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BLOGS IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The article discusses three examples of blogs run by the National Library of Poland both in terms of their structure and substantial content, highlighting the elements which have an impact on promoting the blogs themselves and the institutions running the blogs. The advantages of one of the most popular blogging platforms in Poland — WordPress — are discussed. The article also presents a short guide showing how to adapt the appearance of a blog based on the WordPress platform to the needs of the institution launching it.

Keywords: blog, WordPress platform

Introduction

The National Library of Poland is one of the biggest cultural institutions in Poland and its activities are very diversified. Apart from running cultural, scientific, educational activities as well as gathering, processing and providing access to collections, the National Library deals with preservation, digitalization, publishing, holds exhibitions, conferences and provides services associated with this activity. The will to stand up to new challenges posed by technical progress and the expectations of readers and librarian environment, has encouraged the search for new forms of running scientific, educational and promotional activities in a modern way. An example of such activities are blogs of the National Library, which are discussed in this article. Each of the blogs is run by specialists, employees of the library who deal with a particular issue on a daily basis. This certainly has an impact both on the quality of presented contents and on the credibility and opinion-making value of blogs themselves. Three blogs presented in this article cover the issues of: accounting and finances in cultural institutions, preservation of collections and language of subject headings of the National Library.

In the article three exemplary blogs of the National Library are discussed, both in terms of their structure and their contents. The article also includes short manual explaining how to adapt the appearance of a blog on the WordPress platform to the needs of the institution running the blog.

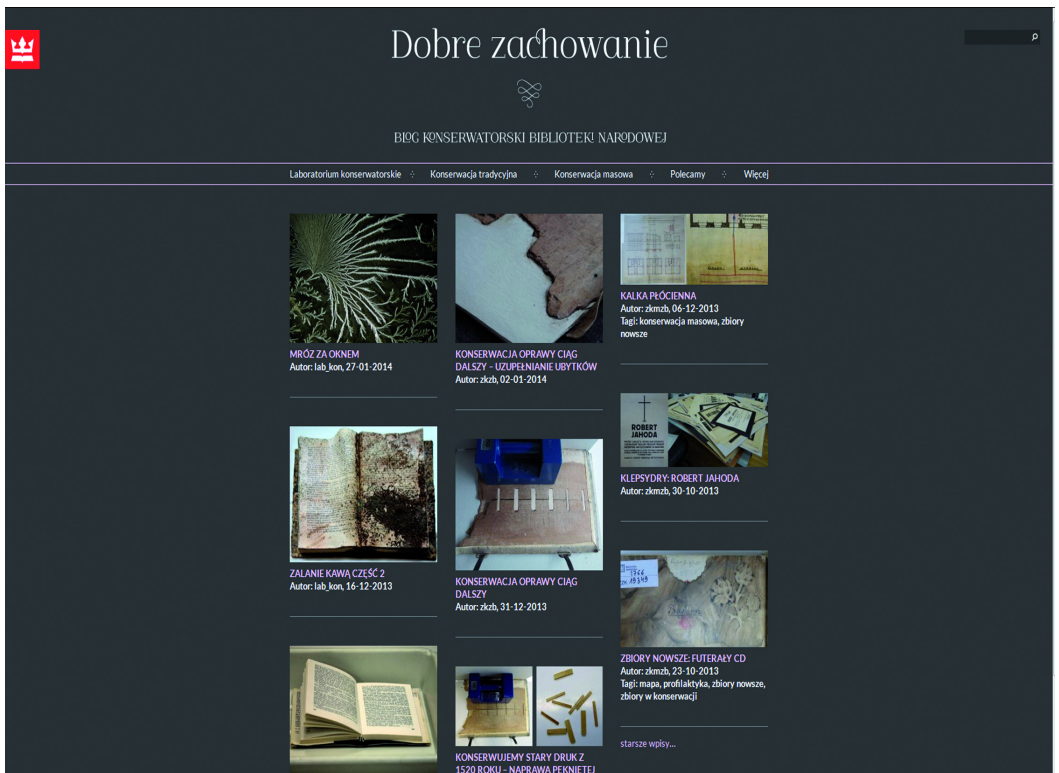
“Dobre zachowanie” Blog

The blog is devoted to conservation and protection of library resources. The blog is run by the employees of three departments: Laboratory for Conservation of Library Collections, Department of Conservation of Library Collections and the Department of Mass Conservation of Library Collections.

