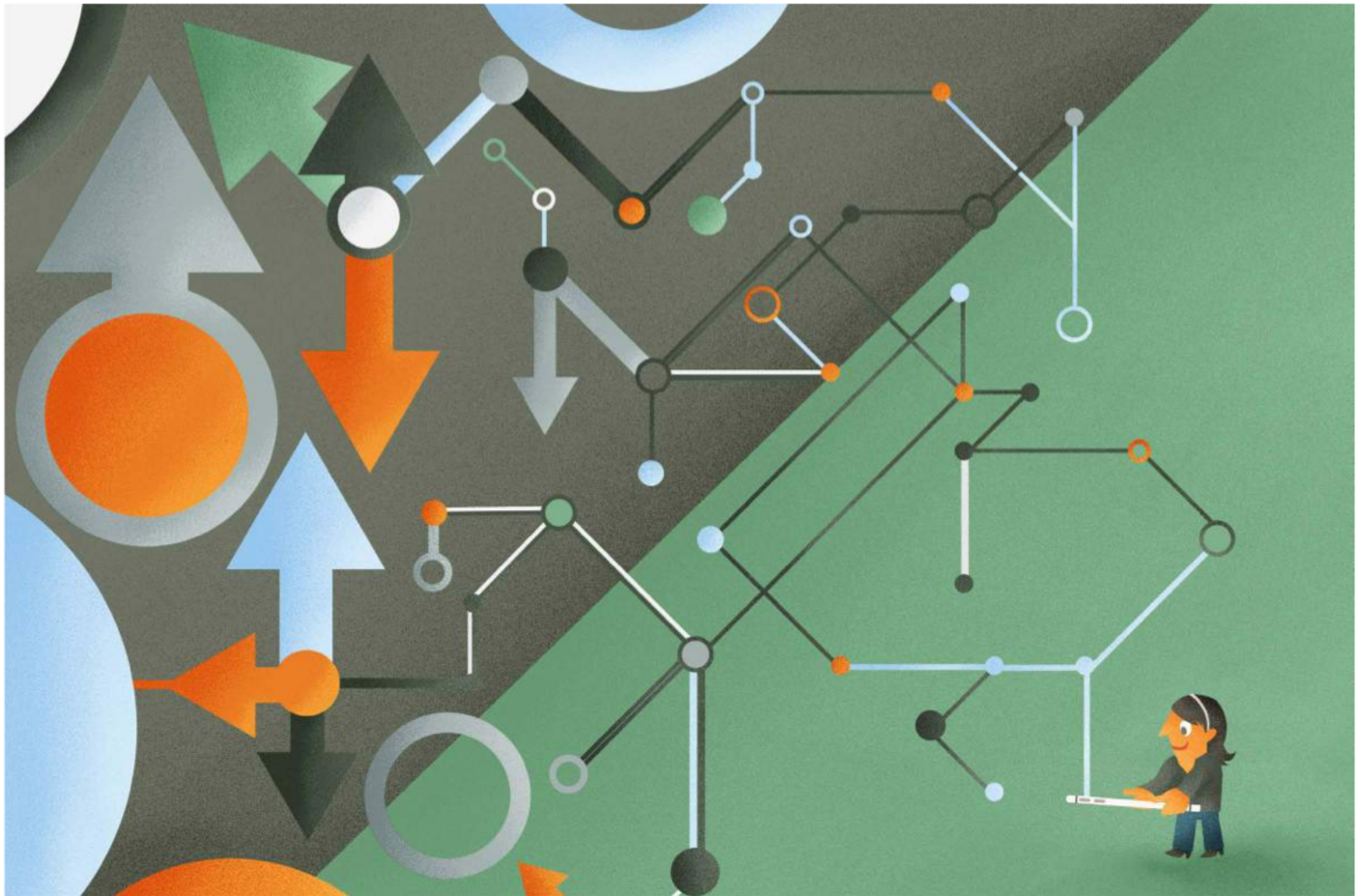




INTERNET MONITOR

# INTERNET MONITOR 2014

*Reflections on the Digital World*



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## Why Blogs Still Matter to the Young

