



LifesterBlog

<http://www.lifesterblog.com>

School of Information

MIMS Final Project 2007

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the rapid growth of photo and video sharing sites, bloggers would like to communicate by sharing a wide array of multimedia content, which often include a combination of text, photos, videos and audio. However, they are often frustrated by the complicated process to embed media objects into their blogs, because most of the blog hosting services only focus on text entries.

LifesterBlog is designed to solve this problem. It is a free blogging and social networking site, with the primary goal to create an easy-to-use user interface for bloggers to upload and share multimedia content. We also allow bloggers to create customized blogs and control the privacy on all of their content. The service is initially targeting the 2.5 million bloggers in Hong Kong, and we will expand to other regions in later stages.

We began the project by performing a competitive analysis to explore the potential opportunities and challenges facing our system. We have also carried out needs assessment and interviewed targeted users, and translated their invaluable feedback into actual design and implementation.



2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Latest figures indicate an estimated 70M blogs in existence, with about 1.5M posts being written every day.¹ While these blogs are located in thousands of different blog hosting services, including Blogger, Xanga, Live Journal, etc, most of them only provide support for text entries, but not multimedia content, such as photos, videos and music.

Even though text is still the dominate component on blogs (80% of bloggers post text), multimedia content is on the rise. Over 70% bloggers display photos on their blogs, 30% post audio files and another 15% post video files.² These figures are expected to grow significantly, because as photo/video sharing sites proliferate (e.g. YouTube now serves more than 100M videos per day), bloggers also want to communicate by sharing a wide array of multimedia content. Therefore, it is necessary to let bloggers share multimedia content in a user-friendly manner, but this remains to be a challenge to most blogging services. For example, there is no easy way to upload videos and music to Blogger and Yahoo! 360.

¹ Dave Sifry, Technorati, "The State of the Live Web", April 2007
Available at: <http://technorati.com/weblog/2007/04/328.html>

² Pew Internet & American Life Project, "Bloggers: A portrait of the internet's new storytellers," July 2006
Available at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP%20Bloggers%20Report%20July%2019%202006.pdf>

3. PROJECT GOALS

The primary purpose of LifesterBlog is to successfully create an easy-to-use user interface (UI) for bloggers to upload and share multimedia content, including photos, videos, music and books. The interface should be very user friendly, such that bloggers can speed up the process and increase their frequencies to share multimedia content, and remain as active bloggers on LifesterBlog. We also allow bloggers to uniquely customize their blogs and control the access levels on all content.

To achieve the above goals, we have conducted a competitive analysis to explore the opportunities and challenges facing our service. We have also performed needs assessment and interviewed targeted users, and translated their suggestions into actual implementation and UI design. The final project deliverable is an alpha version of a personal blogging and social networking website, located at <http://www.lifesterblog.com>.

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

We have chosen four websites in our competitive analysis: Xanga, Yahoo! HK Blog, Windows Live Spaces, and Vox. Among them, the first two sites have localized UIs for Hong Kong users, while Vox is very similar to LifesterBlog in terms of design and functionality. Since LifesterBlog is focused on multimedia content, privacy and customization, the analysis will also be concentrated on these issues, and we will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each site. Refer to Appendix 1 for screenshots of the above websites.

4.1. Xanga

Xanga (<http://www.xanga.com>) is a community of online diaries and journals. It is currently the highest-ranked blogging and social networking site in Hong Kong, with a market share of 72%.³ Its primary users aged between 13-20. Xanga offers basic service for free, and it has two premium service plans.

Strengths:

- Over 1.8 million registered users from Hong Kong (such a large user base can easily create lock in and network effect)
- WYSIWYG editor supporting text, photos, videos and audio
- Users can style their blogs with control over colors, fonts, page width, and headers
- Provides Chinese UI
- Users can create different modules and custom profiles

Weaknesses:

- Does not integrate with other web services that provide multimedia content
- Most customization operations require users to have intermediate knowledge on HTML
- Only allow public or private access for photos, videos and music

4.2. Yahoo! HK Blog

Yahoo! HK Blog (<http://hk.blog.yahoo.com>) is a personal communication portal. It emphasizes text and photos sharing, with recent addition on limited videos sharing. It is currently the second most popular blogging site in Hong Kong, with 8% market share.⁴

³ Hitwise, "Hong Kong Newsletter," July 2006
Available at: <http://www.hitwise.com/news/hk200607.html>

⁴ Hitwise, "Hong Kong Newsletter," August 2006

Strengths:

- Unlimited photos storage for free
- Hosts the official blogs for many Hong Kong pop stars. According to a recent survey conducted by Microsoft, over 60% of Hong Kong Internet users voted “singers and stars” their favorite blog content in the “people” category
- Built-in photo editor with extensive features, such as crop, mask, rotation, filter, etc
- Target exclusively to Hong Kong users
- Large number of pre-defined templates for blog styles

Weaknesses:

- Does not integrate with other web services that provide multimedia content (not even with other Yahoo! services such as Yahoo! Photos, Yahoo! Music)
- Cannot upload videos and music from the users’ computers
- Several features of the WYSIWYG editor do not function correctly on Firefox browser
- Limited focus on community aspect (the site recently allows bloggers to add friends)

4.3. Windows Live Spaces

Windows Live Spaces (<http://spaces.live.com>) is Microsoft’s social networking platform. The site was launched in late 2004 as MSN Spaces, with the aim of allowing its users to reach out to others by publishing their thoughts and photos. It is the third most popular blogging site in Hong Kong, with 7% market share.⁵

Strengths:

- Integrates with Windows Live Messenger and MSN Messenger to display contact cards (with recent updates of profiles and photos) of friends
- Provides flexible ways to customize layouts (users can move every module freely in their spaces, and they can easily create new modules)
- Large number of pre-defined templates to decorate the users’ spaces

Weaknesses:

- Does not integrate with other web services that provide multimedia content

Available at: <http://www.hitwise.com/news/hk200608.html>

⁵ See footnote 3 and 4

- Users have to install a specific client application in order to upload and manage photos
- Cannot upload videos and music from the users' computers
- Currently, the site is only best viewed with Internet Explorer (IE). Most features (e.g. upload photos from the WYSIWYG editor) are not working for Firefox and Safari users
- Only allow users to control view access on their blogs, but not on individual item, i.e. either shows everything to the public or nothing

4.4. Vox

Vox (<http://www.vox.com>) is a free personal blogging service provided by Six Apart. Vox has features that are associated with the Web 2.0 trend, and it also focuses on social networking aspect more than other blogging services. Currently, most of the users of Vox are from US, France and Japan.

Strengths:

- Professional UI design
- WYSIWYG editor allowing users to upload text, photos, videos, music and books
- Integrate with many web services, including Flickr, Photobucket, YouTube, Amazon, etc
- Lots of high-quality built-in templates for blog styles
- Extensive privacy control on all content and comments (public, friends, family, friends and family, private)

Weaknesses:

- Very limited customization features (e.g. users cannot reorder sidebar modules, very few options to allow users to design their own blog styles)
- Does not support full-text search on blog posts
- Only members of Vox can write comments
- Not target to Hong Kong users and no Chinese UI

5. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The idea to create a blogging service was dated back to the summer of 2006, when we have chances to conduct interviews and focus groups with 20 active bloggers (age: 18-23, gender: 12 females and 8 males) in Hong Kong. All of them have at least one personal blog (one of them has 5 different blog accounts), and they spend on average 1-5 hours everyday updating their blogs and viewing others.

During the interviews, we noticed three popular demands for a good blogging service (listed below in order of popularity):

1. Provide ways for bloggers to share multimedia content
2. Allow bloggers to control access levels (privacy) on uploaded content
3. Allow bloggers to customize and design layouts of their blogs

With these requirements in mind and prior research on the current and future trends of blogosphere, we started the implementation of LifesterBlog. Our primary targeted audience is 18-25 years old young adults in Hong Kong and greater Asia region. We will expand to other regions at a later time.

6. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout the development cycle, we have chances to conduct interviews with several targeted users and other bloggers, and we have also recognized reviews from various Web 2.0 blogs. We have listed their feedback into the following sections, and how they affect the actual design of the site.

