



Beyond the Book®



Christopher Kenneally, Director of Author Relations at Copyright Clearance Center interviews Dan Gillmor, Director of the Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University

KENNEALLY: Welcome to another edition of *Beyond the Book*. This is a special broadcast, if you will, coming from the *O'Reilly Tools of Change for Publishing* conference, being held in early February in New York City. I'm with Dan Gillmor, who is currently the director of the Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University. But he's a name familiar to anyone who's been following journalism for a quarter of a century, at least. He's known to some, at least, as one of the first writers with a blog, and that's a distinction now that's probably lost in the dim mists of time. It's almost every writer has a blog, or has to, at this point.

But welcome, Dan. And I wonder if you could address, first of all, your role with Citizen Media – it's the Center for Citizen Media. And defines it as a media, and whether the citizen can also include the expert. I think at this point, people seem to think it's the kind of person on the street, the opportune moment grabbing the cell phone and taking the shot. But citizen media can include people in academia for example.

GILLMOR: Not only can – it does. It's a – it's a misnomer to call citizen media only what the random passerby capturing the right image or a video on a camera, and sending it somewhere else. That's not the only thing. It's just one of many forms of citizen media, which include, and have for a long time, included the blogging by people who know what they're talking about, and who focus on a niche and go deep, as opposed to the traditional media, which tend to go wide but not very deep.

KENNEALLY: Or, for that matter, the conception of the blogger as someone free with his or her opinion, out to grab attention, possibly even a headline. You mentioned that notion of going deep, and a blogger – not only with an opinion, but with some expertise.

Can you take that a little bit further? In what areas are we seeing that?

GILLMOR: Sure. I'm not going to leave out the purely opinion making bloggers either, though. They're part of this overall phenomenon.

The interesting – among the interesting places for this is in the ability of people with a domain expertise to focus hard, and to say not just what they know, but what they think about it, and back that up with good data.

So the – there are million examples, but for example, Brad DeLong, who's an economist at Berkeley, writes a blog that is simply must-reading, if you care about the economy and economic issues. Another example would be Onmelique (sp?) on technology, and communications in particular. He is a journalist, he gets it right, and it's – and writes a blog.

Any number of people on any number of domain expertises are some of the people we turn to now.

KENNEALLY: Well, academics, of course, are accustomed to writing and sharing their opinions, but they do so traditionally through the kind of research journals, the peer-reviewed research journals, and that's how they've advanced in their field in the past. And that's, if you will, the business model for academic writing.

Is there a business model in the academic sphere for this kind of activity you're talking about, the blogging?

GILLMOR: I have nothing against peer-reviewed journals. I don't particularly like the business of peer-reviewed journals, which I think is a difficult problem, especially for people who want to buy them, because they get more and more expensive, and very few people actually read them all the way through.

Another way to do peer review is to put things out for people to comment on and to dissect, and not just a panel of peers, but a world of people with lots of knowledge, collectively, and certainly more than any one author could have, and to look at it that way, and then come back to it and iterate from the original.

Again, I have no argument with peer-reviewed journals, and we need them in many cases. But I hope we're going to add to that, and expand the ecosystem for this kind of expert writing, and get it to a point where people who are not on the list of people who you call to peer-review things also get a chance, and where we get it in a more timely way.

KENNEALLY: Certainly timeliness is far more possible than ever. That is the whole point of blogging. You have to update it regularly.

Do academics, and the people perhaps who are your colleagues at Arizona State, do they talk about that as something of a burden at all?

GILLMOR: I'm not able to tell you that, because I just got there. So I've just started setting up this new center. And I think there's a wide understanding in the

academic community that the current system may not be completely broken, but it's certainly not working all that well, and that there are clearly some needs for other outlets, other methods, and that what we need is a bunch of experimentation in the journal-type article phenomenon to see what else we can do with it.

I think there will be, over time, plenty of competition, and that's a good thing.

KENNEALLY: Well, someone at a program I saw today at *TOC* observed that rarely do you have a revolution that entirely overthrows what came before. Is that how you see today where we are today with citizen media and its relationship to the mass media?

GILLMOR: I prefer to use the expression "traditional media" to "mass media", because I don't know what mass media means. But the answer is, yes. What we want is a more diverse and vibrant ecosystem that, I hope, includes traditional media at its best, and a lot of new entrants.

And the key word in that sentence was "and". A lot of people like to frame this as "or", but it's about "and", not "or".

KENNEALLY: What impact do you see the new media having on the traditional media as far as business goes? I mean, we are hearing – like on your blog, you were talking about Marc Andreessen's *New York Times* deathwatch. That's a particularly strong way of putting that the newspaper publishing business is facing some financial challenges right now.

