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Alumni Flies and Hardy's educational enterprise developed as solution for blogosphere need

Summary: Kidblog was created out of a need for a blogging platform suitable for elementary students.

(December 13, 2011)-Dan Flies '04 and Matt Hardy '01 share a number of experiences in addition to being good friends. As roommates, they lived off-campus together. As classmates, they attended computer science classes together. As Concert Choir members, they sang together. And today, as educational entrepreneurs, they jointly operate Kidblog.org, a hosting service created for elementary and middle school teachers and students.

Teachers use Kidblog to improve their students' writing and communication skills, to enhance classroom instruction, and to expose their students to an idea exchange among peers from throughout the United States and around the world. In the past year, Kidblog has grown to more than 500,000 users.

A question and answer conversation with Flies and Hardy provides more information about their enterprise.

Q:How did Kidblog evolve?

A: Kidblog was created out of a need for a blogging platform suitable for Matt's third grade students to use. It started in his classroom in 2007. Kidblog was made available to other teachers in 2008 as part of a presentation Matt made at a TIES Education Technology Conference.

Q: What was missing in the classroom that Kidblog now offers?

A: Other blogging platforms are missing the level of user management and content oversight that many teachers need. Kidblog provides a high level of functionality, while simplifying the publishing interface for those who desire a more streamlined writing experience. We're ideal for younger students. Kidblog is the solution for teachers who need a safe, simple blogging platform for an entire class.

Q:What are the benefits to children who have this blogging opportunity?

A: Blogs provide motivation for writing and discussion within an authentic context. The process of blogging engages students and provides a venue for readers/writers to share ideas and discuss topics that are important to them. If the teacher's privacy settings allow it, students' blogs can be visible to a global audience. Students are especially motivated by comments posted by visitors whom they've never met, yet who took the time to read and respond to their writing.

Q: How did this network grow so quickly?

A: Kidblog is particularly popular among our target audience, K–8 classrooms. Our market growth has been purely organic—teachers telling other teachers about their success with Kidblog. Several influential education technology blogs promoted the service in 2009, inviting their readers to experience its benefits for themselves, and we saw exponential

growth in 2010–11. Many educators have used Kidblog as a centerpiece of their professional development offerings, showing other teachers how to quickly get their class up and running with blogs.

Q: What are your current Kidblog responsibilities?

A: As with any small company, we do everything. Matt leads our development. His knowledge as a teacher and experience with programming makes him the ideal person to know what teachers need in a blogging tool. Dan helps with development and is the lead for support, business development, marketing, etc.

Q: What is the impact of Kidblog on teachers who use the blog?

A: Teachers love Kidblog because they are able to easily manage large groups of students while effectively moderating blogging activity and content. Teachers are able to offer the benefits of blogging to students. Administrators and parents can be confident that students are contributing to a safe and controlled online community of learners.

Q: What is the impact of Kidblog on education?

A: Many schools are at a tipping-point, where there are more students who have access to technology (both in-school and at-home) than do not. Kidblog leverages this technology access and allows students to have their own corner of the blogosphere, all within a safe, teacher-controlled environment.

Q: Where is Kidblog going next?

A: Kidblog's next phase introduces social networking features that allow schools, classrooms, teachers, and students to more easily connect with other bloggers across the world. Offering a feature-rich, free service has been key to Kidblog's success. In the near future, we'll be offering paid options for district-wide implementations. Kidblog is self-funded at this time, and we're in the process of pursuing outside investment.

A computer science major, Flies also completed minors in music and mathematics. He has served as an IT auditor for KPMG, General Mills, and now Lawson Software.

Hardy graduated with a computer science major and chemistry minor. He completed a master of education at the University of Minnesota in 2005. He currently teaches fifth grade for the Eden Prairie Public School District. In addition to benefiting from Kidblog's functionality in his own classroom, Kidblog has afforded him opportunities to speak at many education technology conferences.

Photo above: Matt Hardy