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**Online community.
Real-world impact.**

Ten tools that tap the power of blogs

by Alexandra Samuel
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Here's my list of the 10 technologies and tools that together unlock the power of blogging as a very easy and effective way to track news, discover information, and collaborate with colleagues. Taking a tour of these tools and services will give you a quick overview of the next-generation web.

1. Really Simple Syndication (RSS): RSS feeds are constantly updated streams of information. Lots of news sites and blogs offer RSS feeds of their content so you can stay up to date on their latest content without having to visit the same sites every day. Anytime you see the initials RSS or XML or Atom (another format like RSS) on a web site, you can "subscribe" to its content using an RSS "aggregator".

2. Bloglines: An RSS aggregator that lets you read and keep track of RSS feeds. This is a great way of creating a one-stop web page for reading all the newspapers and blogs that interest you. Pluck and NewsGator are a couple of other popular tools for aggregating RSS feeds.

3. Technorati: The Google of blogs. A Technorati search is a great way of discovering who is saying what about which topics. For example, you can use Technorati to find out what bloggers are saying about e-democracy. And if you join Technorati you can turn that social security page into a "watchlist" — an RSS feed that you can subscribe to using Bloglines.

4. PubSub: Like Technorati, PubSub lets you create an RSS feed on whatever topic(s) you want to track. But it's not limited to searching blogs: it searches all sorts of RSS-based content, including press releases and newsgroups (usenet groups). The only downside is you can't see your results right away; once you set up and subscribe to your search, you have to wait for new things to get written before you'll see any payoff.

5. Blogrolls: That list of other blogs that appears in the sidebar of most blogs you visit. A blogroll is how a blogger tips her cap to fellow bloggers she reads or tracks. If you find a blog you like, check out some of the links in its blogroll, because chances are you'll like some of those blogs too.

6. OPML: A file format for storing blogrolls. Bloglines can automatically create an OPML file of the blogs you subscribe to, which you can use as a blogroll on your own blog, or as a way of enhancing your blog tracking.

7. Feedster: Another blog search service, along the lines of Technorati and PubSub. But Feedster has the nifty added feature of letting you create (and subscribe to) searches that are limited to a single OPML file. So if you subscribe to a lot of different blogs and news sites that sometimes write about an issue you care about, you can use Feedster to search just those blogs.

8. del.icio.us: An online system for storing links to favourite web sites ("bookmarks"), and for discovering related web sites that you might not find on your own. del.icio.us lets you assign tags to the web sites you store so that you can find them again, and shows you who else is storing web sites under the same tags.

9. Blogger: Blogging is contagious. Once you become a regular blog reader you're likely to get the blogging itch — even if it's just a way of keeping notes on the other blogs you're reading (bloggers commenting on bloggers is a proud tradition — that's why people call the blogosphere an "echo chamber".) But starting your own blog doesn't have to be complicated or expensive: you can get your own blog up and running in literally five minutes using Blogger.

10. WordPress: Blogging can be a great way of collaborating online. WordPress is a very flexible and extensible blogging platform that allows people to work together easily. Once you're ready to kick your blogging up a notch, WordPress can handle anything from a powerful solo blog to a decent, multi-section web site.

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Our principals

Alexandra Samuel, CEO

Alexandra combines hands-on experience implementing online strategies with an extensive research background in digital democracy, e-governance and Internet activism. Her recent projects include managing the online launch of telecentre.org and developing the online community strategy for NetSquared.org. Alexandra holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Harvard University, where her research focused on the creative frontiers of online political engagement.

Rob Cottingham, President

Rob is a seasoned communications strategist who is known online as an e-campaigning innovator, and offline as one of Canada's leading speech-writers. His recent projects include creating the Confeederation web site, a window on election blogging; and writing the final report for the Canadian Prime Minister's External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities. Rob maintains a long-running blog at robcottingham.ca and writes SpeechList, a free e-mail newsletter on speechwriting.

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