



Steve Garfield

Steve Garfield's Video Blog

29

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—Steve Garfield

The content of blogs has undergone a logical progression over the past decade. First there was text. Then images were added in supporting roles. Before long, the images were often the main point, with text merely crediting or introducing the graphics. As the use of images grew, audio started appearing in blogs, and a few audio-only blogs cropped up.

**Steve Garfield's
Video Blog**

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The obvious next step in Web content was video. Countless enthusiasts began adding links in blogs, and finally embedding video in blog posts.

A significant portion of Web users were still using dial-up connections at the time, which made viewing difficult. But it wasn't long before communications technology caught up, and watching video in real time on the Web became practical. Before long there were dedicated websites for sharing images and videos, like Flickr and YouTube.

Enough bloggers were using embedded video or running blogs that were totally video that a new term was coined to describe the practice: video blogging, or vlogging. A vlog (video blog) is composed almost entirely of videos, with text and sometimes thumbnail images serving to introduce or catalog videos.

Vlogging is still new enough that it is possible to track down the pioneers, and Steve Garfield is one. He is also a pioneer in blogging; Garfield is one of the few bloggers who can say he was blogging before there was blogging. On November 18, 1997, Garfield hand-coded his first blog in HTML. (He had experimented with this seven months earlier.) The blog was the first daily update for listeners of the *Karlson and McKenzie* (or *K&M*) radio show in Boston. He kept this up five days a week through April 1, 1999.

Garfield also owns the first paid Blogger Pro account, where he established his *Off on a Tangent* weblog (<http://offonatangent.blogspot.com>) on November 9, 2000.

VLOG Soup

On July 24, 2002, Garfield put his first video on the Web—a short work titled “Inside a Trashcan.” The content is what you might imagine, and he has been vlogging ever since.

The vlogging community is a dedicated group, and close. Vloggers enthusiastically share new tools and techniques, and meet as often as possible. “You feel like you already know someone after you’ve seen them on video,” Garfield maintains. “So even new people at get-togethers recognize each other right away.”

Garfield has the best job a vlogger could have: he’s a video producer.

What sort of blogging did you do before you got into video blogging?

In 1997, I was the producer of a morning radio show in Boston, the *Karlson and McKenzie* radio show. Every day the guests would come in, and I would

post on a web page the date and who the guests were, and if they had a product like a CD or a book, I would add a link to it. Then the next day, I would copy all that and paste the HTML in. I changed the date, filled in the new information, and then saved the page.

Each date had a link, and it was like a permalink page to the information about the guest—just what blogging became. In 2000, when Blogger [a blog publishing service] came out, I totally jumped on that right away. I'm still using it.

Your hand-coded blog goes back almost before anyone else.

It is interesting to note that in July, 2007, a story in *The Wall Street Journal* about the tenth anniversary of blogging said someone named John Barger started the first blog in December 1997. I went back and looked at when my first post was, and it was in August 1997—the first kind of blogging thing. So I left a comment on the story: “I’m probably not the first, but at least I was before this guy in *The Wall Street Journal*.”

There was a huge firestorm across the Web, about how wrong *The Wall Street Journal* was. They claimed this guy was the first blogger, but he was using software that Dave Winer developed, and Dave Winer had his Scripting News blog [www.scriptingnews.com] up before this guy. It's just another example of how the media can be wrong.

When did you get into video blogging, as such?

That was January 1, 2004. It was my New Year's resolution—that I figure out how to do it, even though it was kind of difficult to share video. I had no idea what I was doing. But I had the blog, and I had been doing video production. So I thought, “I should be able to put video in a blog post. Why not?” I went to Apple, and I learned all the code. I just made it up. And then I started putting video in my blog. That had to be in January.

“I had no idea what I was doing. But I had the blog, and I had been doing video production. So I thought, ‘I should be able to put video in a blog post. Why not?’”

Do you have any difficulties finding material, and keeping the blog going?

Not at all—it just comes naturally. I blog about what’s interesting to me and, as it turns out, other people are interested in it, too.

Periodically I put together a clip show of excerpts from vlogs. This highlights video blogs that I find interesting, and that people can go and check out. I’ve done a whole bunch of those. They are a little lengthy—I highlight five, six, or eight video blogs in one show. I’m now into what I’m calling “Season II” with this, and I’m doing it daily now—highlighting one vlog a day every weekday.

What’s the best thing about vlogging?

When reporters or other people look at the landscape, they see YouTube and video aggregation sites, and think, “It’s just videos on the Web.” If you really spend some time in the community, you’ll find that it’s about relationships—finding other people, and learning about other people.

“A side effect [of video blogging] was that you actually got to know the people on an Internet basis more than you get to know text bloggers...

I’m sure it’s all psychological, but... being able to see the other person in the video makes a difference.”

