



DEAR BLOG

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Want to publish your private journal? Hold a discussion forum with highly informed people? Turn to the internet and set up a weblog. Three popular local bloggers tell us why they do it, plus we examine The Huffington Post phenomenon.

B'logging is my therapy. Often by writing things down you gain enormous perspective. It's my creative outlet,' says award-winning blogger Tertia Albertyn.

'It allows for easy self-expression. It's a great way to get your voice out there and start publishing,' says Uno de Waal, an independent social-media and application consultant based in Cape Town.

We've all got opinions and now, with easy internet access, we all have a platform on which to voice our views. Simply log on and start sharing. Welcome to the blogosphere – where anyone with a story to tell can find an audience.



Infertility online

Tertia Albertyn, 40, lives in Durbanville, Cape Town and works in IT. She is married to Marko and has four-year-old twins, Adam and Kate, and a one-month-old son, Max. Tertia's blog,

So Close (tertia.org), started as a chronicle of her journey through infertility and unsuccessful IVF treatments. In 2007 she was the runner-up in The Most Humorous SA Blog category at the SA Blog Awards, and in 2008 she was runner-up in the coveted Blog of the Year category.

'I started blogging in April 2004, three months after the death of my son and a month before starting my ninth IVF treatment. It was a way to connect with people who



Award-winning blogger Tertia Albertyn started her blog to connect with people having fertility problems.

were also experiencing difficulty with fertility. But I also used my blog to journal my experience of IVF. I'd visited online infertility bulletin boards for years, so when my friends in the computer world started talking about this thing called a blog, I decided to start one too.

'At first it was just my fellow "infertiles" that followed my blog. These were people I had previously connected with on online support forums. Friends told friends who told friends, and my readership ▷

grew exponentially. My readers are very passionate people, which means they support me vociferously and also tackle me quite enthusiastically as well.

'I was very surprised by the overwhelming response to my blog. I have yet to do a post where I don't get comments. I have made 2072 blog posts in total and have received 68 729 comments in response to those posts. That's a lot of conversation! And it shows the power of women bloggers.

'With my new egg-donor and surrogacy business (nurture.co.za) I have little time to blog but I still do about an hour a day. I love the sense of community and friendship I get from my blog readers. Here are a group of people who know enough about me to read my story and who connect with me through their comments.

'My blog readers are my 24-hour on-call friends. I can go online anytime and ask "has anyone experienced XYZ" and within minutes someone from across the world will have advice for me.'



Pressure valve

Jane-Anne Hobbs, 46, is a Johannesburg-based freelance writer and a mother of three. She blogs as Juno at salma-gundi.blogspot.com and whatsforsupper-juno.blogspot.com.

'I was researching a feature about blogging for a local magazine and found that setting up a blog is an incredibly quick and simple process. I decided to create my own, and called it Salmagundi and, since it was up, I thought I might as well put something in it.

'There wasn't a specific reason that I started blogging but, as soon as I started, I got hooked. I found the blog was a useful pressure valve. Instead of getting

JOIN THE BLOG GENERATION

It's easy to set up your own blog. There is a variety of templates available on the web that will guide you through the steps of starting your own blog, even allowing you to choose a theme best suited to your purpose. Wordpress.com and blogger.com are two user-friendly sites that will have you blogging in no time.

Interesting local blogs

cooksister.com
capetowndailyphoto.com
blogs.24.com
foodblogs.24.com
2oceansvibe.com

angry, I got things off my chest by writing about them. Just writing down interesting or funny stuff that happens to you during an ordinary day seems to strike a chord with "normal" folk. People are cheered and comforted by reading a blog that echoes their own experiences.

'Blogging allows me to voice opinions that I would normally be too circumspect to air in public. It also forces me to write something every day, which is important if you are a writer.

'My blogs attracted a small but loyal audience fairly quickly. Once it grew, I invited Tracey Hawthorne, another freelance writer, to be my co-blogger. "Muriel" is an outstanding and very funny writer.

'I was not too surprised by the popularity of the blog. Salmagundi is topical, interesting and sometimes controversial, so it was obviously going to have a fairly wide appeal.

'I work from home and I really missed having interesting, sparky debates with like-minded people. Blogging – and reading other people's blogs – fills that vacuum. The interactive element makes it so much more immediate and rewarding than usual magazine and newspaper journalism – even when the responses drive me crazy. While I do get regular comments on my blog, I don't get as many as I would like.