Editors of the blog deal with protection of collections and take actions to guarantee the security and good preservation of collections on a daily basis. Writing the blog they popularize knowledge from the area of conservation of collections. In the National Library the process is carried out in two ways: by means of traditional and mass conservation. The first one refers to single historical objects and works of art and this kind of conservation is supposed to stem the process of decay of paper, as well as to restore, or reproduce the artistic, esthetic and utilitarian values of historical pieces of work.¹ The second method involves saving threatened library resources and archives by

¹ bn.org.pl

Picture 1. Homepage of the "Dobre zachowanie" blog



means of specialized modern devices, or installations where the process is carried out on a massive scale. Both these methods are reflected in form of two categories of the blog's main menu. The authors of the blog make sure that the blog forms a kind of compendium of knowledge about conservation of collections, that's why by choosing the *Polecamy* (we recommend) option, the readers can find out, among others, what norms regulate the conditions for storage of archives and library collections, which gloves should be used for work with historical objects or what literature they should resort to. The option *Więcej* -> *Przydatne linki* (more -> useful links) serves a similar function, as it presents a set of links to external resources associated with the subject of conservation of collections.

"Dobre zachowanie" is a typical photoblog, as photos constitute the main content of the blog. Homepage of the blog consists of a heading containing the blog's logotype. Further down, there is the main menu. Underneath the main menu there is an area divided into three columns which are ascribed to particular departments editing their

content. In each of the columns latest posts in form of thumbnails of photos, title, author and short description, which appears when you move the mouse arrow to the photo, are displayed. By clicking on a thumbnail photo we open the content of the post. By choosing one of categories in the main menu, we display posts from the category. Most posts consist of a few photos and a short description. Every post can be easily shares on Facebook, Google+, Pinterest and Wykop thanks to buttons placed below the title. This makes it possible to promote both a particular post, the blog and indirectly the homepage of the National Library (there is an icon with a logo of the National Library in the upper left corner of the screen). On the blog there is an option of commenting posts, which allows free interaction of editors with the readers.

“Winien czy ma?” Blog

“Winien czy ma?” is a blog on finances, accounting and taxes in cultural institutions written by the employees of the Department of Finances and Accounting of the National Library. National Library is one of the biggest cultural institutions in Poland and its activities are very diversified. For this reason the employees of the Department of Finances and Accounting decided to create a blog, which on the one hand allows them to share their experience from the area of finances and accounting of cultural institution and on the other hand constitutes a platform for discussion and exchange of experiences with employees of similar institutions. The blog is run in cooperation with publishing house “Wydawnictwo Podatkowe GOFIN”, which provides its commercial materials to the National Library free of charge.

Posts on the blog are allocated to three categories: accounting and finance, public finances and finances of cultural institutions. Homepage contains a set of latest posts from all categories (*Co nowego?* in main menu). The layout of the blog is traditional: logotype is located at the top, further down we find main menu. The area below the menu is divided into two columns. The first one is the area for content. The second one constitutes a side menu containing such positions as tag cloud, useful links, archive of posts or RSS channels, thanks to which blog readers can follow new posts easier. Traditionally, the National Library logo linking to the library's homepage is placed in the upper left corner. Every post can be shared on Facebook and Google+ using buttons placed below the title of a post. Comments appearing below posts often contain additional questions associated with the subject of the post and editors answer these questions.

