

Using Blog to Develop an Online Exhibition for Typography Research and Education

Jesvin Puay-Hwa Yeo

School of Art, Design & Media, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore-639 798

E-mail: jesvinyeo@ntu.edu.sg

ABSTRACT

Weblogs, described by one of their creators as the 'pirate radio stations' of the web, are a new, personal and determinedly non-hostile evolution of the electric community. Weblogs are platforms for intelligent reaction to current events and ubiquitous pundits and in recent year, educators have also used it to facilitate the progress of learning. This article introduces the definition of weblog and the major hosted weblog sites: *Blogger*, *LiveJournal*, *Pitas*, *Xanga*, and *WordPress*. It also explains the different types of weblogs, from personal blog to topical blog, thoughtful blog, friendblog, collaborative blog, political blog, directory blog, corporate blog, advice blog, formats blog, audio blog, and photoblog. This article reports on the process of using weblog to develop an online exhibition for typography research and education. It also provides an overview of weblog functions, such as, easy uploading of images, video files, audio files and information, digital archiving of exhibits, online gallery space, and comment and feedback in an interactive format.

Keywords: Weblog, typography, online exhibition

1. INTRODUCTION

Time is scarce in this fast moving world. Technology advances and globalisation continue to change the world we live in. In recent year, weblog has become one of the popular online communications for people around the world. A blog allows the creator(s) to post commentary, events, graphics materials or videos. It works like a website and allows links to other blogs and webpages. As of December 2007, Weblog search engine **Technorati** says it is now tracking over 112 million weblogs, with 8,000-17,000 new blogs created every single day. By fully utilised the capabilities of Web 2.0, weblog could be used for the development of an online exhibition without much difficulty and reach out to its audience around the globe.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article reports on the experimental journey of using weblog to the development of an online exhibition for the typography research and education. The approach taken is to develop an informative and attractive online exhibition within the existing Web 2.0 frameworks to minimise the time putting in to learn new software. Within this framework, the focus has been on developing a comprehensive online exhibition space that provides links to history of typography, typography terminology, experimental typography, typography museums, typography institutions,

typographers and typography courses, and a gallery to showcase interesting typography works.

The aim of this article is to illustrate through real world example, i.e., using existing Web 2.0 application like weblog can enhance an aesthetic institution's ability to archive, visualise and share their exhibitions, and research information online easily and in a more pervasive manner.

3. WEBLOG

A weblog, web log or blog is a web-application that's designed to be updated with periodic posts in a linear, time-based manner, similar to a dairy or personal journal, except that the contents are meant for public consumption¹. These posts are often in reverse chronological order and it would typically be accessible to any internet user. Weblogs are maintained by single authors or multiple authors, and it runs from individual diaries to media programmes, photo galleries, corporate marketing tools, and even as the arms of political campaigns. Most weblogs enable visitors to leave public comments, some encourage visitors to send e-mail message that are then quoted and incorporated into posts, while others are non-interactive. The totality of weblogs or blog-related websites is usually called the 'blogosphere'². When a large amount of activity, information and opinion erupts around a particular subject or controversy in the blogosphere, it is commonly called a 'blogstorm'³.

3.1 Major Hosting Weblog Sites

Hosted weblog applications take a whole of responsibility off the blogger and the complication out of starting a blog. The blog software company manages the web domains, software maintenance and updates, data storage and back up, as well as template design and management. It allows users to focus on content instead of codes and configuration setting. Common blog hosting sites and web services which allow internet users to create their blog for free are.

- (a) Blogger⁴ – It is a free weblog service by Pyra Labs and provides web-based tools required by the individuals to publish on the web. The tool 'Blogger' is a service to make weblog publishing easier. The user does not have to write any code or install any server software or scripts and Blogger allows the users to design their blogs freely. The user could also choose to host the blog on Blogger's blogspot or on the their own server via file transfer protocol (FTP) or simple file transfer protocol. Blogger support most of the web browsers but users are advised to switch to Mozilla Firefox browser to have the best possible experience using Blogger.
- (b) LiveJournal⁵ – It is a free weblog site allowing users to keep a private journal, a blog, a discussion forum or a social network. LiveJournal is popular with its well-like features of a self-contained community and social networking features, particularly with users who are looking for discussion-driven blogging. LiveJournal blogs are cataloged by region, interest and online community affiliation.
- (c) Pitas⁶ – It is a free hosting site for weblogs and news. Supports both FTP and web-based editing features including templates, multiple editors, and a 'yourname.pitas.com' sub-domain.
- (d) Xanga⁷ – It currently hosts the largest number of weblogs on the internet. It offers a free service and a pay service called 'Xanga Premium' which is operated by Xanga.com. Xanga is mostly used as a personal diary site, and it is separated from other blogging sites by its focus on community.
- (e) WordPress⁸ – It is a state-of-the-art publishing platform that offers a clean, easy-to-use interface with a focus on aesthetics, web standards, and usability. It is a free and open source blog publishing application. WordPress is the official successor of b2cafelog which was developed by Michel Valdrighi.

