is a way in which to communicate any kind of information. For example, a warranty recall, a press release, a product shipment notice, or how about a hospital gurney has just moved with a patient from the emergency department to the recovery room. And when that hospital gurney moved between those two points, an RFID tag on the hospital gurney triggered the posting of a blog to the primary care physician's blog reader for that patient. So now the primary care physician sees every time that patient moves or any of his patients move something shows up in this folder. So the doctor looks in the folder on occasion and sees what is going on with his patients.

So this is not about just vanity publishing, this is about a new way to communicate, a new way to syndicate information on a global basis.

One other point about blogging that's I think greatly misunderstood is that a successful blog doesn't necessarily mean that millions of people are reading it. And you get a lot into some of these vanity discussions at conferences, oh, my blog gets more readers than your blog gets. Well, there is a place for that, just like magazines and newspapers like to compare their readership, but blogging is more flexible than that. For example, a person may write a blog to their aging mother a thousand miles away, and mom is the only person that reads that blog. Where another person may be writing a blog which is actually a journal, or a diary of the soccer trip that they are taking to Washington, D.C., you know, a busload of kids, and the parents of the kids on that bus are reading the daily activity that is going on on this trip and they are the only ones that are reading it.

So it is not necessarily for millions. It might be one-to-one or a family thing or a very small group. It is just about communications.

DAVID: You have sort of intimated how blogs are a medium that forces innovation. Can you talk more explicitly about that?

JOHN: Well, blogging is a way to communicate. In order to innovate you have to collaborate. In order to collaborate, obviously, you have to communicate. You have to know who you are working with. So there are many forms of social networking software available to find people. Things like Linked In and Tribe and there are various things like that that allow you to use multiple degrees of freedom to find somebody.



So, for example, you may say well I am looking for somebody that is an expert in Linux® in banking. So you go to one of these sites and you search Linux in banking, and you find all these people and you look at what they say about themselves, and you say this is a person, I really want to meet this person. This person has exactly the skills that I need to collaborate with to develop this new solution that I am trying to develop. And so you look about this person, but you don't know how to reach them. But then you find out that this person knows this other person, who knows a person who knows a person who you know. So you send a message and it goes to the person you know, and that person says yes, this person, he is okay, he has got a legitimate problem, I think you would enjoy collaborating with him. And then the message goes over to this person, to that person, over to the person that you really want to reach, and then that person responds to you and now you are connected.

So once you are connected, you may decide, you know, we're really kindred spirits. We have the same vision for how to solve this problem with Linux in the banking industry. So let's work together. Great, let's work it. Well, how do we share our thinking? Through the blog. I subscribe to your blog, you subscribe to my blog. Whenever I write something new, it appears in the folder, it is not in the inbox of my email, hundreds and hundreds of things that – no, it is not there, it is in my blog folders. And there is a subfolder for this person, who I now have recently met, never met him in person, but now we are collaborators and we are working together.

So blogging is instrumental, it is fundamental to the communications element of collaboration, which is fundamental to innovation.

DAVID: You talked a little bit about how blogs can support and promote an innovative culture. Can you talk about other aspects of IT infrastructure that can also achieve that, and other requirements – like integration, openness and collaborative capabilities – that will be crucial?

JOHN: Innovation is not a new concept; of course, it has been around for a very long time. People have wanted to collaborate for a very long time, but it used to be hard to do until we had the Internet. It is almost hard to imagine today not having the Internet. But for most of civilization there was no Internet, so to collaborate meant riding a horse for three months to get to another place to meet with a person or write a letter and the Pony Express delivers it and later telegraph and, of course, you know, the evolution of communications. But not until the Internet was it possible to really communicate.

And the way to think about this is that now we have every computer in the world connected to every computer in the world. That's what the Internet makes possible. So with every computer connected to every computer, that means that every person is connected to every person that they want to be.

Now, obviously, within the Internet there have to be some private tunnels to protect against unwanted intrusion, and to protect intellectual property, and to protect against improper communications. But aside from that, the potential of the Internet is enormous and we are 5% of the way there. We have seen the Web, we have seen email, now we are seeing the beginnings of this new capability called blogging, which is actually the beginning of the semantic Web.

The semantic Web is a Web where computers can talk to each other without people having to be involved. And those computers can talk to each other because the content – the Web pages, if you think of it that way – have context. They are not just pretty with



format: they have context, they have these tags, and tags are changing the world. Tags are causing context to explode. And the way to think about this is iTunes® or Adobe® Photoshop® elements, or Flickr®. Let's take Flickr as an example. So you take a lot of digital pictures, you drag them into a folder on Flickr and they up to the Flickr.com Web site, but on the way up you add tags to those pictures and you put motorcycles, Mozart, Somers, IBM, blogging, whatever tags might be appropriate to a picture. And then someone else looks at that picture and they see IBM Somers headquarters buildings in the background of this picture and they say, well, that might be about these tags, but it is also about I.M. Pei, because he designed those buildings. So here is another person unbeknownst to the person who took the picture, adding context to these pictures.

So this is, we are at the very beginning of an explosion of context that will make the Internet just extraordinarily more powerful and will feed directly into innovation because when you search for a picture or music or an idea, you can search on these tags, and the tags can help you find what you are looking for.