*Alison J. Head*

Technology writers have declared the death of blogs and the evidence, it seems, is undeniable. Readership has declined dramatically as content that once was the bedrock of the blogosphere has migrated to sites like Tumblr, Twitter, or Facebook.<sup>1</sup>

But this year, when we conducted in-depth phone interviews with 63 recent graduates from 10 US colleges and universities as part of a national study on lifelong learning, we discovered that the death notice for blogs might be premature.<sup>2</sup> Young graduates, in fact, said they placed a high value on blogs when we asked if, and how, they kept learning after college.

Utility is key to understanding how and why young graduates rely on blogs for supporting their lifelong learning as they make the transition from college into real life. Our interviewees admitted to looking for “specifics” and “how-to information” they could directly apply in the workplace, the community where they lived, or their personal lives. This was often to shore up knowledge and to close their skill gaps. Graduates also wanted practical and no-cost information that they could call up quickly and use.

We found, however, graduates were selective about the blogs that they choose to consult. Many said they followed blogs after having carefully vetted them using a range of different approaches. One interviewee said he started reading a digital marketing guru's blog after first learning about him in a New York Times business article. Another interviewee, who is setting up her own graphic design business, said she is following a well-known entrepreneur's blog.

Still another young graduate mentioned doing a Google search and culling through results to find a credible blog about setting up first-time personal budgets after college. The comments posted on blogs, she said, helped her figure out which solutions worked over time and, ultimately, whether or not they were feasible for her.

At a time when bloggers may be posting far less on their WordPress or Blogger sites than they once were, our research tells us young adults may still turn to blog content over mainstream media sources for a variety of reasons.

Blog content is a good value with up-to-date information from insiders, according to interviewees. Many said they could not pay to learn from tutors or professional experts available to others in “real life.” Blogs were an affordable source of the know-how they needed. Others said there is an authenticity and candor to blog content because writers rarely are compensated, unlike the writers from the mainstream media publications that they tended to mistrust. Interestingly, none of the interviewees mentioned sponsored reviews, which are a form of advertising on some blogs.

Most graduates we interviewed prioritized their search for lifelong learning sources by looking for util-



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ity as well as for multiple voices writing about the kinds of things twentysomethings need to know. There are, of course, a myriad of online sources with this kind of shared utility for lifelong learning, such as online forums, webinars, social media, video-sharing sites, and MOOCs.

Our findings, however, suggest that blogs, far from dead, are thriving, but in a different form, at a time when sites like Coursera, Google Helpouts, and Instagram brim with the promise of luring younger online users away from older traditional platforms. These newer online venues may simply not be enough to provide lifelong learners with the kind and quality of information recent graduates seek.

Based on our interviews, we suspect that the overall quality and depth of blogs that have not migrated to social media platforms may be filling a gap with more information rich content and less of the self-absorbed opinion and personal musings of the past.

## Notes

- 1 See Verne Kopytoff, "Blogs Wane as Youth Drift to Sites Like Twitter," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/technology/internet/21blog.html>; Jason Kottke, "The Blog is Dead, Long Live the Blog," *Nieman Journalism Lab*, December 19, 2013, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2013/12/the-blog-is-dead/>; and Felix Gillette, "Department of Blogging Extinction: Technorati Rankings Are Dead," *Business Week*, June 24, 2014, <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-06-24/departments-of-blogging-extinction-technorati-rankings-are-dead>.
- 2 Project Information Literacy (<http://projectinfolit.org>) conducted this research in collaboration with the University of Washington's Information School and in affiliation with the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard as part of a two-year study on lifelong learning, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Testing of these qualitative trends will occur with quantitative data collected from a large-scale survey PIL administers to recent graduates at 10 US colleges and universities. A findings report will be released in December 2015.