6.1. WYSIWYG Editor for Multimedia Content

In order to support multimedia content, our site needs an editor that can provide bloggers the ability to visualize their content during the editing/uploading process. We have developed our editor (Figure 1) based on the open source WYSIWYG editor from tinyMCE (<http://tinymce.moxiecode.com/>). The editor has the following features:

- Cross browser compatible (supports IE, Firefox, Safari, Opera)
- Contains all the common editing abilities, such as font size, style and color adjustment, indentation and alignment, etc
- Enables bloggers to easily combine text, images, videos and audio in their posts



Figure 1: WYSIWYG editor

With the WYSIWYG editor in place, we proceeded to design the UI for uploading and editing multimedia content. Refer to Appendix 2 for the UI design and steps to upload a photo (similar for video, music and book). Notice that in order to offer a simple and fast upload process; we have taken the following design considerations:

- No HTML is involved in the entire upload process, so bloggers without any web programming knowledge can still easily share content
- No copy and paste actions are involved, hence the process is less error prone
- Bloggers do not have to leave our site in order to upload content, so the entire processing time is reduced
- Once bloggers have uploaded photos, videos, music and books, they can easily control (e.g. resize, re-position) how the content will appear on the blog posts

Users' Feedback:

- Spent less time to create attractive posts with multimedia content
- One of the common suggestions was to include an auto-save function during the blogging process. Most of them have prior experience that during the middle of writing blog posts, either their computers or the blogging services crashed, and their entries were lost. They then have to spend extra time to re-blog
- Several users (with technical background) would like to embed code from other web services, so that they can import different types of media (e.g. slideshows, charts, polls) in their posts
 - This feature is available since the beginning of May 2007

Future Improvements:

- Clean up unused components (and reduce size) of the WYSIWYG editor to speed up the initial loading process and subsequent operations
- We notice the importance to have an auto-save function, and we are testing it extensively. We aim to push out this feature in late May 2007
- Allow bloggers to upload multiple photos from a single operation
- Create a simple photo editor, so that users can crop images, add captions and create other effects to embellish their photos

6.2. Integration with Popular Web Services

6.2.1. Share Photos from Flickr and Videos from YouTube

In LifesterBlog, not only do we allow users to upload and share multimedia content from their own computers, but also from popular web services. As photo/video sharing sites proliferate, users may have various accounts to store their photos and videos online. But when users want to blog about them, most of the existing blogging services do not provide an easy way to retrieve multimedia content from other web services.

At the current stage, LifesterBlog supports photo sharing from Flickr (Figure 2). We also support video sharing from YouTube (Figure 3), the dominant player in the online video sharing market. YouTube is the 6th most popular website in Hong Kong and 1st in the video sharing category.⁶ Notice that our users do not have to leave our site in order to complete the above sharing processes.

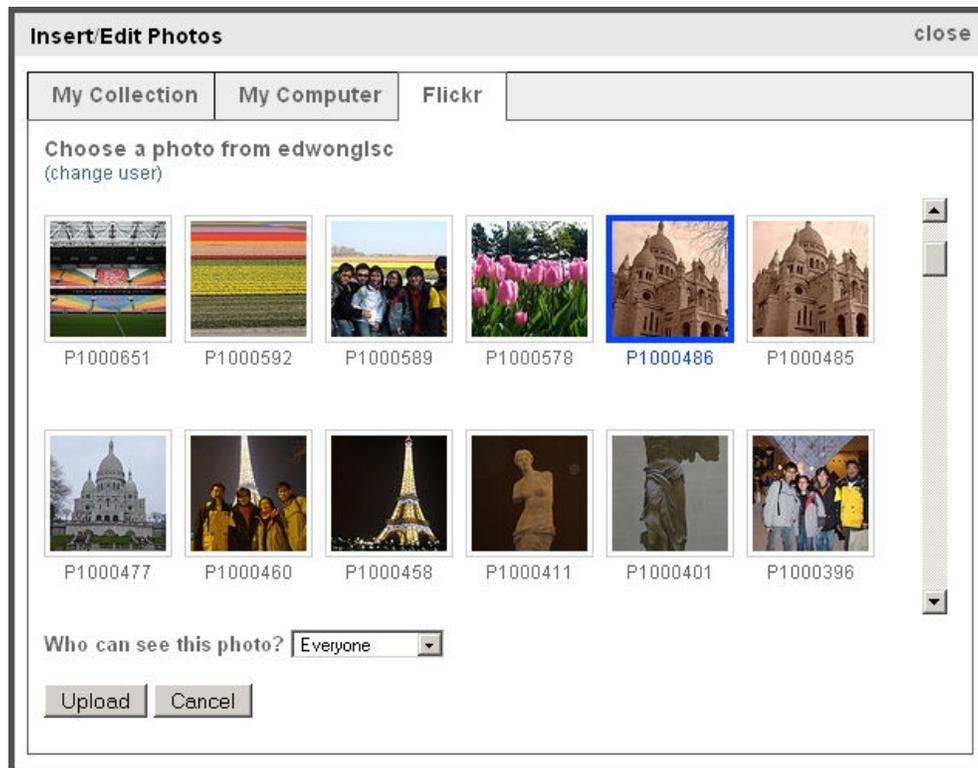


Figure 2: Upload photos from Flickr

⁶ Hitwise, "Hong Kong Newsletter," September 2006
Available at: <http://www.hitwise.com/news/hk200609.html>



Figure 3: Upload videos from YouTube

Users' Feedback:

- The ability to share videos from YouTube is one of the most requested features from users of existing blogging services. Users appreciated this feature being integrated in LifesterBlog, and they found it very easy and simple to use
- Besides entering usernames or URLs to retrieve videos from YouTube and photos from Flickr, users would also like to be able to search content by keywords. We will include this function in the near future

Future Improvements:

- Support photo sharing from Yahoo! Photos and Photobucket. Together with Flickr, these three sites represent 70% market share in the online photo sharing market⁷

6.2.2. Record Video Comments from Flixn

⁷ LeeAnn Prescott, Hitwise, "PhotoBucket Leads Photo Sharing Sites; Flickr at #6", June 2006
Available at: http://weblogs.hitwise.com/leeann-prescott/2006/06/photobucket_leads_photo_sharin.html

LifesterBlog also integrates with Flixn (<http://www.flixn.com>) to provide the ability to record video comments (via webcams). Refer to Figure 4 for a screenshot.

Comments

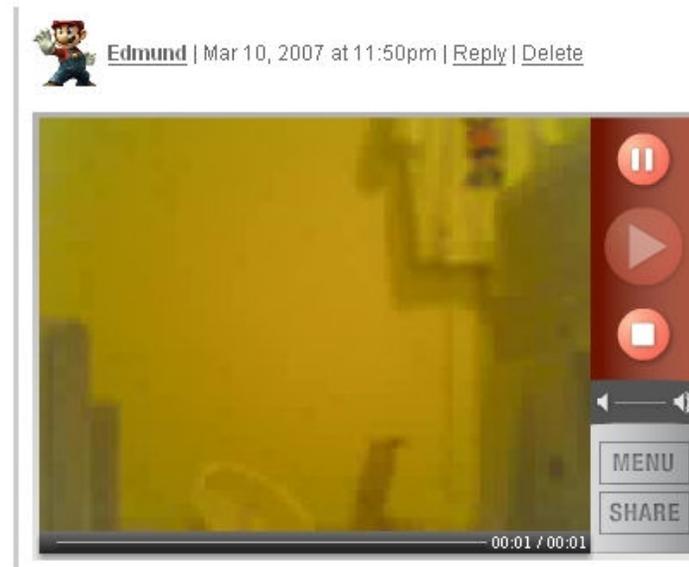


Figure 4: A recorded video comment

Users' Feedback:

- Most users never thought about using webcams to record video comments, and they said this feature was fun, interesting and special

Future Improvements:

- We are planning to extend this ability and allow users to record video profiles

6.2.3. Import Profiles from Facebook and Yahoo!

Due to the proliferation of social networking, users may have various online identities and profiles to express themselves. By providing a method to import pre-existing profiles from other websites, bloggers can speed up the process of creating new profiles in LifesterBlog. At the current stage, we allow users to import profiles from Facebook and profile images from Yahoo! Avatar.