Is new media, citizen media, causing that? What's the relationship between those financial problems and the citizen media movement?

GILLMOR: I think Marc was a little over the top on that, even though I pointed to it, and I am a shareholder in the *New York Times*, so I'm certainly not hoping that it will go out of business. In fact, I think we need what they do very desperately, and we need what traditional media do when they do their jobs well. We need that desperately.

The impact that various media can have on each other – and I think this will go in both directions, from the traditional media to the new media of all kinds. Among the things that they could help everyone with, if they made it part of their mission, is what we might call a media literacy – helping people understand what goes into doing good journalism, and what – why the standards are there, and what they mean – the principles.

Conversely, people who are doing new kinds of media can teach traditional media a lot about media as a conversation as opposed to a lecture, about the – about using new tools to help people who are consuming media do a – get more out of it, and a whole lot of other things.

So this is, again, I hope symbiotic rather than purely competitive.

KENNEALLY: And just to put it colorfully, though, bloggers with principles sounds rather like honor among thieves, or something like that.

GILLMOR: I – that's absolutely not true. It's not a – that's like saying, people who write on pencils – write on paper. Blogging is a tool. It's not a kind of writing, it's just a tool.

And there are some bloggers whose work I consider at least as credible as – if not more credible – than anyone in the traditional media writing or covering the same topic.

Yes, there are – I would say if you looked at blogs in totality as journalism, most of them are junk. But most of them are not intended to be journalism, and most of them are – there's no pretense to that effect, or do they even want to be. And when I say junk, that's actually the wrong word.

The writing on the Web that people are doing – and I use writing in the broadest sense, to include audio, video, and a whole bunch of things. That is self-expression. People are creating media. And I don't see how that is a bad thing in any sense, except when it's done for bad reasons, or done badly and influencing people despite being done badly.

So we should be celebrating the variety of what's out there, and recognizing that the blog written by one person aimed at family and close friends has more value per reader of that blog than the most popular blog has in value per reader, because of who the audience is.

We just tend to forget that this is all important stuff. Not everything needs a business model.

KENNEALLY: Well, I was being facetious, of course, and just alluding to the general perception among some about blogging. But I think you're right. The point about reading today, and consuming content, if you will, is finding the right people to do it, and not necessarily a great number of people.

GILLMOR: Again, it's the – the democratization of media is not entirely a positive thing. But on balance, I think it's very positive, because people are being creative, and people are experimenting in ways that traditional media have not tended to do, in part, because they were based, in a business sense, on monopoly or oligopoly.

KENNEALLY: Well, finally, is there a career to be had in blogging at all? Do you see that? We've seen so much in the last four years, from the last conventions in 2004, when bloggers were on the outside looking in. And it was a great rush to write

about blogging – it was the hot new thing. Today, they're very much a part of mainstream campaign coverage.

Is there a career in blogging at all for journalists, or for those who want to write about a certain topic?

GILLMOR: Well, many, many journalists have blogged as part of their jobs, so in that sense, certainly there is a career in it. There are a number of bloggers who are covering a single topic with relentless focus and depth who are making a living at it, usually with advertising.

But there are many ways to – if you want to call it this, monetize a blog. And the lawyer who writes a blog that shows great depth about the law may not take a bit of advertising on that blog, but it will be enhancing his or her career. And I could point at half a dozen of them who do that.

In many different areas, this is true. A small business with a blog that helps the customers and suppliers, etc., know better what's going on, that has to have value. A company with a blog, or a series of blogs that go beyond PR-speak and actually engage conversation with the various constituencies that they have – surely that has a monetizing effect at some level.

Again, blogging is a tool, and it's not a single media format. It's just a tool that people can use in a variety of ways, only one of which is in a traditional media sense.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're here at a conference called *Tools of Change*. Blog – blogging is a tool of change in publishing. Blogs are becoming books, blogs are possibly being reused, licensed to people, they're picking up bits and pieces. That, in fact, is happening as we speak.

GILLMOR: It's happening. It's been happening for some years. And I don't know who was first, but the – it certainly worked well for me and – in a book I did, where I put up the outline on the blog before the serious reporting, and then drafts of the chapters, and got lots and lots of wonderful feedback and help from people, to make it a better book.

KENNEALLY: I should mention your books. There's *We, the Media*, and – help me out on the title of the other one, now.

GILLMOR: It's *We, the Media*. The subtitle is *Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*.

KENNEALLY: But there's a second book.

GILLMOR: Well, I'm working on another book that is not out yet.

KENNEALLY: Oh, I see. Well, listen, Dan, thank you so much for taking the time out. I appreciate your help. This is Chris Kenneally for *Beyond the Book*. Thank you very much, Dan.

GILLMOR: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

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