

# To Blog or Not to Blog?

It's time-consuming, and hard to quantify,  
but authors blog on

BY SUE CORBETT

Millions of kids are online these days—27 million teens each day after school, according to a recent survey. Naturally, authors who write for them feel pressure to be there, too: blogging about their books, their tours, their favorite TV shows. But is it worth it? The answer seems to be a qualified maybe—or maybe someday.

"It's kind of like the DVD extras," said YA author Sarah Dessen, whose popular blog gets 3,000 hits a day. "It gives readers a little insight into who you are, and it gives me a way to keep in touch with them between books."

Still, it takes time. Dessen says she spends about 30 minutes crafting an entry each day, and at least that much time reading comments. "I've had girls who wrote, 'If you didn't spend so much time blogging, you'd have more books out.'"

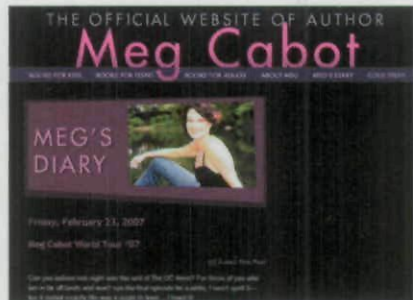
Time, of course, is crucial to the writing process. Ann Brashares doesn't blog because it takes time away from her principal work. "I've been on such a crazy writing schedule for the last year and a half that I haven't slowed down enough to do it," she said.

Indeed, some writers must go cold turkey on blogging in order to get their other writing done. Last December, Stephenie Meyer posted a note on her Web site announcing that her usually frequent updates would be "mostly MIA for the next half year" while she wrote one 600-page book and edited another. Libba Bray, working under deadline pressure to complete the final book in her YA trilogy, has been an infrequent poster since a blog entry late last year that read, in part: "My editor, who is probably reading this and wondering how I dare to take time from the furious writing to post...."

There's also the danger, says *Princess Diaries* author Meg Cabot, of using your best ideas for the instant gratification of the blog faithful. "I have come up with entries and then thought, 'This is such a Princess

Mia thing. It'd be much better in a book.' You don't want readers to come to your books with a sense of déjà vu, or think you're a hack who's repeating herself."

And writers have to decide not only how much energy they have for this, but how much of themselves they're willing to expose. "It's easy when you're typing away in the privacy of your own home to forget all the eyes that could see what you post," said Cynthia Leitich Smith, who has two blogs—one about children's literature, called *Cynsations*, and one about her own writing, *SpookyCyn*. "A lot of industry professionals read *Cynsations*, but so does my Aunt Linda and two ex-boyfriends."



As more authors blog for an audience accustomed to instant access and with varying ideas about privacy, the author-reader relationship is being redefined. Blogs allow readers to comment on posts, occasionally demonstrating how far we've come from the days of fawning fan mail. One blog reader told Dessen her eyebrows were overplucked. A girl's father chastised Cabot for spending too much money on manicures. YA author John Green has taken down what he calls "explicitly offensive" comments. "It's my blog and if I think your comment is stupid, I'm going to delete it," he said.

## There's the Rub

Okay, so blogging is not exactly how all writers like to spend their time. But the big question, of course, is, do blogs sell books? On that, everyone agrees that

the answer is yes, though no one can point to any numbers, at least not yet. "Saleswise, I'm not necessarily expecting to see a post-for-post, purchase-for-purchase correlation," said Julie Strauss-Gabel, who edits Green at Dutton. "Blogging is a long-term endeavor, one that builds and sustains a loyal fan base over a career."

Cabot says that after she started blogging, visits to her Web site soared. Dessen used her blog to count down the days to her pub date for *Just Listen*, and readers stormed bookstores looking for their copy. "I had a lot of girls go to stores on the first day and when the book wasn't on display, they had someone go into the back and made them open a box," she recalled. "I really liked hearing that."

Building excitement online about upcoming appearances definitely makes a difference, says Elizabeth Eulberg, publicity director at Little, Brown. Meyer cultivated fans of her vampire-themed novels with Web updates and with regular participation on fan-generated sites devoted to her books. Those readers turned out in droves for her appearances for *New Moon*. "A lot of them will greet her with their screen names—'Hi, I'm Edwardlover!'—and what amazes me is that Stephenie remembers most of them!" Eulberg said.

But just as e-mail and comments have replaced those sacks full of letters popular authors once got, the written blog is already considered very 2006. Green has already cast aside his so-yesterday text entries for "Brotherhood 2.0," a video blog (a "vlog") he does with his younger brother, Hank, a Web designer. They take turns posting two-minute videos about a *Seinfeld*-style smorgasbord of random topics. A recent entry had John stranded at O'Hare in the midst of a tour to promote last fall's *An Abundance of Katherines*. He interviewed himself about his flight being canceled.

"My whole life I've had crazy ideas and stupid projects and some of them have worked out really well," said Green, who can't imagine not blogging, but does predict the form will continue to evolve. "I will blog until it's replaced by something more awesome, by a feed or something. And then I will blog directly inside your head." ■

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