Social Network Service Extension of WebryBlog

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Abstract

Blog and Social Network Services (SNS) started spreading explosively. Many people publish blog articles with ease. BIGLOBE started a blog service named WebryBlog in March 2004, and recently released new functions for the SNS.

This paper introduces this SNS extension of the WebryBlog.

1. Introduction

As a result of the explosive spread of blogging, the network is now filled with a vast number of blogs that are written each day by many people. This trend has led to the birth of a new form of communication in which the readers enter trackbacks and comments on the blogs.

On the other hand, the Social Network Services (SNS) such as mixi[2] are also spreading rapidly, and communications based on friendship and communities are attracting attention.

At BIGLOBE, we recently enhanced the community function of the WebryBlog and extended it with an SNS facility. This paper is intended to introduce the SNS extension of the WebryBlog.

2. Blogging and SNS

When the user of a blog writes an article in it, the article is delivered as RSS into the list of new articles at the blog portal. When other users find new RSSs or interesting blogs, they can communicate with the blog by means of trackbacks and comments.

As a large number of entries are made that deal with a topical news article in a short time the blogs have acquired a media like aspect.

On the other hand, the SNS consist of closed networks that cannot be joined in principle without an introduction by a friend. Communication in these networks is held by exchanging messages after reading the entries of a friend or joining the communities (bulletin boards) in which they are interested. Since the friend introduction system reduces anonymity, the community based input tends to be less disordered and presents a high activity rate.

3. Problems with the SNS Communities

The SNS initially presupposed the publication of real names, aiming at offering a venue for social communities on the network by linking human relationships in the real world. However, as the number of members increased, the concern or risk of a leak of personal information and damage in real life has increased. and those who register their real names have decreased.

4. SNS Extension of WebryBlog

At BIGLOBE, we have enhanced the community function of the WebryBlog to solve the above problems by applying an SNS type extension to it.

This extension allows each blog owner to create and run a community called a "Circle." In addition, it activates communications between blog owners by providing a "Friend List" to assist the blog owners in establishing mutual friendships. The following sections will outline the SNS extension of the WebryBlog.

4.1 Profile Page

A Profile Page is added to the WebryBlog for use in showing information on the blog owner. The profile does not need to have a real name but can be used with a nickname. The information items shown in the profile include the "Nickname," "Self introduction" and "Profile image" as well as other freely selected information such as hobbies.

4.2 Friend List and Friend Introductions

A blog owner can establish friendships with like-minded persons and show a Friend List in public. A friendship can be es-

tablished when a person makes a friend request and another person makes a friend approval. The user can also write a text for the introduction of a friend. When a friendship with a user is established, the profile image of the other party is added to the Friend List together with a link to the friend's Profile Page.

4.3 Circle Function

A circle is a community space that can be created by a WebryBlog user, and has the function of an image bulletin board. The person who created a circle becomes its "Host," who runs it and recruits members for it. As the circle can be joined only by registered users of the WebryBlog, other members are always identifiable, so safe communications are assured.

A circle can be categorized into one of the three types of "Closed," "Open" and "Invited" according to its purpose.

(1) Closed Circle
Only those who are invited by the Host can become members of this circle, and page viewing is limited to the members only. This type of circle assumes the use of a place for liaison between friends or by membership communities.

(2) Invited Circle
Those who are invited by one of the circle members can become members of such a circle. This type of circle can be used by highly specialized groups or by those who like 'word of mouth' or 'on the grapevine' communication.

(3) Open Circle
Anyone who has registered in the WebryBlog can become a member of an Open circle and page viewing is opened to the entire network. This type of circle aims to provide a place for the exchange of hobby information, and also provide a forum for large-scale communities, etc.

The participants in all of the above circles can be managed by the Host, who can cancel the participation in the circle of any problematic member. Only circle members that are allowed to make entries in the circle pages and the Host can change the open/closed attribution of the circle according to the situation. One of the most significant features of the present SNS extension lies in the provision of management functions that can solve safety problems accompanying traditional SNS at the same time as ensuring the openness of the community(**Fig.**).

4.4 Future Perspectives

The SNS extension that we plan to add in order to extend communication further includes; 1) a "footprint function" with which a WebryBlog user viewing a blog can leave a footprint automatically, in order to indicate the user's visit to it; 2) a "Messaging function" that is linked with the Webry Messenger (IM); 3) "Presence linkage" for showing the status of users.

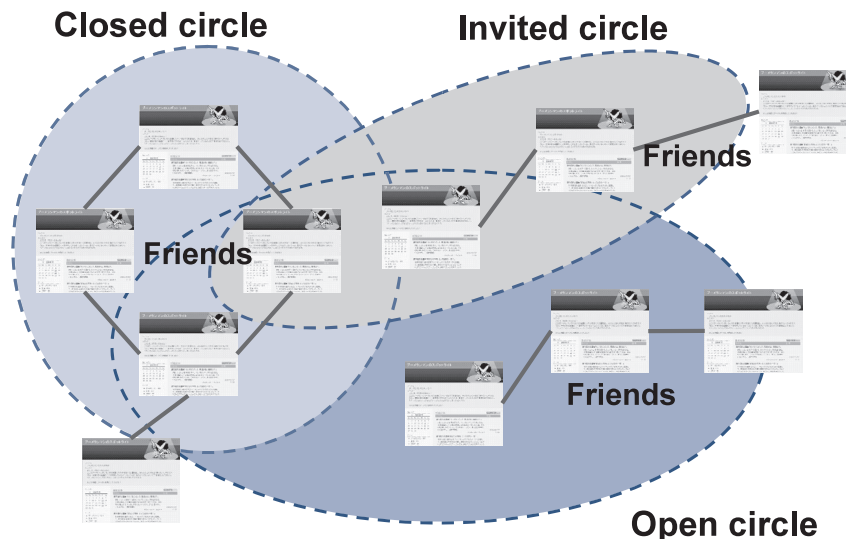Blog users can interconnect as "friends" and join the "circles" they like.

Fig. SNS extension of WebryBlog.

Social Network Service Extension of WebryBlog

5. Business Model

The WebryBlog is a business model which profits from the advertising displayed in the users' blogs. Therefore, the present SNS extension is designed so that any circle page will always include some advertising.

The commercial use of circles is prohibited for the present, but we will provide the paid commercial-base circle function in future.

We also plan to provide communities for corporations in the WebryBlog, where the SNS is provided based on a tie-up with a private corporation.

6. Conclusion

This paper discusses the communication problems involved in using blogs and the SNS, and introduces an SNS extension for the WebryBlog for attaching the communication functions of SNS to it, while still maintaining its characteristics as a blog service. At BIGLOBE, we are planning to expand our communication services by improving and enhancing our blog service with the SNS extension functions.

References

1) Mizumori, et al., "BIGLOBE Blog Service", NEC GIHO, Vol. 57, No. 6. pp.65-68, Nov. 2004.
2) http://mixi.jp/

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