Bloggers' conference emphasizes tools of reporting

The Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tennessee (AP) -- Bloggers -- those Internet-based writers without rules -- are fighting back against criticism that their work is unreliable, libelous or just poorly done.

More than 300 bloggers came to town Friday for a two-day conference that was heavy on teaching techniques used by journalists in what bloggers term "the mainstream media." One class taught students how to access and analyze government statistics.

Conference organizer Bill Hobbs called blogging "citizen journalism."

"If freedom of the press belongs to those who have the press, then blogging expands ownership of the press," Hobbs said.

Right now, more than 8 million people write blogs, said Bob Cox, president of the Media Bloggers Association. Blogs, short for Web logs, are running commentaries on whatever their authors are interested in. Content often focuses on politics or media criticism and usually includes feedback from readers.

Participants such as Shelley Henderson said they want to expand their research capabilities to strengthen their commentaries. Henderson, of Los Angeles, dedicates her blog to keeping the Internet unregulated.

Blake Wylie of Nashville was among the participants who took exception to criticisms from politicians and mainstream media pundits that their work is often inaccurate.

Wylie said bloggers often provide links to let readers go directly to their sources of information.

Hobbs noted that blogs entries are corrected more thoroughly and prominently than in other forms of media.

"We write and then our readers edit us," Hobbs said.

Linda Seebach, a columnist for The Rocky Mountain News, said traditional media outlets are experimenting with involving bloggers in their news reports. Her
newspaper this week launched a series of 40 community-oriented blogs to serve the Denver area.

Hobbs said bloggers and the news media are linked because bloggers use them for source material and that the relationship could grow closer.

The prevalence of blogs seems certain to expand even more as people explore ventures such as global blogger news services. Hobbs said the usefulness of such projects was shown when the Indian Ocean tsunami struck last year and some early accounts and pictures from the area came from bloggers.

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