

Paper 120-31

SAS® Blogging -- Finding Resources & Sharing Information Outside of SAS Tech Support

Angela Hall, Zencos Consulting LLC, Durham, NC

ABSTRACT

Do you weblog? Did you know that there are several blogs now available that are updated regularly with information about SAS products? This presentation discusses the blogs that are currently available and what information they contain. Also, learn how to use blogs to your advantage, and how to update them with information that you consider noteworthy.

INTRODUCTION

Wait! What is a weblog you say!?!?

"A weblog, web log or simply a blog, is a web application which contains periodic posts on a common webpage. These posts are often, but not necessarily, in reverse chronological order. Such a website would typically be accessible to any Internet user. The term "blog" came into common use as a way of avoiding confusion with the term server log." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>)

Blogs are used by individuals to express their opinions or by corporations internally to discuss topics and externally to share news. Some see blogs as diaries, private and personal. Many blogs are not available for public viewing. However Corporations are realizing the value in sharing information internally between employees and between employees and the customers they serve. In August 2005, SAS was even stated to be reviewing their employees blog-ability. "SAS ... is weighing guidelines for employees who blog." (News and Observer, 8/21/2005)

This paper will provide tips and tricks to running a blog. Of course, there are plenty of resources available on web design, so these topics will not be duplicated here, but included in this paper are some ideas on what others will be looking for in a technical SAS blog.

Also, did you know that there are already several weblogs available and updated regularly with information on SAS products? These could help with that problem on SQL procedures before the next SAS Training Class occurs. Included in this paper are tips on where to look for blogs, highlights of currently active SAS blogs and tips on how to insert a comment to other's blogs.

USEFULNESS

Blogging can be an excellent mechanism to get tips on SAS as well as showcase a SAS Programmer's knowledge. "A blog is an excellent way to build up your 'authority' and move up politically in a trade association, too. Your readers would be others in your field, not customers." (ComputerWorld, 2003, p3) Similar to LISTSERV emails, blogs can allow for collaboration on topics. And with blogs, storing and searching through email files is not required since the information is available over the internet.

Information currently available on each blog is geared toward the author's interests and insights, making different resources helpful for different scenarios. Some blogs are also more active than others. Keeping an eye on these (or subscribing to an XML feed which sends updates via email immediately when there is a new post) will provide an additional resource for that new product.

At any time, SAS programmers can search for technical assistance outside of SAS Support by going to Google® or other search engines. But to stay abreast of what other programmers are up to, it's beneficial to proactively read LISTSERVs, blogs, and newsletters.

STARTING A BLOG

The advantages of blogs versus a regular website are that hosting software is available for free and writing html is not required. They are extremely simple to setup, Blogger.com (a Google product) provides an intuitive user interface. Yahoo has a blog hosting service to allow storage of all blog posts, images and customizations on a specific domain. A search on Google.com for 'free blog service' produces a host of other mechanisms to create a blog.

The main task in starting a blog isn't choosing the host service however; it's the definition of a blog scope. For SAS, consider a group of products or skills, such as SAS Programming, SAS & Microsoft Integration, or Application Development. Give enough room in the scope to allow for 1 post per week. This will keep users returning for updates, otherwise the blog goes stale resulting in disappearing readers.

Then add some personal design elements to the background. This requires some web page coding experience, however cutting and pasting from favorite websites is possible. Or add advertising, Google's AdSense provides a source of revenue and is a simple cut and paste of code into the blog template.

POSTING

While blogs are an excellent place for large numbers of people to view information, inserting new content is usually not available unless you are the blog owner(s). Comments on topics initiated by the blog owner(s) depends on the blog setup.

Blogs are administered in such a way to be either established as personal, for one or more specific owners to post comments, or as community, where anyone can add their comments but the owner still maintains control of website content.

Again, posting is as simple as sending an email message to the blog's address (if this option is enabled in the blog's setup). Some hosting services also provide HTML editors so a blogger (a person who takes part in a blog) doesn't need to know HTML tags.

In a technical blog, such as SAS based blogs, there are a few tips to consider.

1. Keep the content concise and complete.
2. Be accurate.
3. Use images sparingly, since they decrease website performance. But definitely use them when it is necessary to convey the topic.
4. Reference other material as you would a formal paper. No need to plagiarize. Stay professional.

The main point to remember is that the readers will likely use this information for their employer or customer. If the information is not complete, readers will be frustrated. The better the blog, the better the publicity, which of course helps you!