One day in April, 2004, this guy, Jay Dedman, made a comment on one of my blog posts. He said, “Hey, Steve, this is cool. Come join us in this Yahoo! Group—we want to talk all about video blogging.” So I joined that group, but there were only three people. There was Jay Dedman, a friend of his, and then me. We started talking about online video, and then other people started joining, and we started watching each other’s videos to see what everybody else was doing.

Then it got to be 40, 50, maybe 60 people. And we still kept up, and everybody watched everything that everybody else made. People weren’t making things every day—they might make one

video a week or two a month. So it was still possible to keep up with everything everybody was doing.

A side effect was that you actually got to know the people on an Internet basis more than you get to know text bloggers. We're still figuring out the reasons for that. I'm sure it's all psychological, but being able to see the other person in the video makes a difference.

And one thing that a lot of us were doing was what Jay Dedman calls "moment showing." You pick up the camera, capture a moment, ([like] Dedman with his friends), put it up on the Web, and we get to share in that moment. At the same time, he was building a history for his grandchildren, so when you take all those moments together, they'll tell a story.

When we finally met, we felt like we already knew each other. I don't know if you've experienced that, but with video blogging, it happens over and over again. It's kind of old hat to us, but for new people who are doing it, they come up and say, "Hey, Steve, I feel like I know you! Do you know who I am?"

Oh, yeah! And now there are thousands and thousands of video bloggers. The only bad part is that no one can see everybody's work.

Are the video moments all slices of daily life?

Yes. For example, one of the people in the queue of videos I'm going to highlight is Gogan, a guy in Croatia. He's going to get his car inspected, he's having pizza, and he's taking care of his baby. From his video, I already feel like I know the guy a little bit. It makes the world a smaller place.

A lot of what I shoot is personal, like what my wife and I do on the weekend. I package that into something we call "The Carol and Steve Show." Maybe we go to a wine-tasting in Boston, and I take out my camera and I'm filming it and interviewing the people who are serving the wine. It enhances our experience.

"I'm like the guy who's the first early adopter, so every tool that comes out, I give it a run-through."

Other people ask, "Hey, what are you doing?" And I end up talking to them. The camera has a way of opening people up, so it's kind of fun. I'll take it on vacation, and film little videos of where we go.

Are there any special tools you use?

I pretty much use everything! I'm like the guy who's the first early adopter, so every tool that comes out, I give it a run-through. I'll usually blog about it and tell people what it's like—share my feelings about it.

Right now I use Apple's Final Cut Pro software to edit. I also use iMovie, and sometimes I use QuickTime. It all depends on what the content is.

For shooting video, I have an iSight camera that's right on the Mac, and I'll use a Nokia 93 cell phone that has video in it. I might use a Canon GL2, which is an advanced camera that I use for certain projects.

Something new I'm using is a website called TubeMogul [www.tubemogul.com]. It lets me upload video to nine sites at once. It also provides statistics on all your videos.

That may bring up questions: "Do you really want to load your video up everywhere? Are you losing control of it?" There are a million issues. I'm just testing it out because I think that by putting my videos on a number of sites, I might find an audience that wouldn't have found me through my blog. So now I have them on YouTube [www.youtube.com], Metacafe [www.metacafe.com], Brightcove [www.brightcove.com], and a whole bunch of places. I'm just checking it out to see how it works. I might find an audience that wouldn't have found my blog or wouldn't have gone to where I host my videos.

And I'm writing blog posts about the experience, and what videos and associated posts look like once they get on a site. The thing about video blogging is you have a video, plus supporting text, and links—in effect, a story. And I might give technical details of how I did it all.

A lot of the sites might treat that added information as kind of a side thing, or cut it off, or not put it out there in front. So that's why I'm carefully looking at what's happening with video blogging—what you can and cannot call video blogging, and what it all means.

What kind traffic are you getting?

On a site called Blogmad [www.blogmad.net], I'm the second-most-popular video blogger. I have over 6,000 people a day looking at my stuff. That's pretty good for video bloggers.

What's your day job—or night job, as the case may be?

It's video production. Among other things, I produce a video blog for cookbook author Nina Simon called Spices of Life. I have a [Boston] city councilman named John Tobin as a client. From what we know, he's the first elected politician in the United States to have a video blog.

Do you look at blogs and other vlogs?

Yes, I do! I post, comment, link to, and interact with other bloggers. [I] phone and e-mail them.

I do a lot of presentations. I was in a media company and asked, "How many people read blogs?" Everybody does. "How many people comment on blogs?" I'm looking for a show of hands. Out of a crowd of 40, maybe five! I was actually surprised. But that's just what the statistics show: like 10 percent of the people really participate, and maybe 80 or 90 percent just watch.

How many blogs are on your RSS feed?

I probably have about 1,500. No, let me think—I probably have 500. I have some that are in a daily folder, and I have some—that are in a media folder, and of those I concentrate on and get through maybe 50 to 100 of them. Then there's another 300 to 500—those I go through at times. But there are certain ones that I watch every day, I definitely want to check every day.