Facebook is one of the top social networking sites for college students. A large number of Facebook users are between 18-25 years old, and they are also LifesterBlog's primary targeted audience. Refer to Appendix 3 for the steps to import profiles from Facebook.

Yahoo! is the number one web portal with a huge user base. Its avatar service (<http://avatar.yahoo.com>) is one of the most popular ways to create online profile images. Refer to Figure 5 for importing profile images from Yahoo! Avatar to LifesterBlog.

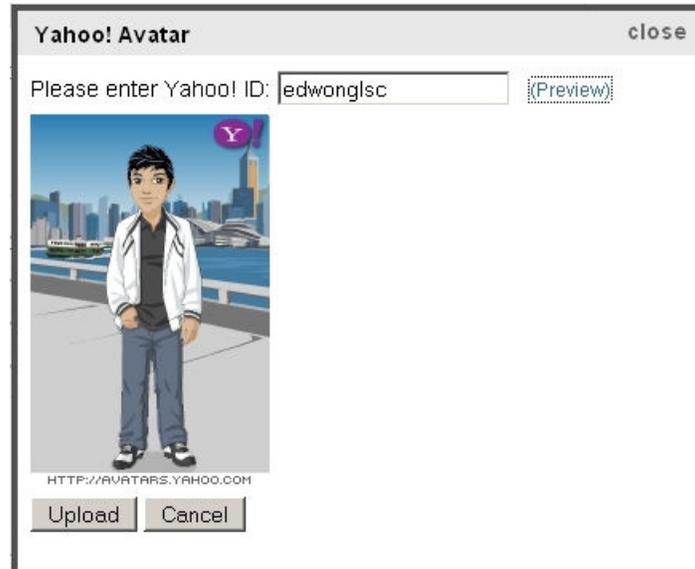


Figure 5: Import a profile image from Yahoo! Avatar

Users' Feedback:

- They agreed that the import function can save them time. However, several users have noticed that the current LifesterBlog's profile entries do not fully map with those from Facebook
- They would like to add multiple profile images (currently, we only allow one member photo per user)

Future Improvements:

- We are working to provide more flexibility in the profile page, including multiple member photos, video profiles, more contact information, more education information, etc

6.2.4. Import Content from Amazon

Over 75% of bloggers write posts because they want to share personal experience.⁸ Bloggers may want to share their favorite books with friends and families, or they may blog about their thoughts and reviews on recent movies. In order to enhance their blogging experience,

⁸ See footnote 2

LifesterBlog has integrated with Amazon to provide a huge online database of books, music and movies, so that our users can search for items that they want to blog about (Figure 6).

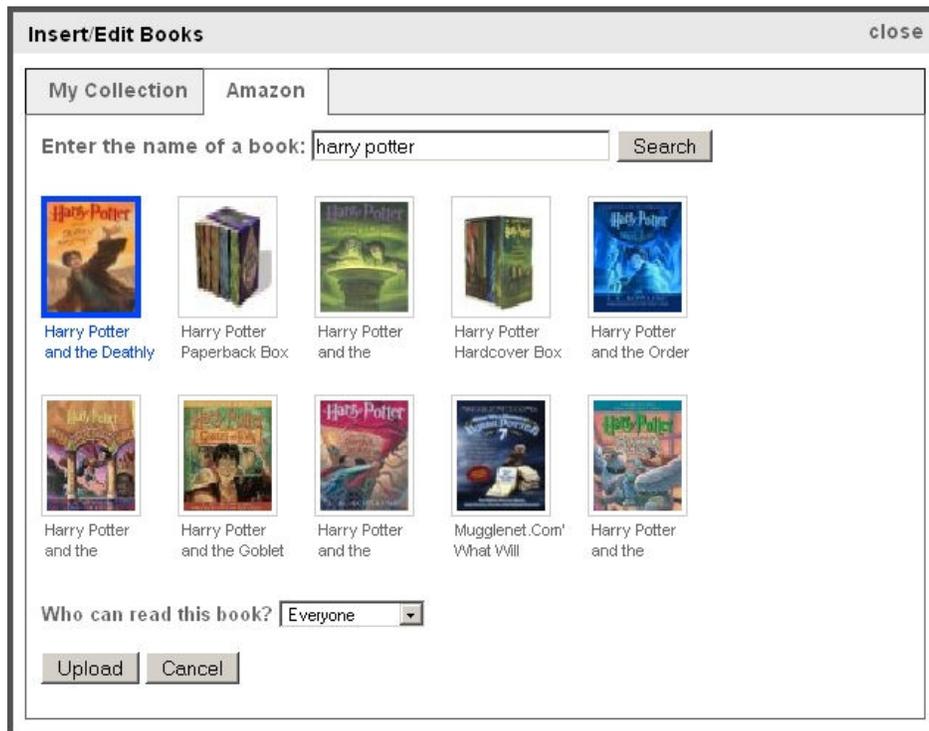


Figure 6: Upload books from Amazon

Future Improvements:

- Most items in Amazon are still English-based, and users cannot search using Chinese characters. Therefore, in order to facilitate users to find more localized (Chinese) content, we are also seeking a Chinese database of books, music and movies. So far, we have spotted aNobii (<http://www.anobii.com>) from Hong Kong, which is a web-based tool that helps users share and explore books

6.3. View, Manage or Share Content

After users have uploaded content to LifesterBlog, it is also important to provide UIs for them to easily view, manage or share the content.

Posts:

- Blog owners can choose the number of posts to display per page
- Blog owners can choose the display format: full view or excerpt
- Posts are shown in the index page of a user's blog (Figure 7)

- Each post has its own separate page (linked from the index page) where users can view and write comments, mark a post as favorite, email a public post to friends; while the owner of the post can also edit and delete it
- Users can subscribe to RSS feeds and receive automatic updates on new blog posts
- We provide direct linkages to social bookmarking services including Del.icio.us, Digg, Google Bookmarks, Technorati and Yahoo! MyWeb, so that users of the above services can share public posts (as well as photos, videos, music and books) with millions of other Internet users

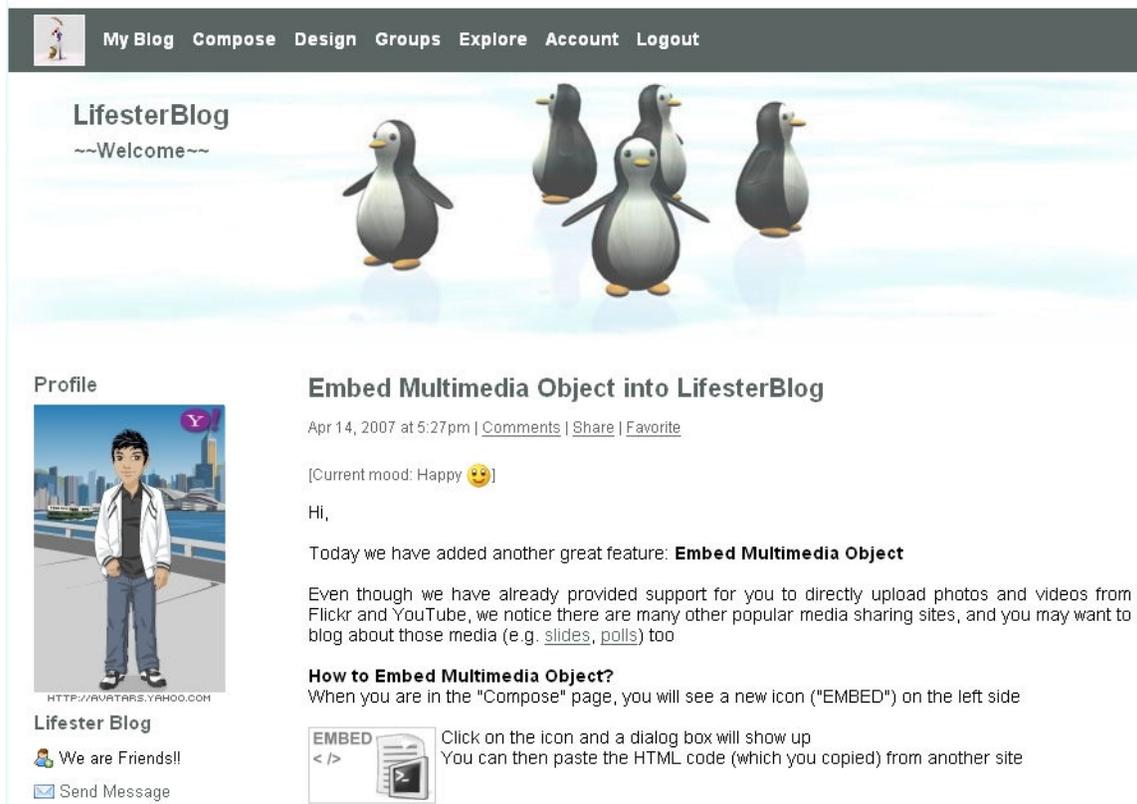


Figure 7: Posts are shown in the index page of a user's blog

Photos (similar for videos, music and books):