Advanced bloggers prefer to generate their blogs by using server-side software tools such as Movable Type, bBlog, WordPress, b2evolution and Serendipity⁹. Such programs provide greater flexibility

to users to publish on these website or on a third party site, or even to host a group of blogs for a company or school.

3.2 Types of Weblogs

Broadly there are 12 types of weblogs:

- (i) *Personal blog* – It is an online diary or journal, such as Blogger or LiveJournal. It is a space for users to write their day-to-day experiences, complaints, thoughts and many more. The weblog format is usually user-friendly and allows inexperienced bloggers to create, format, and post entries easily.
- (ii) *Topical blog* – It is often focuses on a specific niche, often a technical one. An example is a 'Google Blog' that posts only Google news. Many weblogs now allow different categories, which mean a general blog can be modified to become a topical blog as per the needs of the users.
- (iii) *Thoughtful blog* – It presents an individual's or a small group's thoughts on current subject that are less contingent and more philosophical.
- (iv) *FriendBlog* – It is a distributed networked journal on the web, composed of short, frequently updated posts written by friends connected through their similar interests. By connecting the user FriendBlog, all posts would appears in his friends and acquaintances 'FriendBlogs'.
- (v) *Collaborative or Collective or Group blog* – It is usually written by a group of people on a specific topic, such as MetaFilter¹⁰. It can be either open to the public or limited to a specific community.
- (vi) *Political blog or watch blog* – It is usually comments posted by an individual that link to articles from news websites. It usually sets out to criticise what the author considers systematic errors or bias in an online newspaper or news site. These days, politicians also use blog to run their campaign; e.g., presidential campaign of Barack Obama for America during 2008.
- (vii) *Directory blog* – It collects and categorises numerous websites with interesting content in an easy to use and constantly updated format. Political blogs also fall into this category.
- (viii) *Corporate blog* – It is for employees of corporations to post their official or semi-official blogs about their work. This type of weblogs could be a disastrous if bloggers do not handle them carefully.
- (ix) *Advice blog* – It is weblog that provides expert advice, such as personal finance blog (Mintlife) or parenting and family blog (The Mother Load).

- (x) *Formats blog* – It is weblog which specialises in specific form of presentation. For example, web comics (image blog) or videoblog (video blog) or moblogs (mobile blog) belong to this category.
- (xi) *Audio blog* – It is MP3 blog, which make audio files available to the user. It is normally targeted at highly specialised musical genres, such as late 60s soul music or early 90s hip-hop.
- (xii) *Photoblog* – It is photo-sharing sites, such as Buzznet and Flickr. They integrated the typical photo gallery service with photo sharing, blogging and syndication to create a new kind of social networking.

4. DESIGNING ONLINE EXHIBITION IN WEBLOG

Weblog, the most widely adopted tool of the read/write web can now be used to generate exciting new learning formats, as well as able to engage students in a new world of synchronous information feeds and interactive learning¹¹. It also has the potential to create learning community and helps to develop a better grounding in fundamental course concepts¹². Furthermore, educational use of weblogs is increasingly being brought into existence every day^{13,14}. However, most of the researches focused on using the weblog as a student journal or a forum or act as a facilitator outside classroom. There is relatively little research on using weblog as an online museum or online exhibition space for educational proposes. This current study endeavors to scrutinise how weblog could act a tool to create an attractive online display of information and shape up the aesthetic aspect of an educational portal.

Following is the implementation and development of the typography online museum using weblog. This section demonstrates us how weblog can enhance an aesthetic institution's ability to archive, visualise and share their exhibitions, research information online easily and more pervasive. The weblog created will be used for Typography courses in School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. There are a total of three levels of typography courses in the Visual Communication BFA programme and these courses are compulsory to all students, namely, Typography I, Typography II and Typography III.