Picture 2. Homepage of “Winien czy ma?” blog

“Fabryka języka” Blog

“Fabryka języka” is a blog of the Department of the Language of Subject Headings of the National Library addressed to librarians. The blog provides information concerning work on vocabulary and methods of work applied by the Department, reviews and information concerning new publications about preparation of subject indexes, information about the way and organization of work at the Department. Authors of the blog encourage readers to send their own opinions and comments, which let them better adapt the content of the blog to the needs of readers. ²

² Fabryka-jezyka.bn.org.pl

Picture 3. Homepage of "Fabryka języka" blog

This blog is built on the basis of a traditional three-section?? model — at the top of the page the logotype and main menu are placed. Main menu consists of three categories and information about the authors of the blog and its subject scope. The area below the menu is divided into two columns, where the first one displays the content and the second one constitutes a side menu containing such items as: link to the website of subject headings department, RSS channels, archive of posts or latest comments. Posts can be shared in popular social media networks by means of buttons placed below post contents. Traditionally, the National Library logo linking to the library's homepage is placed in the upper left corner.

WordPress platform

WordPress is one of the most popular blogging platforms in Poland and for this reason, in this article most attention is devoted to this particular platform. What makes

WordPress popular is the fact that it is offered based on the GNU (General Public License) license. Moreover, the technologies used to build the platform are open source software projects. Another major advantage is that for editors using the blogging platform on a daily basis is very easy.

Main advantages of the WordPress platform

- It is based on open-source and very popular software.
Due to the fact that such technologies as PHP and MySQL, which are available on almost all hosting servers (both company servers and in hosting offered by specialized companies) have been used to build WordPress, there is no problem with hosting websites based on WordPress. An additional advantage is that WordPress is compatible with many platforms. This means that WordPress doesn't determine the operating system and doesn't require using a particular Internet browser. Moreover, the popularity of the applied technologies means that a comparably big group of people acquainted with www technologies are able to use the platform.
- Complex and very easy content management system (CMS).
CMS WordPress system offers a very friendly administration panel covering both activities associated with editing the blog's content and administrative functions.
- Big number of add-ons expanding the basic functionality of WordPress.
Thanks to good documentation, the utilization of popular technologies and large community gathered around the project a great number of add-ons such as templates and plug-ins, allowing to change the appearance of the blog and expand its functionality, have been created.
- Ready blogging platforms
It is possible to use a ready blogging platform available at the address WordPress.com — in this case you don't need to have your own www server or to pay for hosting services. The main disadvantage of this solution is limited possibility of configuration.

Adjusting the appearance of WordPress

It is possible to change the appearance of WordPress in two ways. The first involves buying a ready graphic template or using one of free templates available on the net. The second way is ordering a template from a company specialized in web technologies or from the webmaster employed at our institution.

The main advantage of the second solution is that our blog can get an individual, unique appearance, which identifies our blog and matches other websites of our

institution. What's more, the blog skin we design and create ourselves contains only the functions that we need.

Before we start creating a template, we should first collect the requirements for the planned blog. For this purpose it is best to meet the blog's future users and on the basis of collected requirements prepare an initial concept of the project. Next, the initial project should be consulted with the blog users. After receiving approval it is possible to start the installation of WordPress and further its initial configuration. At this stage it is worth thinking about the integration of the blog with social media networks and 'attaching' statistics, which allow us to follow user traffic on the blog. Another step will be preparing a graphic design of a template taking into consideration the collected requirements.

Structure of WordPress graphic template

WordPress templates are located in the folder `/wp-content/themes`³ where you have to create a sub-folder with the name of your template. The basic files that belong to the a template are the following:

index. php

Basic file generating the structure of sub-pages. It contains PHP code and an (X) HTML tag. By applying conditional markets we can adapt the content and structure of markets to the currently displayed sub-page. The file can contain the complete structure of a page or can use template tags⁴ to generate its particular fragments, eg. heading, footer etc.

header. php

File creating the heading of a blog. The content generated by the file can be taken from the level of another template file, by using template tag `get_header`.

sidebar. php

File creating side menu of a blog. The content generated by the file can be taken from the level of another template file by using template tag `get_sidebar`.

footer. php

File creating the footer of a blog. The content generated by the file can be taken from the level of another template file by using `get_footer`.

³ The path in relation to the blog's main folder.