- Single view (Figure 8): Each photo has its own page where users can rate, share, view comments and write comments; owners can also edit and delete the photo
- Normal view on multiple photos (Figure 9): This page displays all photos with their respective titles
- Full view on multiple photos (Figure 10): This page displays all photos with details, including titles, number of comments and favorites, tags, etc

- Sidebar view on recent photos (Figure 11): In a user's blog, recent photos of that user are shown on the sidebar as a module. The blog owner can select the number of photos to display, or remove the module

Photos | Upload

16GG003.jpg

Apr 15, 2007 at 9:44pm | [Comments](#) | [Share](#) | [Favorite \(1\)](#)
Viewable by: Everyone | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#)

→ Different operations on a photo



[View All Photos](#)



↑ Navigate through all photos ↑

← Click to display full-size photo

Figure 8: Single view of a photo

Photos | Upload

[Normal View](#) | [Full View](#)



Page: 1 [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#)

Figure 9: Normal view on multiple photos

Photos | Upload

[Normal View](#) | [Full View](#)

Photos with detailed information

Figure 10: Full view on multiple photos

[Profile](#) | [Edit](#)

[View All Posts](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#)

Your Blog. Your Way

Mar 14, 2007 at 10:30pm | [Comments](#) | [Share](#) | [Favorite \(1\)](#)
Viewable by: Everyone | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#)

Today I dream u hold me in your arms & you touch my hair tonight really feel f hand my heart will start to dance...Today I dream u hold me in your arms & you really feel fall in love you kiss my hand my heart will start to dance...Today I dre arms & you touch my hair tonight really feel fall in love you kiss my hand my hear Hellow World

Recent photos on the sidebar module

[Photos](#) | [Upload](#)

more...

Write a Comment -OR- [Record a Video Comment](#) **NEW!**

B **I** **U**

Figure 11: Sidebar view on recent photos

Future Improvements:

- Provide a batch edit feature so that users can change the settings of large quantities of items in a single operation (e.g. change the access level of 20 photos from public to private).

6.4. Search Content

In LifesterBlog, bloggers can quickly find content through search and tags (descriptive keywords associated with items). In the index page of LifesterBlog, there is a search panel on the right side, and users can search for people, posts, photos, videos, music, books, groups and personal interests based on different search criteria. For example: when users are searching for other members, they may want to limit the search results to only show members that have uploaded profile images (Figure 12).

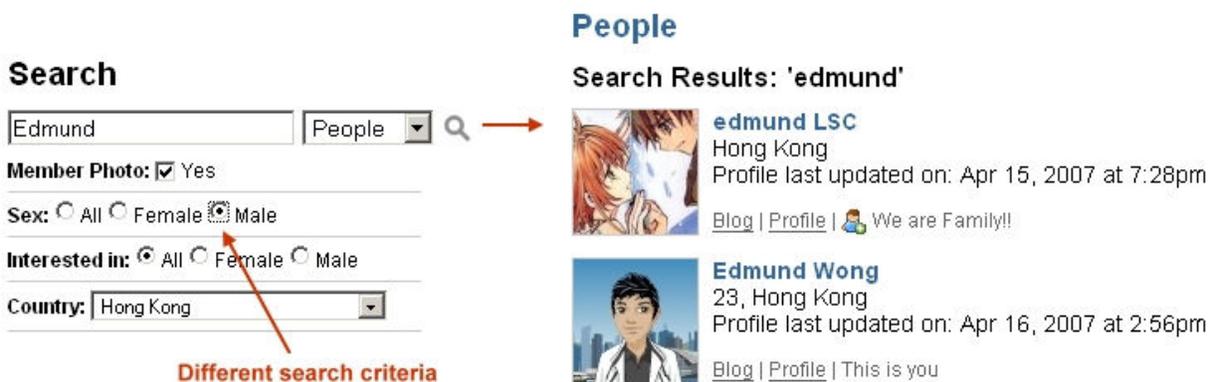


Figure 12: Search panel with different search criteria (left) and search results page (right)

Tags (Figure 13) are a big part of LifesterBlog, and any item that a user share on our site can have tags added to it. With tags, not only users are connecting information on their own blogs so that they and others can easily find the content (Figure 14), but also users are connecting to others who are posting similar content (Figure 15).

Tags for Videos

05 97 annecy apple bad beer blanc book bt cable
 car century chamonix champion chan
 comedy crossover 籃球 edmund
 europe 食螺 香港 黃子華 flat fold
 gag hinge hongkong lyon mac macbook
 manus millennium mont nba paris party
 pong pro talkshow taste video wynn 個
 人畢業典禮 冠軍 唱片 宇宙最強 巴黎鐵
 塔 成龍 搞笑 教育電視 棟篤笑 下載

Figure 13: Tags that are applied to a user's videos

Tags

[Posts](#) | [Photos](#) | [Videos](#) | [Music](#)

3 Post(s) tagged with 'europe'

Annecy - 係冇得store luggage!! (28/3) [Apr 06, 2007 at 1:47pm]

Tours - 'Local Tour' (29/3) [Apr 07, 2007 at 2:08pm]

Photos from Europe 07 [Apr 14, 2007 at 5:39pm]

1 Photo(s) tagged with 'europe'



P1000578

Figure 14: Items that are associated with the tag "Europe" from a particular user

Photos

Tags: 'europe'



Search

Photos

Date:

From Flickr: Yes

Tags for Photos

7-1 annecy bookmark cafe cake cell chamonix
 china da vinci danny edmund embed **europe**
 香港 足球 felix france **holland** jenny joe katie
 lifesterblog louvre **lyon** man utd my dog old town
paris phone pics restaurant roma rss salmon

Figure 15: Photos that are tagged with the keyword "Europe" from all users

Users' Feedback:

- Besides using tags to organize content, users would also like to organize blog posts into different categories (e.g. music, personal, travel, food, etc)

Future Improvements:

- Provide full-text search on all items, which will improve the precision and recall on search results
- Provide search functions within the users' homepages, so that they can easily retrieve content from their blogs
- Provide real-time search suggestions while users are typing search queries

6.5. Privacy Control

The ability to control privacy on uploaded materials is one of the most popular demands from bloggers. However, most existing blogging services (such as Blogger, Windows Live Spaces) only allow users to control view access on their blogs, but not on individual item, i.e. either shows everything to the public or nothing. In LifesterBlog, we provide very flexible and secure ways on privacy control. Bloggers can select access level for every post, every picture, every video, every audio and every book, and there are five access levels: public, friends, family, friends and family, or private (Figure 16).

The screenshot shows a form for creating a post. On the left, there is a dropdown menu labeled 'Who can see this post?' with a list of options: 'Everyone' (selected), 'Friends', 'Family', 'Friends & Family', and 'Only You'. Below this is a text input field for 'Tags' with the placeholder text 'Enter descriptive keywords'. A 'Save' button is located below the tags field. On the right side, there are two more dropdown menus: 'Current mood:' and 'I am also:'. Both are currently set to '-Select-'. A search icon is visible next to the 'I am also:' dropdown.

Figure 16: Changing access level for a post

Visitors to a blog will see only what they have access to. For example: if a blog has several public entries about neighborhood events, but the owner of the blog marks pictures of a family event as “family only”, then the general public simply will not be able see the family pictures.