COMMENTS

When reading other blogs, one might be inclined to add their own input to a topic. Comments are not always an option on blogs, but for those SAS blogs that allow feedback, follow the same posting guidelines mentioned in the previous section. Standard practice for submitting comments to a blog is to click the word 'Comment' located at each blog post.

DISCUSSION GROUPS DIFFER

Note that discussion groups are different than blogs, in that anyone can initiate a topic to discuss. As wikipedia.org states, discussion groups are the usual locations for unmonitored content and conversations usually go outside the scope of the original purpose of the discussions. An example of a SAS Discussion Group is the comp.soft-sys.sas group on <http://groups.google.com> site. After you subscribe to the group, you can start new discussion threads on any topic you wish. By the way, this is a great discussion group. You can find information on SAS code techniques or show off your own skills by helping others.

AVAILABLE SAS WEBLOGS

As of January 2006 the following list of Active technically oriented SAS Weblogs gives an idea of what is currently available. Reviewing these is similar to reading newsletters; however they are updated more frequently or have more detail on getting through that sticky SAS situation.

Please note that the definition of an 'Active' blog is one with at least one post since October 2005. The following list of SAS blogs is in alphabetical order. Also, I have also posted my opinion of this as a resource based on the usefulness applied to SAS products and activity level. (Disclaimer: This is solely the opinion of the author.)

	Ranking
★ ★ ★	Great
★ ★	Good
★	Useful

Coruscation ★ ★

<http://www.omor.com/coruscation/> has detailed information on statistical uses of SAS. Overviews of ODS, proc quantreg, proc sql, and data steps are useful.

The latest post concerns joint regression analysis in studying genotype-environmental interactions.

Data Steps ★ ★

<http://datasteps.blogspot.com/> contains tricks to SAS Programming. There are stories about Stephen's family mixed in with SAS code. The added plus is that readers can & do post comments to Stephen's tips.

SAS@ from Out in Left Field ★ ★ ★

<http://savian.blogspot.com> was started just this month (January 2006) with a scope of giving tips to integrate SAS with Microsoft products. Extremely technical and very specific in scope, this is one to keep an eye on if you are looking for this type of information!

Stored Processes ★★

<http://auspiciouscoincidence.org/geek/> contains great tips for SAS coding. Very simple and concise, this can give ideas on other ways to program. There is a problem with viewing the post on some web browsers, but once around the web formatting issues there is some valuable information available.

the SAS BI-ogsources ★★

<http://sas-bi.blogspot.com/> gives detailed posts on uses of the SAS Enterprise BI product suite. With little information available outside of SAS Technical Support, this website provides a first hand look at SAS Enterprise Business Products from a users perspective. Recent posts discuss best practices on installation, creating new measures in OLAP Cubes, and using XML to create files compatible with other applications.

The 'Unofficial SAS Weblog' ★

<http://sas.weblogsinc.com/> provides a place for SAS News, Gossip, and Capabilities. Recent posts include reviews of 'Gartner's Magic Quadrant for Business Intelligence Platforms' and the drop in rank from Fortune's Best Places to Work list. The information is interesting and can prove valuable when looking for a job at SAS or pushing your SAS agenda in the IT purchasing decisions. However the information is rarely technical.

SEARCHING FOR SAS RELATED WEBLOGS

Since this is a dated review and web content changes overnight, the following mechanisms are available to search for additional SAS blogs.

- <http://www.bloghub.com>
- <http://blogs.icerocket.com/>
- <http://www.technorati.com/>
- <http://blogs.gigablast.com>

There are also services available to tracking favorite blogs without linking to each one. Look for a feed reader service, such as <http://reader.google.com> and subscribe to the blog's feed (which is either RSS or Atom format).

CONCLUSION

You might have a very different opinion, so check out all of these blogs and look for more! And if you have a skill set you would like to share with others, gain the professional recognition of creating your own blog!

REFERENCES

ComputerWorld.com (April 28, 2003) Blogs. Retrieved from <http://www.computerworld.com/developmenttopics/websitemgmt/story/0,10801,80623,00.html> on January 13, 2006.

Companies adding voice. (2005, August 21). News and Observer. Google.com

Wikipedia. Discussion Group. Retrieved from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discussion_Groups on January 23, 2006.

Wikipedia. Blog. Retrieved from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog on August 31, 2005.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Angela Hall
Zencos Consulting LLC



2530 Meridian Parkway, Suite 300
Durham, North Carolina USA 27713
1-919-806-4412
angela.hall@zencos.com
<http://www.zencos.com>

SAS and all other SAS Institute Inc. product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of SAS Institute Inc. in the USA and other countries. ® indicates USA registration. Other brand and product names are registered trademarks or trademarks of their respective companies.