4.1 Choosing Authoring Tool

A few free service weblog providers mentioned above on what they offer and exactly how they work were studied. All of these services have a link on the homepage that will take the user to a sign-up page and all of them require a username

and password. These services also provide design templates and some of them allow user to change the header design.

After the testing two weblog hosts, Blogger and Wordpress were narrowed. Both are easy to use, user can get help anytime from the main website. Blogger website provides a video tutorial for beginners and it allow user to upload html without extra cost. After much consideration, Wordpress was chosen as the weblog host for this implementation because it allows a user to create multiplies blogs using the same username and password, it has more design themes to choose from and the features are clearer and easy to use compare to Blogger. The user could create a website looking blog in a minute and it allows users to invest in tools that are more sophisticated when they gain experience. Moreover, there are tons of helpful resources available and easily searched for on Wordpress support site and forums. Some useful links for beginner included getting started, write a new post, change blog's settings, choose another theme and frequently asked questions.

4.2 Implementation

The author started by collating all the typography information needed from the world wide web was collated and separated them in different folders for uploading into the blog. The content focused on five areas of typography, namely, history of typography, typography terminology, experimental typography, typography museums, typography institutions, typographers and typography courses. These areas provide information and links to the subject matters and there will be a gallery to displays beautiful type design.

On the first attempt, 2 hours were spent to sign up, design and upload the first batch of information. A blog address named typographymuseum.wordpress.com was created and it came with 3 gigabytes of file storage. The title of the blog is Online Typography Museum and it can be changes at anytime. A theme name Outline was chosen designed by Chris Pearson. To personalise the weblog, the original header was replaced with a typographic banner. A category column was created on the right side of the blog for easy access of information.

After 2 hours, part of the content was uploaded; it covered History of Typography, Experimental Typography and part of Typography Museums. Every post came with a description and an image of the information website. Viewers can link to the website by clicking on the image. A search widget was also added for viewer to search specify object or word on the blog.