'My food blog is a challenging creative outlet for me. It allows me to indulge my passions for food and cookery. It gives me a real kick to receive feedback from other cooks or chefs who try out my recipes and offer me their feedback.

'For me, blogging is democracy in action. It allows a small individual voice to have a say and to bypass

traditional means of communication. Talented writers and thinkers who may have limited opportunities for breaking into mainstream media are able to use their raw talent and ingenuity to attract an audience. Sure, there are millions of pointless, self-indulgent blogs out there but the cream always rises to the top.'



Sharing of ideas

Melanie Novitzkas, 37, lives in Somerset West and blogs as Doula Mel at bosombuddies.typepad.com. She's a trained doula (a non-medical assistant in the childbirth process) and is married with three children.

'I started blogging as a way to get exposure for the charity I run. My sister Tertia Albertyn has a successful blog so I thought I would give it a go too. I started it with the idea of getting people from around the world to support the project. Slowly, but very surely, people started using the blog to tell their personal stories.

'I started my charity, Bosom Buddies, about three years ago. We make nappy bags for new mothers at state hospitals in Somerset West and nearby Macassar. We rely on donations of products, which we use to fill the bags, and we also have fundraising events such as a ladies' day and a winter ball.

'At first the response to my blog was slow but I had a bit of an advantage with my sister's readers popping over to read my blog too. Luckily, we appeal to very different audiences so there is not too much competition. I have friends who make regular comments and there are those who only occasionally leave a post.

I am very grateful, humbled and somewhat amazed that hundreds of people are interested in reading about what I do every day. It has also meant incredible support for Bosom Buddies. Half of all the donations we receive come from people who have read the blog.

'Blogging is my therapy. I enjoy the sharing of ideas, knowledge, wisdom and experience that takes place. And it serves as a record of what my life was like for my children to read one day. It's fun to write. I meet amazing people out there who feel like real friends. It



Melanie Novitzkas blogs to support her charity.

also makes the world a smaller and friendlier place. I love blogging – it's addictive. Apart from its fun aspects, blogging also provides a unique marketing opportunity and is an efficient and unique way of communicating in this technological day and age.' >

LEARN THE LINGO

Blogosphere A collective term for all blogs in cyberspace. Can also refer to a specific blogging community.

Blogroll A list of blogs, usually found on the side of a blog page, that serve as a list of recommendations by a blogger. Often refers to blogs on similar topics.

Blogware Specialised content management software that helps you create and maintain your blog. Not an essential requirement for a blog.

Bloghood A collection of local blogs.

Vlog A vlog is a video log – it's like a blog but in video form. Peter Oakley, better known as geriatric1927, is an 82-year-old pensioner from Leicester, England. In 2006 he made his debut on the video-sharing website YouTube. In his series of short autobiographical videos entitled *Telling It*



All, he shares his life experiences in an honest and idiosyncratic way. His 120 vlogs – which begin and end with some blues music – were, at one point, the most subscribed to video on the website. YouTube users and the media praised his 'grandpa-like way of story-telling'.

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A liberal news blogging phenomenon

Before May 2005 blogging was for geeks and losers. Then successful – and rich – journalist and author, Arianna Huffington (above), launched The Huffington Post (huffingtonpost.com), a blog-turned-liberal-news website.

Her blog caused such ripples in cyberspace that blogging history is now divided into pre- and post-Huffington. The Huffington Post comments on everything from politics, business and media to entertainment and the Green movement.

It has become one of the most widely read news and blog sites in the world. It is also one of the most widely linked to and frequently cited media brands on the internet. It soon became the playground of professional columnists and celebrity bloggers, including the likes of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

In 2006 Arianna was nominated as one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People and in March 2008, UK newspaper *The Observer* voted The Huffington Post the most powerful blog in the world. It has certainly made big media companies aware of the power of the web, and blogging in particular.

Arianna was born in Greece but moved to England when she was 16. She holds an MA in Economics from Cambridge University and was also the third woman to hold the position of president of the Cambridge Union Society in 1971. She moved to the US in 1980 and in 1986 married oil millionaire Michael Huffington (they divorced in 1998 when Michael revealed he was bisexual).

Her early political leanings were to the right but her political persuasion changed in the late 1990s when she became what she calls a 'progressive populist'. 