

Maddog Unleashed

Double-Barreled Detour: Technology's Fire Hose Flows in Both Directions



Twitter is a massive time drain. It is yet another way to procrastinate, to make the hours fly by without getting work done, to battle for online status and massage your own ego. But it's also a brilliant channel for breaking news, asking questions, and attaining one step of separation from public figures you admire. —David Pogue, technology columnist for *The New York Times*.

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

When I dropped by the BRAIN Web site the other day and saw that the outfit had launched a staff blog, I gave myself a quick going-over, checking for any severe head injuries that might have gone unnoticed.

Our publisher is not always Capt. James Tiberius Kirk, boldly going where no man has gone before. Occasionally—especially in lean times—he evokes Capt. Philip Francis Queeg, muttering querulously about lazy, thieving subordinates while fondling his steel balls. But I keed, I keed.

Actually, I'm delighted that BRAIN has begun blogging. It's a gateway social medium, and like marijuana leads to harder stuff, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Before long, the BRAINiacs will be as distracted by tweets, tags and twaddle as I am, and they will no longer be able to chide me for pushing deadlines.

Rockin' In the Treetops. Plenty of industry types see some method in this social-media madness, but I'm still not certain what it is. Twitter often feels like attending a convention of Jack Webb impersonators, because one's posts—called “tweets”—are limited to 140 characters. I have more voices than that living in my head.

Facebook appears to be the revenge of some über-dork frozen out of the cool kids' clique in high school. And LinkedIn—well, I joined, but I'm not sure why. If I wanted to make contacts, I'd get a job at LensCrafters.

Now Hear This. Like our publisher, I had been content until recently with my own small corner of anti-social media, otherwise known as a Web 1.0 Web site. Like some two-bit Zeus, I held forth from my virtual Mount Olympus, casually lobbing digital thunderbolts without fear of blowback.

But that's so last millennium. Even my small, deeply disturbed congregation eventually began to mutter blasphemies against maddogmedia.com's lack of modern amenities, like comment sections, RSS feeds and reliable HTML.

Thus, last fall, I took my first tentative, clay-footed steps into the world of Web 2.0, test-driving a series of blogging options and finally settling on a self-hosted WordPress blog with all the latest bells and whistles.

That Fabled Slippery Slope. Naturally, it was all downhill from there; from deity to mortality in one fell swoop. Before long I had not only a real-live blog with comments but accounts with Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, and today my Olympian routine has become all too plebeian.

Instead of arising fashionably late, grabbing a cup of java and sitting down at the Mac to survey the news before getting my snark on, I get up way too early to bring my tweeps, friends and commenters up to date on all the fascinating things I'm not doing because instead of doing them I'm banging away at the keyboard about how I'm not doing them. Some of my best columns lately have been written in 140 characters or less, and for free, too.

In his own column, one about his own experience with Twitter, David Pogue noted that keeping abreast of technology is like trying to drink from a fire hose. But that simile is so Web 1.0. In today's Web 2.0 world, the water runs in both directions, upstream and down. And I, BRAIN—and you, too—may as well get used to being hosed.