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*PRESENTATION OUTLINE SHOT 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY WORKSHOP*

The (Hi)Story of Technology from a Contemporary Journalism Point of View: How Blogs and News Portlets are Changing the Landscape

I. Journalists are historians, living in the present--and historians are journalists who concentrate on the past. Blogs and news portlets are the latest manifestations of what is happening in technology journalism, but their emergence is pointing the way toward more personal, close-to-the-scene information that will some day prove immensely valuable to historians.

In the case of writing about technology, both journalists and historians are covering the innovation scene in different ways. Our articles and books feed each other's work, or they should, probably less so from my direction than from yours. What we try to do as journalists is tell the contemporary story of technology and its effects on science, society, business, and people's lives.

As I began my first book project, a Sloan Foundation-backed effort on the history of radar, I adopted this attitude wholeheartedly, finding it easy to translate my contemporary journalism mindset to the past. I identified what I thought was an interesting and important topic, I interviewed people, did research, took notes, and in the end told a story. I wrote it differently than a historian would, or most historians would, but it was a work of history and a journalism account at once.

II. We need to talk more and in some cases look for ways to collaborate.

I have been covering technology and society for 25 years or so, and writing about the history of technology in one way or another for more than half that time. When I began writing about history, I got a real cold shoulder from historians until I proved myself. However, I am a big believer in the myriad voices, competitive voices at times, that make for innovation. This is true in technology, but it is also true in journalism and history. Different voices make us stronger. This includes different types of accounts, from narrative to legal to personality-driven to case studies to overviews to very detailed, technology-oriented minutiae.

III. Journalism is rapidly evolving in its coverage of technology: the rise of blogs and news portlets.

With our growing understanding of the role technology innovation plays in economic growth--think Robert Solow's Nobel Prize winning work in economics--the story of technology has taken prominence in journalistic publications. We have seen an explosion

of specialty publications, mostly magazines and newsletters, around various aspects of technology, high-tech sectors, and subsectors.

So, where is journalism going with its coverage of technology? Is one medium being displaced by another? I don't think so. I think we are adding new dimensions. I'd like to talk about the rise of blogs, because that is what I am involved in. When they first arose blogs offered a kind of freeing mechanism for individuals. People would blog thoughts, opinions, and sometimes news of what they had just encountered or learned. Most found sparse audience. But a few natural pundits emerged who really caught on and influenced society. In the technology space, some extremely powerful things emerged that spread information, often different kinds of information, faster and more freely.

Blogs like technorati rank other blogs, and there are lots of variants on this. Engadget spots articles and refers people to them. Blogs like Techcrunch practice a new kind of pseudo-journalism that blends traditional coverage and reviews with personal interest and opinion. These blogs are typically based on free, open source software. Distribution is widespread and incredibly cost effective. You can reach hundreds of thousands of people (sometimes more) each month for around \$200 a month in communications and distribution overhead.

#### IV. Drive Toward Professionalism of Blogs and Evolution of News Portlet Hybrids

Now comes a new trend, of which I am part, of professionalizing blogs to perform a combination of traditional journalism and blogging that might be called news portlets. A few, including Xconomy, have been able to raise venture or angel funding, hire staffs, and create a professional sales effort.

This represents one path of evolution of blogs and therefore one path of evolution of technology and journalism and society.

#### V. The Xconomy Case

Xconomy is a digital media venture dedicated to providing timely, insightful, close-to-the-scene information about the local companies, personalities, and technological trends that exemplify the exponential economy, the realm of business and innovation that is characterized by exponential technological growth and is responsible, in turn, for driving an increasing share of overall productivity and economic growth.

The goal is to construct a network of business and technology blogs, each tailored to a pivotal high-tech epicenter or key technological field and linked via an interactive central site. This network will uniquely target the innovation community—an audience of business and technology executives and innovators, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, angel investors, lawyers, and university researchers. Initially, the main source of revenue will be underwriting of both our online content and local events.

Xconomy grew out of the following premises:

*Advanced economies grow largely on the strength of high-tech innovation.*

MIT's Robert Solow won the 1987 Nobel Prize in economics for showing that long-term growth in gross national product is not due primarily to capital investment, the pillar of classic economic analysis, but rather to technological progress. A number of great economists have since supported and expanded Solow's trailblazing work.

*The overall pace of technological change is increasing at least exponentially and has probably been doing so since the dawn of the technological age.*

Whether viewed through the lens of productivity per worker or in overall terms, U.S. economic growth has been on an exponential path for the last hundred years. Moore's Law, which famously postulates that the processing power of a semiconductor chip doubles every 18 months, has become part of our business lexicon. What's not fully appreciated is that such exponential growth is a hallmark of technologies or technology areas as diverse as DNA sequencing, data transmission, genomics, graphics, information storage, software price performance, wired and wireless Internet access, nanotechnology, and much more.

*A great need exists for timely, credible, and authoritative information about this exponential economy at the local level.*

As the rate of technological change increases, the key to participating in and benefiting from the exponential economy will be to better understand the nexus of business and technology—and the synergies between different fields that produce new ideas that change the way we live and work. This is best done through up-close-and-personal reporting and events that bring extraordinary people together.

No blog, magazine, newspaper, or wire service provides the desired combination of on-the-ground local coverage with first-class local events, all tied to a growing national and international network.

In addition, most biz-tech blogs are largely stand-alone entities, manned by one or two individuals and usually devoted to broadly covering the news of a general field, such as venture capital, the Internet, or telecommunications. A few are geographically local, such as John Cook's Venture Blog, which covers the Seattle venture capital scene. But most are national in the scope of what they try to cover.

Here are snapshot descriptions of what we consider the three most influential professional biz-tech blogs:

- **GigaOM** – Founded by well-known telecommunications and Internet writer Om Malik. A small staff posts 5 or more items daily. Malik does a good job covering his beat, and is building events and conferences and a significant revenue stream.

- **TechCrunch** – The current gold standard in biz-tech blogs. The Silicon Valley-based, Internet-focused site claims more than one million unique visitors and two million page views per month. A two-man staff posts 5-10 times a day, covering a wide range of technology reviews, company profiles, and financing and VC news. TechCrunch sells six or seven sponsorships for \$10K per month, plus conventional CPM-based ads.
- **VentureBeat** -- Another respected venture blog, probably the most professional in existence, launched nearly three years ago by a former San Jose Mercury News and Wall Street Journal reporter. It claims 100,000 unique visitors and one million page views per month. In addition to 3-8 blog posts per day, it offers a news feed area and a column for guest bloggers.

## VI. Conclusions and Thoughts

The archive being created by blogs and news portlets is an especially interesting one. Can it be captured and studied? What role will technology journalism play in the future of the history of technology?