Users' Feedback:

- Users suggested us to add more access levels (e.g. best friends, classmates, colleagues). Many of them also thought that LifesterBlog should allow them to assign friends into different groups, so that they can share different items to different friends, but not to the entire friends list
- They thought we should add a blacklist feature, so that blog owners can block view access from malicious users

Future Improvements:

- We are working to let users organize friends into various groups. Meanwhile, they can achieve similar results by creating different blog groups and invite different friends to join
- Allow users to set access levels for comments
- Allow users to set a default preference on privacy control and never worry about it again (currently, the default is “public” and user cannot change the default option)

6.6. Customization

There is a growing trend for web 2.0 companies to emphasize on the easy customization of blogs and social networking sites, both in terms of features and design. One popular method is to allow users to personalize the layouts of their homepages via combinations of background music, banner images, color and font effects, etc. Another method is to personalize the sites by including different types of widgets (mini-applications that one can put into blogs or web pages). Currently, thousands of widgets are created for MySpace, Flickr and Photobucket offer widgets

to display users' photos, Cyworld (<http://cyworld.co.kr>) let users customize their homepages using widgets as the building blocks, etc.

In LifesterBlog, we provide customization options in the following ways:

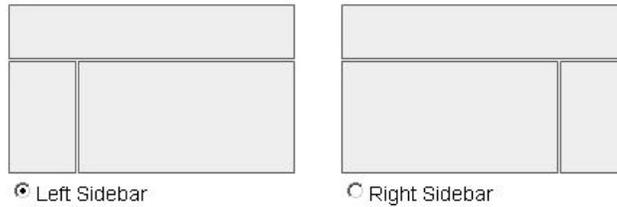
- Pre-defined layouts: These are built-in templates for our bloggers, and they can apply a new layout in a single click
- User-generated layouts: Users can create unique styles for their blogs based on pictures, graphics, music, color and font effects
- Sidebar widgets: We implement a drag/drop interface for bloggers to personalize their blogs via widgets, such as Flickr photo stream

6.6.1. UI for the Pre-defined Layouts Page

We went through two iterations for the UI designs. In the first design (Figure 17), we presented the thumbnails of the built-in templates in two columns, and users can click on a thumbnail to view a larger image for the template. If users want to apply a new style, they have to click the "Apply to Blog" link.

Choose Your Blog's Style

1. Select a Layout:



2. Select a Style:

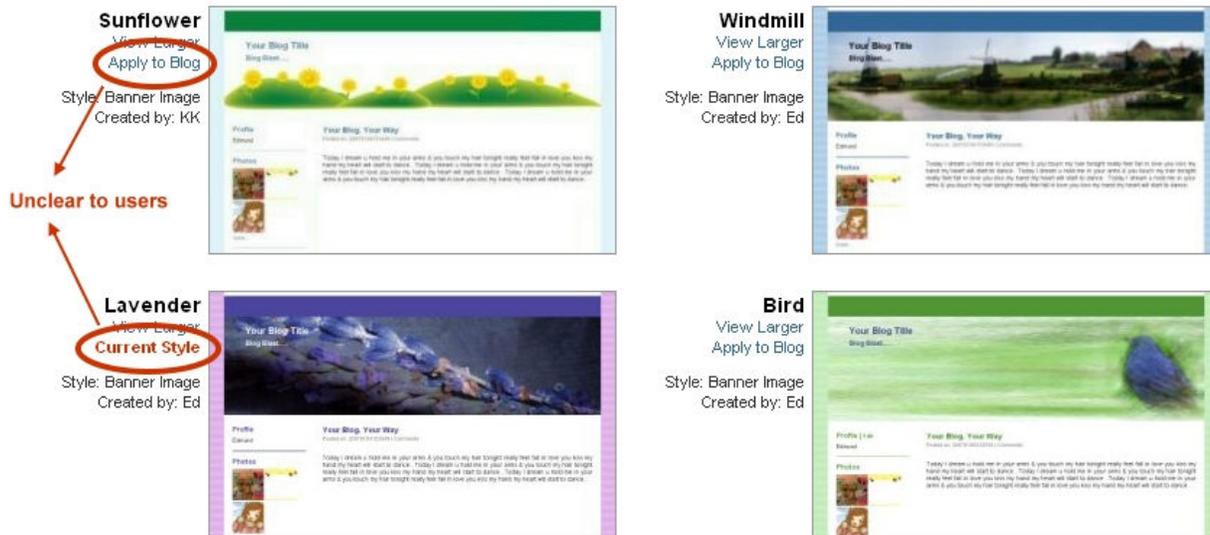


Figure 17: First UI design on the pre-defined layouts page

Users' Feedback:

- Users thought they should be able to apply the new design when they were viewing the larger image
- The font size for the “Apply to Blog” link was too small and users had a hard time looking for the link
- Users requested a full-screen preview before they have to confirm a new design
- Users requested a clear confirmation message after they clicked the “Apply to Blog” link

Based on the feedback, we redesigned the UI with several changes. In the second UI design (Figure 18), all the thumbnails are presented on one column on the left side. A large preview panel is placed on the right side, so whenever a user clicks on a thumbnail, the preview will change accordingly and the new style will be applied. Also, a clear confirmation message will be shown when users update to a new style.

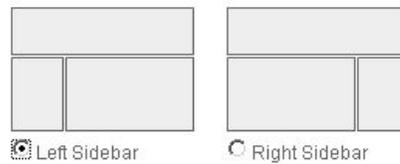
Choose Your Blog Style

Select the look and feel of your blog based on existing templates

1 Select a Style



2 Select a Layout



Clear confirmation message

3 Preview Style **Updated!!** [View My Blog](#)



Name: Forget It | Category: Banner Image | Designed by: Otto

Figure 18: Second (current) UI design on the pre-defined layouts page

Users' Feedbacks:

- With the large preview panel on the right, users said that they could very easily view and apply new styles

Future Improvements:

- When we have more built-in templates in our database, we will organize them into different categories, so that users can easily browse through them
- When we have a larger user-base, we will display the popularity of each template, i.e. how many users have applied the templates

6.6.2. UI for the User-generated Layouts Page

We went through two iterations for the UI designs. In the first UI (Figure 19), users clicked the “Customize” tab to access the page. It had a preview panel on the left side, and the design options on the right side.