This is way under-tapped. We are right at the very beginning of this. We are at the very beginning with tagging, and there is a lot of deep research kind of work going on, but I think there is a case to be made that the real impact of tagging will come from grassroots. Just like the real impact of the Web, it did not come top down. It didn't come from IBM or AT&T® or Microsoft® or GE® or any big company. It came from people at universities and governments and students and just people. That's how it evolved and is still evolving. And I believe right now that the power to the people concept is re-engaging. People are taking control of their data and they are deciding what tags should be applied. They are deciding what the context of this data should be. And this is a key part of innovation again ~ by adding context to data it allows other people to find it and add their tags to it, and allow somebody else to find it, and it allows a collaborative process to begin.

Listening is so important to innovation and it is not just a matter of listening to your own ideas through your own team of people. You also need to get that outside opinion. And, of course, with the Internet it is very easy to get an outside opinion. There are a lot of experts out there. How do you find them? Blogs.

You search not just Google® or Yahoo® or whatever your favorite search is ~ you search specifically through the blogs and you can do that at the main search engines, or you can specifically go to some of the blogger sites that have search capabilities, like Technorati.com, that logs and catalogues all the blogs. And you search it at one of those kinds of sites on what the bloggers think.

And this is really important, in the early days it was important on the Web to be able to do a search and get some hits. Now you do a search and you get 49,875,000 hits. And what you really want to know is what are the leading edge thinkers saying about this particular topic now? What are they saying this week? I am not looking for documents from five years ago. I might be, but that's just a separate thing. The Web has become the legacy. The legacy is not the mainframe, the legacy data is all on the Internet; there are billions and billions of documents out there.

So if you want to collaborate, if you want to innovate, you want to find out the second opinions from people who are in the know. So how do you know who is in the know? You search the blogs and you read. And most blogs point to other blogs. And you say



well, I don't know about this person, I never heard of them, but I see that they refer in some way to this other person that I have heard of.

And it is just like a book. I always say with regard to this question, well how do you know if a book is any good or not? You look at the book I wrote, *Net Attitude*, and you say, John, I never heard of him, who is he. Then you look on the back of the book, and like all books it has what we call blurbs, right, and here is a comment from Lou Dobbs about you should really read John's book. Here is a comment from Nicholas Negroponte at MIT and here is a comment from Bob Metcalf, the inventor of the Ethernet. You say well, I never heard of John, but I have heard of these three guys and if they say he is okay, he is okay.

So it is the same thing with blogs: you read a blog, you see who they are writing about, who they are collaborating with, you look at [Technorati.com](http://Technorati.com) and you see how many people are pointing to this blog and over time better measurements will evolve. Second derivatives of these crude measurements we have today. Just like on eBay you have a way to see how good a buyer or a seller is, you will also be able to check the veracity of bloggers and see who is really credible or not. And that becomes your source of getting a second opinion.

And, by the way, some of those bloggers are also consultants. And you say, I really like this person's point of view. I want to hire them. I am going to bring them in to spend a day with our company and bring their outside opinion more inside the house, so that we can collaborate further with this person.

DAVID: Could you talk a little about podcasts, or other tools that can foster innovation?

JOHN: Well, there are many new tools available today again thanks to the Internet and I believe blogging is the most underestimated, still the most underestimated capability. And sort of a subset of blogging is podcasting. Podcasting is a way to deliver not just the words, but to deliver the words in music or the picture or the audio or, of course, the video. And so the concept is to allow everybody to be not just a publisher but allow everybody to be a broadcaster, or everybody to be a disc jockey.

Now does everybody want to be a disc jockey? No. It is just like blogging. Blogging is not for everybody. Everybody should not blog. Blogging is for people who are good at communicating, people who want to communicate, people who know what is going on in the department.

Let's take an Intranet blog for example. Ask Sally. Sally knows everything going on in the department. She knows who is working on what, she knows every project, she knows exactly what is going on. Is Sally the manager of the department? Not necessarily. But Sally has a passion for sharing information. So Sally is the department blogger and she communicates.

Now how does she communicate? Well, one way is she writes, and writing is still the majority and the reason is because there are a lot of people who do not like to communicate verbally, or may not be able to communicate verbally for various reasons. Some people, you can put a gun to their head before they would get up and make a speech, but yet they are excellent communicators with words at the keyboard.

So this is not to say that podcasting both audio and video is going to replace the blogs, the written blog. No, it is not: it is a supplement to it.



And, frankly, my vision for podcasting is for the schoolteacher. Think of the schoolteacher who at the end of the day records a program. "Hi, this is Mrs. Smith and I would like to review what we covered in class today, I would like to remind you about your assignments for this evening and a preview of what we are going to talk about tomorrow." And can you imagine the kids with their MP3 players on the school bus are listening to Mrs. Smith and saying, hey, did you hear Mrs. Smith? She is really getting good at this. You know, Mrs. Smith should be a disc jockey. And some teachers will emerge and be great at this. Not all of them. And the ones who don't want to do it, aren't good at it, it is okay. Let them do it, let them type or let them not communicate. But the stars will emerge; they will set the bar very high and will encourage other teachers to learn this new communication skill. And I think there is huge potential for podcasting in educating. Of course, in business as well. But I see the most leverage right now in education.