⁴ Both conditional and template tags will be discussed in further part of the article.

functions. php

File allocated to auxiliary functions used in other files of the template.

style. css

File of the template's style sheet. Additionally, heading which includes such information as the name of the template, author, description, version, etc is placed in this file

By using the above-mentioned files we can create a simple template. A more complex template needs a greater number of files, for example:

home. php

Homepage template file.

single. php

Template file used when a page with a single post is displayed.

page. php

Template file for a static page.

category. php

Template file for posts from a particular category.

tag. php

Template file for posts with a particular tag.

search. php

Template file used to display a page with search results.

404. php

Template file used when WordPress is unable to find a post or a page.

Before we start creating a template, we need to learn about three issues: template tags, conditional tags and the loop displaying posts.

Template tags

Template tags are used for dynamic generation of template content. In most cases their names begin with `get_` or `the_`. Below you can find the most often used template tags:

get_header

Template tag making it possible to load header. php file located in the template folder. If we are using a few different header. php files (eg. one for error page and another for the page displaying posts) we can provide a part of the name of heading file located after the hyphen (in case of heading header-404. php it will be 404) as a parameter.

get_search_form

Template tag loading a form enabling search on the blog from searchform. php file.

get_footer

Template tag making it possible to load footer. php file located in the template folder. Similarly as in case of get_header tag we can provide the name of the footer file in the tag parameter, if we want to load a file other than the standard one.

bloginfo

Returns information about the website. We have to provide the value we find interesting as a parameter. get_bloginfo functions in a very similar way. The difference between these two tags is that bloginfo directly prints the returned value on the screen and get_bloginfo only returns a value which can later be eg. saved to the variable.

the_content

The tag displays the content of a post. It has to be used within the loop displaying posts. It contains two optional parameters used in case when in a post the dividing tag <! -more--> has been used. The first one determines the text that is supposed to be displayed on the homepage as an incentive to read the whole text. The second one decides whether the text before the dividing comment is supposed to be displayed on the page of a single post.

the_title

The tag displays the title of a post.

the_author

The tag displays the author of a post.

the_date

The tag displays the date of publication of a post.

Loop displaying posts

The loop displaying posts in WordPress looks this way:

```
<? php
    if (have_posts ()) {
        while (have_posts ()) {
            the_post ();
            // zawartość wpisu
        }
    }
? >
```

The code of the loop begins with a conditional instruction in which function `have_posts` is used. The function checks whether a blog has posts that can be displayed. If the condition is satisfied, the main loop is launched. The main loop runs until the moment when the `have_posts` function returns TRUE value. The `the_post` function prepares all data concerning a post for display.

Conditional tags

Conditional tags are used in blog template files for displaying contents depending on whether certain conditions are satisfied or not. Tags of this kind return logical values TRUE or FALSE and are used in combination with conditional instructions. By using them it is possible to check whether currently homepage or a single post page is displayed. It is also possible to check whether the displayed post belongs to a particular category. A characteristic trait of these tags is the name usually including the prefix `is_`. Below the list of most often used conditional tags is presented:

`is_home`

The tag checks whether the displayed page is blog's homepage.

`is_single`

The tag checks whether a single post is displayed. It is possible to provide post's id as a parameter. Then it will be checked, whether the post with the given id is displayed.

`is_page`

The tag checks whether the blog's static page is displayed. Similarly as in case of `is_single` tag, it is possible to provide page id in the parameter.

is_search

The tag checks whether the page with search results is displayed.

Conclusions

Each of the described blogs focuses on a particular, narrow area of activity of the National Library of Poland and takes a close look at these subjects. Readers interested in a particular subject gains a credible source of information from a particular area and the institution gains an excellent promotion tool. It took the blogs only a few months to attract a group of loyal readers. On the basis of comments published on the blogs and on the official Facebook profile of the National Library, it is possible to conclude that the blogs have been highly appreciated. Readers have recognized their professional quality: both the presented contents themselves and the modern form of presentation of information.

Nowadays even the best texts presented on websites without adequate graphic setting are insufficient to attract a broad group of readers. That's why in the article special attention in the description of the WordPress platform was paid to creating graphic templates.

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