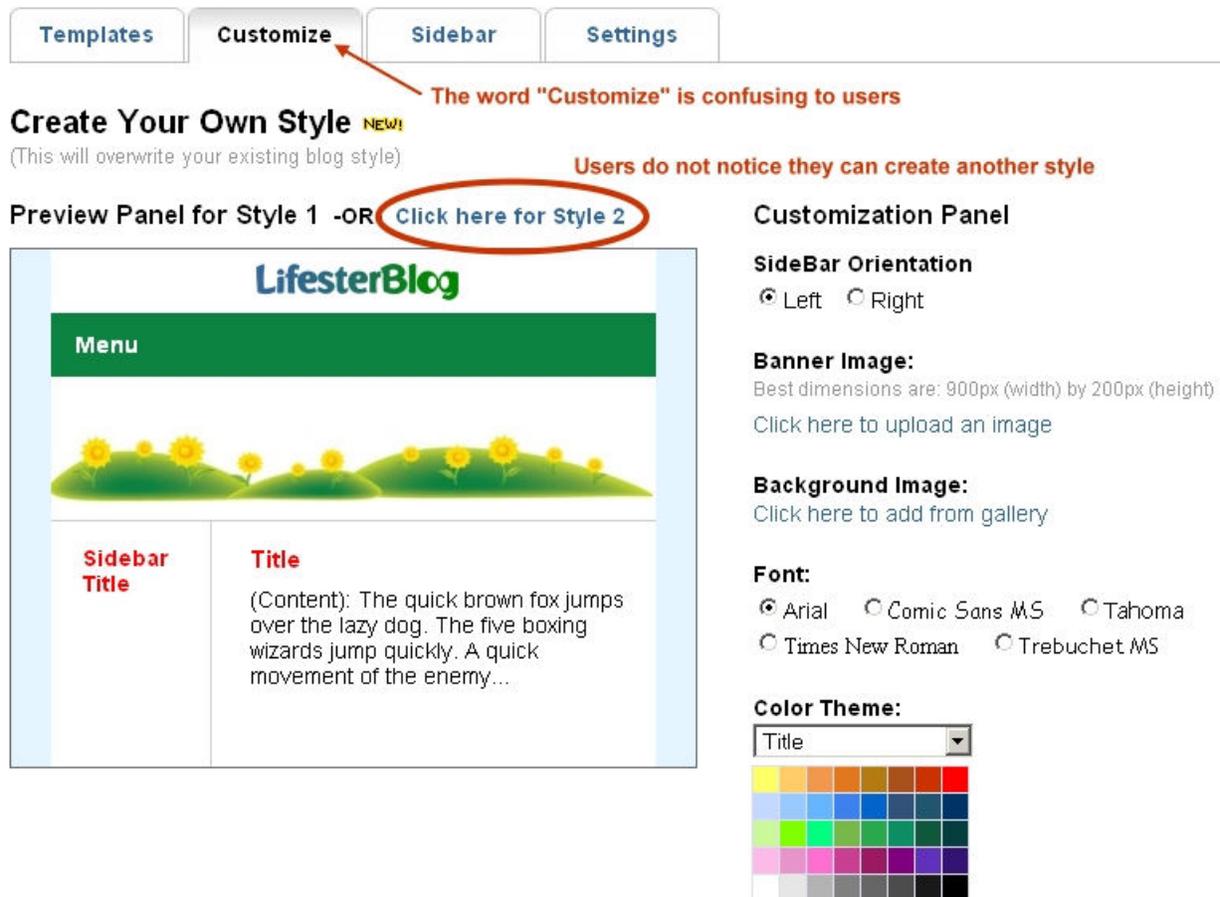


Figure 19: First UI design on the user-generated layouts page

Users’ Feedback:

- The word “Customize” was misleading. Users misinterpreted the purpose of this page was to customize the layouts from the pre-defined layouts page
- The real-time preview panel was very helpful for visualization purpose
- Only a few users noticed that they could create 2 different types of new styles
- They would like to view other users’ designs and layouts

Based on the feedback, we created a new UI for the page (Figure 20). First, we changed the tab name from “Customize” to “Create Style”, and we added an extra help message to distinguish the page with the “Templates” page. Second, we used numbers to guide users to follow the

necessary steps to create new styles. Third, we moved the preview panel to the right (and the design panel to the left), so that it is now consistent (in terms of location) with the preview panel in the “Templates” page.

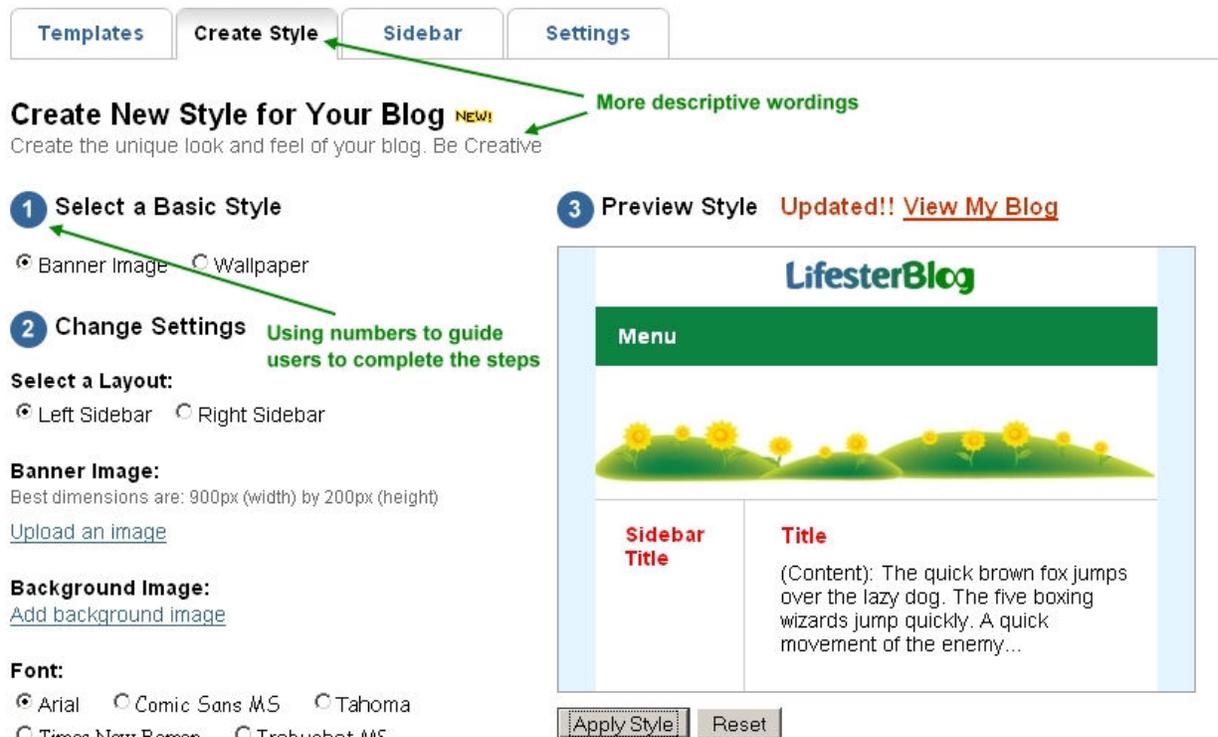


Figure 20: Second (current) UI design on the user-generated layouts page

Future Improvements:

- Allow users to share their designs with other members
- Allow more options and parameters in the design panel

6.6.3. UI for the Sidebar Widgets Page

In this page (Figure 21), the current sidebar widgets of the users are shown on the left, while the non-used widgets are shown on the right side. To add a widget, users just need to drag it and drop it to the left, and the change will be updated instantly without unnecessary page reload. Refer to Appendix 4 for the steps to add a sidebar photo module in Xanga, which are time-consuming and error-prone.

Customize Your Sidebar NEW!

Add or remove widgets that will be shown in the sidebar



Current Sidebar Widgets Updated!! [View My Blog](#)

DRAG a widget and DROP it to re-order position

Photos
Display most recent photos

Recent Comments NEW!
Display most recent comments of your blog

Social Bookmarks
Bookmark and share your favorite items | [More info](#)

Tags
Display keywords that are assigned to your items

Videos
Display most recent videos

Music
Display most recent music

Calendar
Display daily/monthly archives of your blog

Add New Widgets to Sidebar

DRAG a widget and DROP it to the LEFT side

Stats
Display simple statistics of your blog | [Preview](#)

Flickr Badge NEW!
Display photos from Flickr | [Setup](#)



Figure 21: UI design on the sidebar widgets page

Users' Feedback:

- Most of them were amazed by the fact that they could drag and drop sidebar modules. They said the operation was simple, sleek and fast
- Some users with technical background wanted the ability to add their own widgets (e.g. slideshows, polls) through embedded HTML

Future Improvements:

- Since the beginning of May 2007, we have allowed users to embed HTML into their blog posts. The next step is to work on the function that will allow users to embed (or create) new widgets as sidebar modules. We anticipate this feature to be ready by late May 2007
- We are planning to add more pre-defined widgets for non-technical users, including YouTube video stream, live chat, wall post, etc

6.7. Social Networking Aspects

In LifesterBlog, not only do we provide a state-of-the-art blogging service, but also we aim to introduce a sense of community for our members.

6.7.1. Friends and Families

We make it very easy for our users to connect with friends and families, and expand their social networks. For example, John recently heard that his friend Katie has signed up an account in LifesterBlog, and John would like to connect with her. So John visits the index page of LifesterBlog and conducts a “people” search. In the search results page, John clicks on the “Add to Friends or Family” link right next to Katie’s profile, and sends a request to connect with her. Or if John already knew the web address of Katie’s blog, he can visit her blog directly and click on the “Add to Friends or Family” link that appears underneath Katie’s profile (Figure 22). By connecting with Katie, John can now send private messages to her, and share items that are set as “friends” only.

