BLOGGERS Café

Tim Lauer

Making Your **Presence** Known

Welcome to the Bloggers Café, a new column from some of the top ed tech bloggers. Hear the latest discussions from their blogs, including new insights, important issues, new tools, hot tips, and promising practices.

Recently I have been playing around with two microblogging/presence streaming sites, Twitter and Jaiku. Both are social sites that allow users to share their presence stream with selected colleagues and friends, or with the whole world. These sites allow users to quickly post short snippets about what they are up to at any particular moment. Examples include everything from users sharing what they are currently reading to what they are having for lunch. The posts are organized in chronological order with a date and time stamp.

Although some users work to acquire as many "friends" as possible, most use these sites in a manner similar to a regular weblog, and share their information with a circle of friends, colleagues, and others with similar interests.

Although Twitter seems to be the more popular service, Jaiku has a few more features, including the ability to add other Web content to a presence stream. For example, in addition to posts from the author, she can also choose to select content from other blogs and photo sites. Most users include photoblog feeds, weblog feeds, and other indicators of work that provide a whole picture of what the person does online. In addition, Jaiku allows others to add comments on users' posts.

These services also expose some of their functionality via Application Programming Interfaces that allow others to build Web page plugins, software, and widgets that hook into them. Twitterrific is a Mac OS X application that displays your Twitter presence stream on your desktop. Twitteroo is a similar tool for Windows users. As friends post to Twitter, these tools list the posts, similar to an instant message chat window. They also allow you to upload new posts directly from their interface. Juhu is a similar tool for Jaiku users. Also, plugins for popular blogging tools such as Wordpress allow a user to embed their presence steam within their Web page. In addition, both Twitter and Jaiku allow for posting from mobile phones.

Even though these services are relatively new, some educators are beginning to experiment with them. Our digital arts teacher is using Jaiku to create a presence stream based on classroom assignments. He also has a screen capture utility that grabs an image every minute from the lab display computer and combining the two into a Jaiku feed that allows families and other interested people to get a glimpse of what his students are up to on any particular day.

At this year's NECC in Atlanta, Twitter was a popular method for some attendees to connect and find each other. Another interesting conference-related use was in conjunction with an application called Twittercamp. This can be used as a digital bulletin board, where participants can use Twitter to send specific messages that show up on a large screen display. NECC attendees used Twittercamp during the preconference EduBloggercon for everything from making lunch plans to acquiring Braves baseball tickets.

Twitter and Jaiku are two examples of how blogging is evolving and changing and how people are using the Web and mobile technologies to connect and learn from one another. ■

Resources

Jaiku: http://jaiku.com
Twitter: http://twitter.com
Twittercamp: http://www.danieldura.com/code/twittercamp
Twitteriffic: http://iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific

Tim Lauer is principal of Meriwether Lewis Elementary School in Portland, Oregon. Besides his work as an elementary school principal, he is also an adjunct professor at Pacific University. Find his blog, Education/Technology, at http://www.tim.lauer.name.