



Brad Stenger ... I am a journalist and programmer living in Portland, Oregon. I write for national science and technology magazines like Technology Review, Popular Science, and Seed, and blog locally at OregonLive.com. Scientific American has assigned me to cover CHI 2005. My research career includes projects at Yale University, University of Washington, and Oregon Health & Science University, and then there's my Masters in HCI at Georgia Tech in 2002.

Blogs change the relationship between citizens and their journalism. And the human-news-computer interaction scales remarkably well. Local events, tragedies and triumphs, gain international attention when the narratives prove compelling, whether or not the source is a citizen or a journalist, as long as the narrative can spread virally over the Net. That's the big picture. Call it the macro.

The micro is, I think, even more interesting. In Portland, citizen volunteers work on the digital divide. Personal Telco and Free Geek, local 501c3 organizations, provide free wifi networking and free computers throughout the area. This is also a technically literate and engaged corner of the world. ORblogs.com is a website started by one of the creators of the original Blogger software. It aggregates blogs produced statewide, 546 when I last checked.

A bridge from the digitally underserved to citizens journalism is an experiment in human-news-computer interaction. Portland, probably uniquely, has pieces in place to carry out the experiment.

The start for my experiment will be tools for coffee shop workers, writers and programmers like myself, to share their work. The objective is to give the coffee shop just a touch of the office experience. One person can know what someone (another willing participant) at the next table or at another hotspot is working on. When interests and/or locations match, those same people are a step closer to conversation, maybe even collaboration, but without obligation.

The hotspot testbed can lead to next generation interfaces offering similar support to home workers. In time, as people become comfortable sharing narratives on-line, and as the 501c3-s continue their community-minded missions, the line separating citizens from journalists blurs. The micro, as I've termed the pool of citizen journalists, in the future might not be so small. And the macro, it will be interesting to see how well it scales.