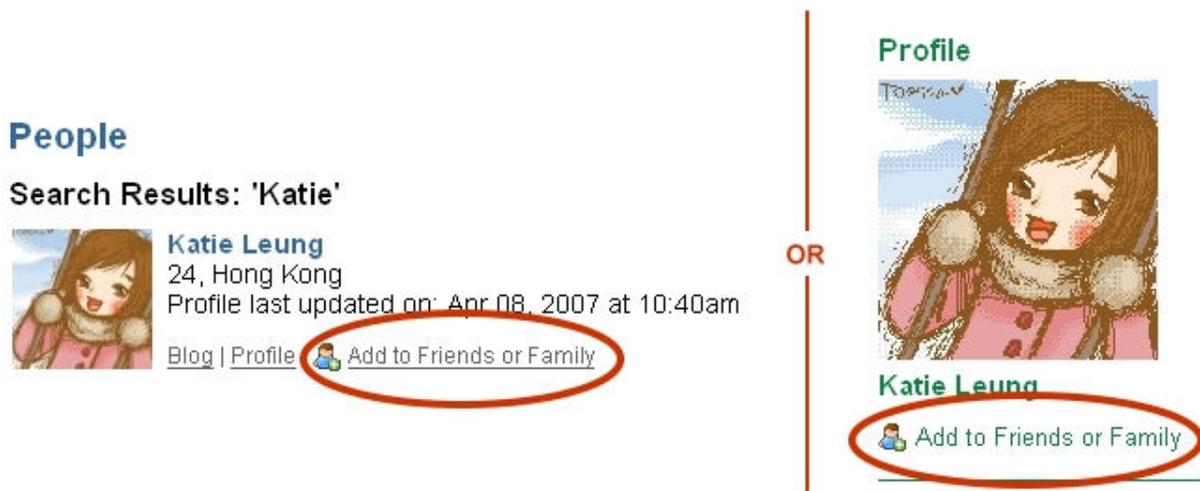


Figure 22: Add a new friend or family member in LifesterBlog

Future Improvements:

- Allow users to invite non-LifesterBlog members to join, and automatically assign them as friends or families. This feature will be available in mid May
- Create a page where users can view all the recent actions and updates of their friends and families

6.7.2. Blog Groups

Bloggers can create different groups (Figure 23) in order to interact with different types of friends. Groups can be public or invite-only, and members of the groups can share posts, photos, videos, music and books with others.

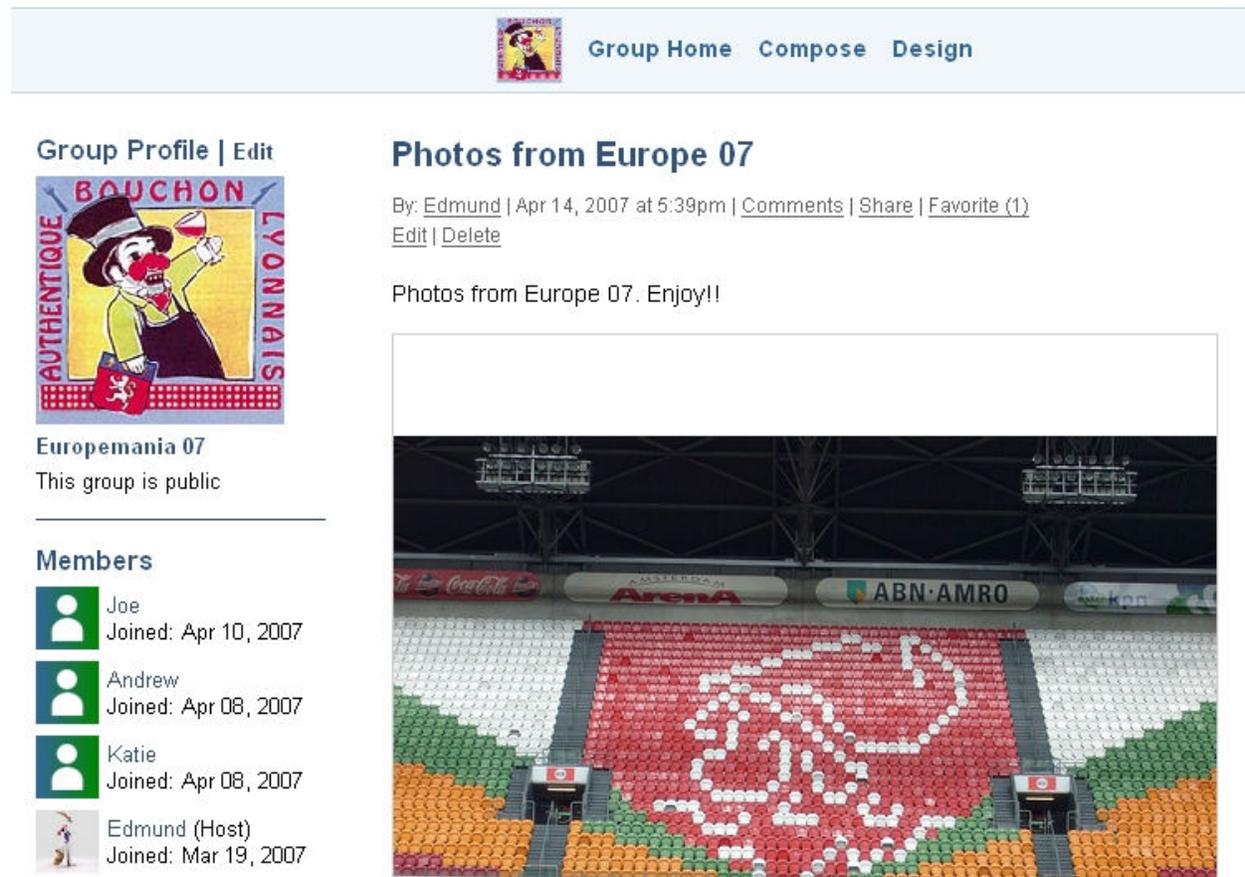


Figure 23: One of the group homepages in LifesterBlog

Future Improvements:

- Allow users to create “private” groups: only invited friends can join and upload contents; the groups will not appear in the public domain in LifesterBlog
- Allow members of groups to share documents (e.g. word, excel, pdf) and links

6.8. Language Preference

One of the best ways to attract users is to provide a service based on their languages. For example, Xanga, the highest-trafficked blogging website in Hong Kong,⁹ has set up a Chinese

⁹ See footnote 4

interface for users of Hong Kong. Similarly, since Vox is targeting users in Japan (besides US), it has a Japanese interface for the Japanese bloggers.

In LifesterBlog, we provide a Chinese interface (Figure 24) and an English interface for our bloggers, and they can select their own language preferences.



Figure 24: Chinese interface of LifesterBlog (<http://hk.lifesterblog.com>)

6.9. Development Tools

In order to build a scalable web application for the mass audience, we have utilized various tools, programming languages and applications to complete the task.

- Front-end: PHP, HTML, CSS, SQL, AJAX, JavaScript, XML, ActionScript
- Back-end: MySQL, Apache
- Applications: Dreamweaver, Photoshop, PhotoImpact, Illustrator, Flash

7. FUTURE ROADMAP

LifesterBlog is currently in alpha stage, and we have a list of features that we would like to implement for the beta release (in October 2007). In the following paragraphs, we have included several important upcoming features in our site.

7.1. Mobile Blogging

In LifesterBlog, we want to make it easy for users to view and use the site no matter where they are. Therefore, it is necessary to allow users to quickly post content from mobile and other portable devices that have browsing and email capabilities.

7.2. Personal News Aggregator

LifesterBlog aims to become a community rather than just a collection of blogs. Therefore, we are working on a new feature called “LifesterWatch”, which is a personal news aggregator showing recent posts from people that a blogger has designated as family and friends. It will be a way for our bloggers to follow updates of people in their social networks without having to visit each individual’s blog (similar to Facebook’s News Feed).

7.3. First Time Experience

We will incorporate several social engineering aspects to make posting easier and quicker for our bloggers. One of them will be related to “first time experience”: we will ask users to share some of their invaluable memories, such as first day of college, first date, etc. These questions are designed to stimulate people to blog and keep them active even if they do not know what to share with the world.