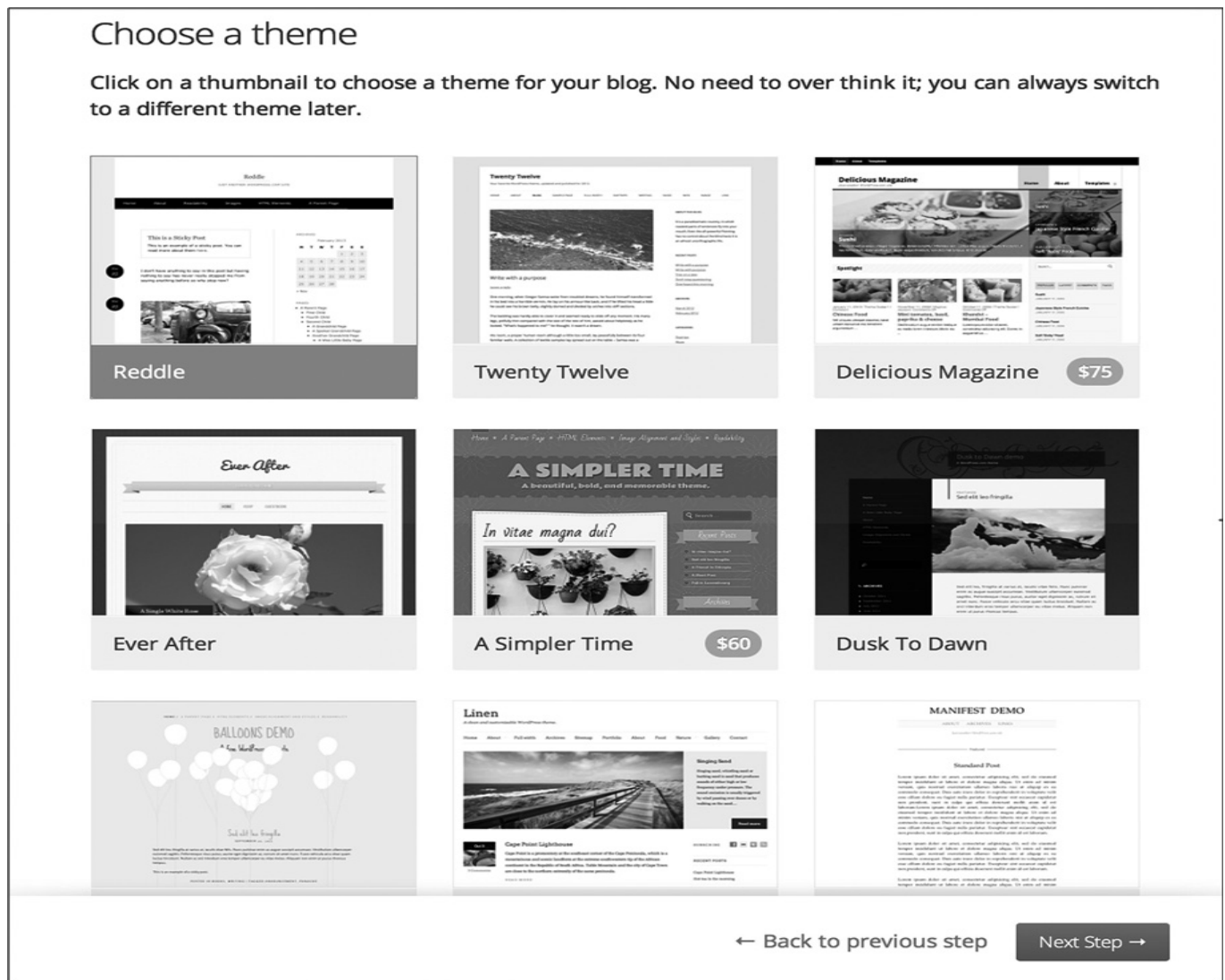


Figure 1. Theme design template.

Uploading the information continued on day 2 for 5 hours. Five more categories had been added, Typographers, Typography Courses and Learning, Typography Design and Bookstore, Typography Foundry and Typography Institutions. Typography Design and Bookstores and Typography Foundry were newly added to the original content areas to make it helpful for researcher and students interested in typography. Another new area would

be the Inspiration button on the top bar, this page contained links to all the interesting typography websites¹⁵.

5. EVALUATION OF ONLINE TYPOGRAPHY MUSEUM

The weblog was sent to 40 visual communication students at School of Art, Design and Media in Nanyang Technological University via e-mail. They were asked to browse the blog and give feedback.



Figure 2. Easy to access upload/insert buttons for any digital media.