Do you keep track of the time you put into blogging?

I was doing it from 8:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M. today—straight out. What I was doing today is working on the Spices of Life, capturing video that I shot last week because it's due on Friday.

I'm working on a "Blogsoup" today, so I'm recording myself doing my intros and grabbing the video from the video blogger to edit that altogether. And then I had a newspaper in England that was on deadline—they wanted to interview me and they wanted video, so I shot a video for them and put it up on the server.

"[It's important to write] the text along with the videos. Google reads the text. When people are searching for something that's in the context of your video, they can find it if you've written the text properly."

Then they e-mailed me and they said, “Can you change where you’re sitting in your chair?” I really didn’t have time, but I shot it and posted that to them. Today’s been a busy day. This interview was a good break. I took a walk around the pond!

I notice that you have a few ads at your vlog.

Yes, there are a few Google ads, but they’re not a major focus. I’m not making a lot of money from them,

What do you do to attract readers and viewers?

The way I bring in readers and viewers is just to participate in the blogosphere—reading other blogs and making comments. And I use Twitter, which you could call a micro-blog.

“The way I bring in readers and viewers is just to participate in the blogosphere—reading other blogs and making comments. And I use Twitter, which you could call a micro-blog.”

I don’t know how many people I have following me lately—almost 400. I just say, “Hey, I just put up a new Vlog Soup.” People will go check it out and give me a comment back. Or on my Flickr photos, I’ll put up a photo that has a thumbnail of my video, and people who follow my Flickr stream will say, “Oh look, a new video,” and go watch.

But I haven’t hired any PR companies. I don’t do any campaigns to make it happen. It’s all organic.

Another way that’s organic is to use Google. It points to the importance of writing the text along with the videos. Google reads the text. When people are searching for something that’s in the content of your video, they can find it if you’ve written the text properly. So people who do video and stick it on a page without that important associated text are losing out.

What about SEO (search engine optimization)?

I know about it, and I actually know how to write a descriptive title and first sentence so it tells people what it is I have. And that’s mainly how I do it—I write a good description and title automatically.

You mentioned that your growth was organic. This is something I'm hearing from quite a few bloggers: organic growth, and no gaming the system.

No, no way. One quote I have: "I subscribe to people." These are people I'm having a relationship with—that's what so great about it.

Not incidentally, all the people on YouTube are video bloggers. When you look at the definition of a blog—and I'm big on making sure the Wikipedia article is correct!—it's a permalink allowing you to link to an item that everybody can link to. And that's how the whole conversation goes.

So if a blog is a title and an entry made up of whatever it is—audio, text, or video—and then a permalink, which allows people to reference back to the item, that's the whole beauty of blogging! If you look at YouTube, it has that. It has the title, it has the content (which is a video and text), and it has a permalink. That's the big thing about YouTube—and that's video blogging, too.

There's a whole discussion in the Yahoo! Group—you can go to the archives. We've had many discussions of what is video blogging—and I'm always the guy who says, "Video blogging is a technology, it's not a genre."

It's the mechanics of how blogging is done. Video blogging is just adding video to a blog. And then when you look at what the content of a video blog is, you can get into a whole debate. Is it fiction? Is it real? Is it not edited? Could it be a TV show? These are all genres of what a video blog can be.

In general, it's different from TV because a lot of it is moments from things. One thing that is different from TV—which TV is starting to figure out—the beauty of it is the conversation, the comments, and the interactivity that can happen between the creator and the viewer. And TV just puts it out and people watch.

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Do you have some advice for vloggers?

It's not as hard as it might seem, especially the idea of putting video on a blog. It's really easier than people think.

When I do presentations a lot of times, I'll go, "Okay, this is what you do," and if people have a little digital still camera, I show them how they can take that video, pop it up to blip.tv [<http://blip.tv>], and automatically post it as a blog entry—and they're a video blogger! In five minutes, I can show someone.

If you are capturing a moment, with no editing, you put it on your computer and go to blip.tv. There, you have a link that knows your user name and password to your blog and automatically posts the video moment. You're a video blogger! And the Nokia phone I have makes it even easier than that. You push a button, and it posts it right up to the Vox blog [www.vox.com, a blog picture-hosting site] from the phone if there's Wi-Fi around.

Points to Review

Vlogging is, at present, the apex of blogging. New technology may provide new dimensions to blogging in the future, but for now vlogging is the most intimate and information-rich method of communication bloggers have available. As Steve Garfield implies, many of the rules for conventional blogging also apply to vlogging. There are, however a few new things to be learned:

- To attract readers, you must participate in the blogosphere in your area of interest. Read and comment on other blogs, and use social networking tools like Twitter.
- Common, everyday moments in life are among the most fascinating video that vloggers share.
- Because sharing videos tends to start strong relationships, as a vblogger, you can expect in-person contact.
- Putting video in a blog post is easier than it looks.