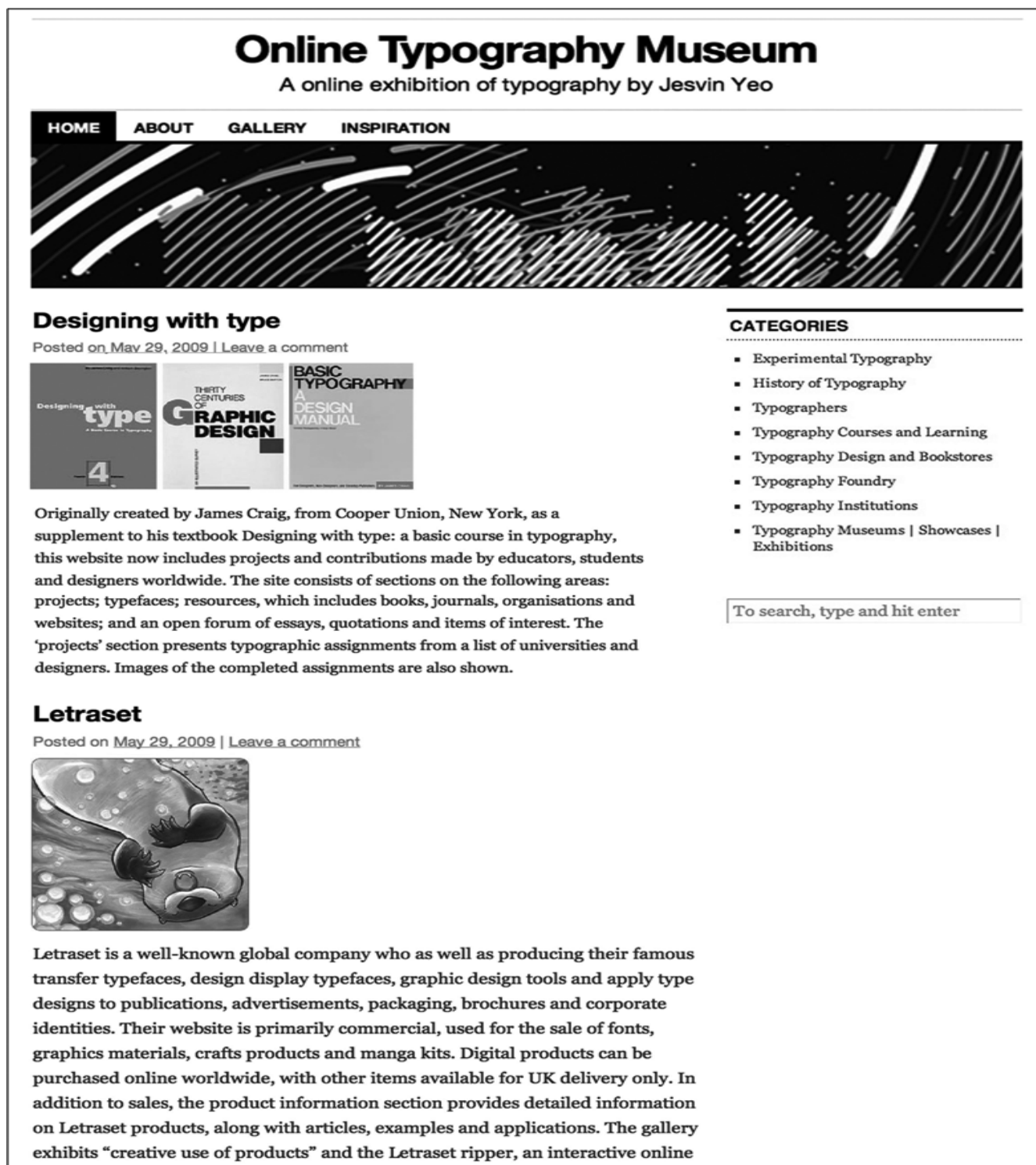


Figure 3. Final design of the weblog.

All of them commented that it was easy to use and navigate. Eighty per cent of the students felt that there was sufficient information but some suggested that it would be helpful to add in sub-categories when the time comes whereby there are more entries. A number of students liked the weblog to include links to typography rules. All the participants agreed that the weblog was very useful for typography similar to that before. They felt that it was like a research

hub connecting various links relating to typography. Some of them commented that they like the site and not seen a site on typography quite like it. They felt that most sites on typography are less resource-intensive and more blog-like and chatty. Of the total, one eighth of the students suggested that it would be useful to have a form where users can submit new resources.

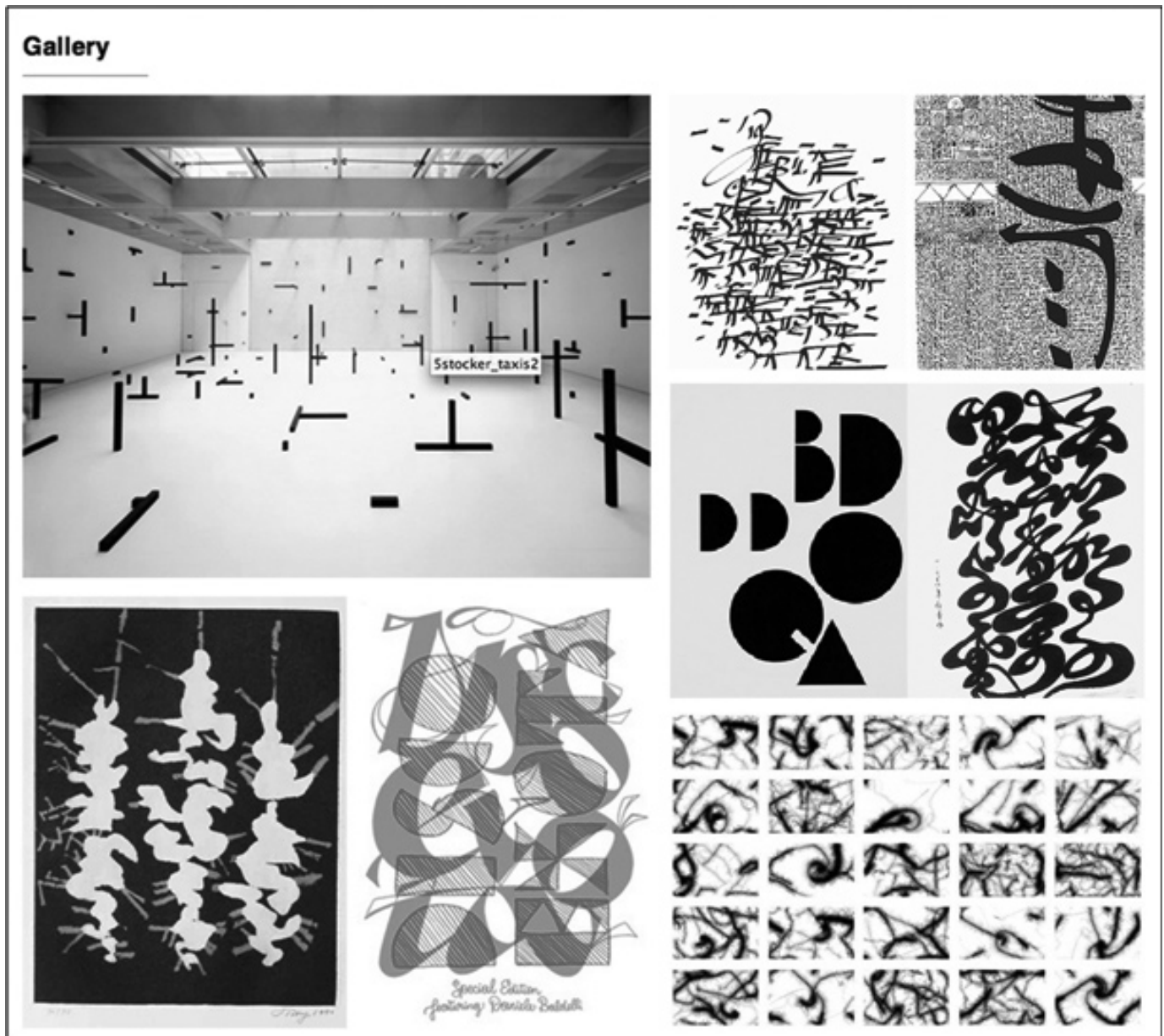


Figure 4. Gallery display of type design.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Seeing that more and more educational institutions are using technology for their higher education teaching, the demand of a well designed sites for sharing and exhibiting information is growing day-by-day. Especially for design school, one of the important factors that students need to learn is aesthetics sense. Most of the school blackboard that supports teaching does not allow the flexibility of design and layout. Furthermore, the information on the blackboard is only available for a certain period and for students who have sign up for the course. Instructor might need to recreate or transfer information for the same course in a new semester.

The article has introduced several weblog management tools that offer free hosting. One of these services is often the best choice for a

beginner because all the details will be taken care of. Nevertheless, there are some drawbacks on these services. The service maybe outages when their hosting servers malfunction or overloaded but cases like that seldom happen. It is demonstrated that it is easy to create an online gallery using weblog, as long all the information is ready for uploading, a professional online gallery can be build within 2 to 3 hours. Weblog also allow user to delete or add information, images, video and audio files, categories or sub-categories in a minute. Result from the evaluation showed that weblog is an application that is easy to navigate and viewers can find information easily. It proves that weblog can be an excellent application for any online exhibition projects.

With the advances of technology and Web 2.0, 'we have seen that blogs can be used as notepads for exploring one's own thoughts and ideas'¹⁶, but also as online exhibition for an institution to visualise, exhibit and share a subject information. Weblog is a 'significant part of a new culture of voluntary, contributive, and collaborative participation that, despite being distributed in structure, can be highly focused in organisation'¹⁶. Institutions or departments include exhibition design, library service, online museum or education could create a professional online exhibition anytime, anywhere and with zero cost.

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About the Author

Prof Jesvin Yeo, is Singapore-based multidisciplinary designer and an Assistant Professor at the School of Art, Design & Media of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She also trained at Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design in London. Her research interests are focused on historical and contemporary cultural changes, particularly related to Asian cultures, technology, and typography. Her works has also been exhibited at 798 Art District in Beijing, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Washington D.C., and she has won international awards including *Red Dot Award* (Communication Design), *Design for Asia Award*, and *How International Design Awards*.