APPENDIX 1: SCREENSHOTS OF XANGA, YAHOO! HK BLOG, WINDOWS LIVE SPACES AND VOX

Xanga

Username Password
[join](#) | [safemode](#) | remember me

Weblogs | Photos | Videos | Pulse | Metros | Bloggings | Profiles |

Featured Weblogs | recent | discussed | boosted

Sorely Disappointed
 with the media. The bordering-ignorance coverage of "Cho Seung-Hui", and sensationalism of the VTech tragedy is...
 from [crazeemichi](#) - 90 comments

Gun control
 The VT massacre has, just as usual, brought up the usual question of gun control. Would it have been prevented...
 from [dinopollard](#) - 229 comments

Makeup Tutorial : A Natural look
 This video will show you how to acheive a natural basic face is something you can wear to school, work or oth...
 from [RiceBunny](#) - 327 comments

SECRET SHOPPERS WANTED
 Shop where you want and We'll Handle the Bill!
 CLICK HERE



RiceBunny: 部落格 - 相片 - 影片 - 音效 - pulse - 個人檔案 - 訂閱!

分類 - 標籤 [[xanga](#) - [註冊](#) - [登入](#)]

關於此文章

星期四, 2007年4月19日

作者: [RiceBunny](#)

Makeup Tutorial : A Natural look



原稿: 19/4/2007 1:15
 回覆: 329
 eProps: 638

[Boost 此文章](#)

[新增回覆](#)
[新增回覆](#)
[回復的頁頁](#)

This video will show you how to acheive a natural basic face is something you can wear to school, work or other daily activites. Non of these photos below or the video has been airbrushed, this is as real as I can get 😊 It kills me not to be able to color correct these photos...



網誌內容

熱門搜尋：
[容祖兒](#)
[李克勤](#)
[飲食](#)
[更多](#)

用戶登入

- 免費無限儲存空間
- 分享照片文字繪圖創作
- 百款主題背景
- 修改照片加特效

▶ **PLAY** 00:00:25

想百分百感受BLOG的樂趣?

▶ [即時上載Video](#)

廣告

“無論日粥定夜粥，最緊要係靚粥！”

徒弟

精選 Blog [▶ 更多](#)

馮禮慈 Blog
馮禮慈同你講音樂外，講生活講幻想。

keith 夫夫
無聊白痴爛gag事，通通blog俾你。

Sabai Sabai Blog
帶你嘆吃喝玩樂「泰」世界外，仲有扮靚心得分享。

烘焙新丁愛蛋糕
烘焙新丁與各位蛋糕愛好者一起分享學習心得和美味回憶。

內容分類 [▶ 所有分類](#)

焦點內容:

音樂	旅遊
情感關係	電影
寵物	家庭
飲食	潮流文化

Sabai Sabai Blog
Sabai Sabai Blog

[加入BLOG友名單](#) [訂閱BLOG](#)

Sawadee 你好，歡迎到訪My Blog! [留言](#)

Sabai Sabai

最新

曼谷購物 / 搵食分享

網誌分類：泰有用 2007/04/11 16:10:05

曼谷購物中心Tesco Lotus超級百貨店，乘坐BTS空鐵在 "On Nut" 站落車。*買家庭用品/零食 Emporium Department Store乘坐BTS空鐵在 "Phrom Phong" 站落車Central Childlom... [《 詳文 》](#)

回應(5) 引用(0)

士多啤梨乳酪

網誌分類：泰好食 2007/04/11 12:43:55

每次到泰國玩，都會買這牌子的士多啤梨乳酪吃，上星期到泰國玩亦不例外 [《 詳文 》](#)

回應(2) 引用(0)

搜尋

站內 全站

網誌分類

- 愛回憶 (10)
- 泰好食 (23)
- 泰有趣 (21)
- 泰好玩 (20)
- 越南 (5)
- 文章分享 (9)

Windows Live Spaces

Windows Live™ Spaces edwonglsc (Change user) | Sign

Spaces Central > Home Go to your space

edmund
Edit your profile

- Go to your space
- Messages
- Pending requests (4)**
 - Views today: 0
 - Views in the last hour: 0
- Add photos
- Add a blog entry
- Add friends
- Edit lists

Welcome home!

This is your Spaces home, where you can keep up with the people and things you care about. It's easy to make it great:

- Add friends and Messenger contacts** so their latest updates will appear on your home page.
Add friends and invite to Messenger
- Update your profile** so it's easier to find other people with the same interests.
Edit your profile
- Get friends talking** by posting to your blog. Their comments will appear on your home page.
Add a blog entry

We'll be adding to this page in the future, and we'd love to hear your ideas. Tell us what you think

— The Spaces team
P.S. This welcome message will go away after a few days.

What's new

adverti

Do you know your credit score?
See your score in seconds!

Excellent	750 - 850
Good	660 - 749
Fair	620 - 659
Poor	350 - 619
I Don't Know	????

Find out INSTANTLY!

privacy matter

Spaces Central

Videos on your space

Now you can embed videos in your blog entries.

Add a blog entry | Find video gadgets

Windows Live™ Spaces edwonglsc (Change user) | Sign

Spaces Central > 下一站..... Go to your space | Home

Photos

B-day @ LA

Povy...Yvonne...
Photo 2 of 14

Add a comment | Comments (0)

More albums (27)

- B-day @ LA (14) April 12
- a day to remember (9) March 15
- Forever friends 2 (20)

下一站.....

Friends (11)

Explore friends

Hermit

LILY

Linda Liu

天韵

wing

Povy

Vox

VOX™ Already a member? [Sign in](#)

See it. Hear it. Vox it.



Express Yourself Share Your Life Start a Conversation Control Your Privacy

How you use Vox is up to you. Meet new people or keep in touch with friends, start a blog, post photos, watch videos, create a group, or just discover interesting things. Vox is easy to use and has a powerful set of privacy features.

Get a free account

Create your profile and start blogging.

[Join Now](#)

or [take the Vox Tour](#)

Answer the **Question of the Day**



Is it likely that the U.S. will have a female president in the near future? In your lifetime? Why?

[Join now to answer](#) | [View answers](#)

EXPLORE VOX

[Posts](#) [Photos](#) [Audio](#) [Videos](#) [Books](#) [People](#) [Groups](#)

find something on vox [Search](#)

[THIS IS GOOD]



NEAT THINGS FOUND ON VOX [←](#) [→](#)

JustMarie shares the value of [happy days and forward pays](#). Jay [salutes](#)

Who's on Vox



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[Mena's Vox](#) | [Profile](#) | [Neighborhood](#)

DollarShort / VoxTrott

About Me

Mena
United States
[View my profile](#)
 I founded a blogging company with my husband and I have a cute dog named Maddy.

DollarShort / VoxTrott Archives

- [March 2007](#) (1)
- [February 2007](#) (2)
- [January 2007](#) (7)
- [December 2006](#) (10)

Ben and Maddy

Mar 15, 2007

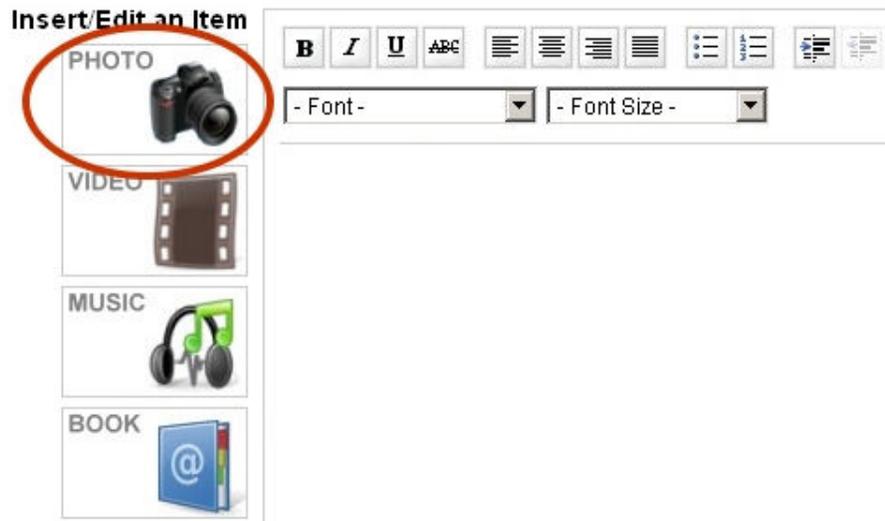


Photos

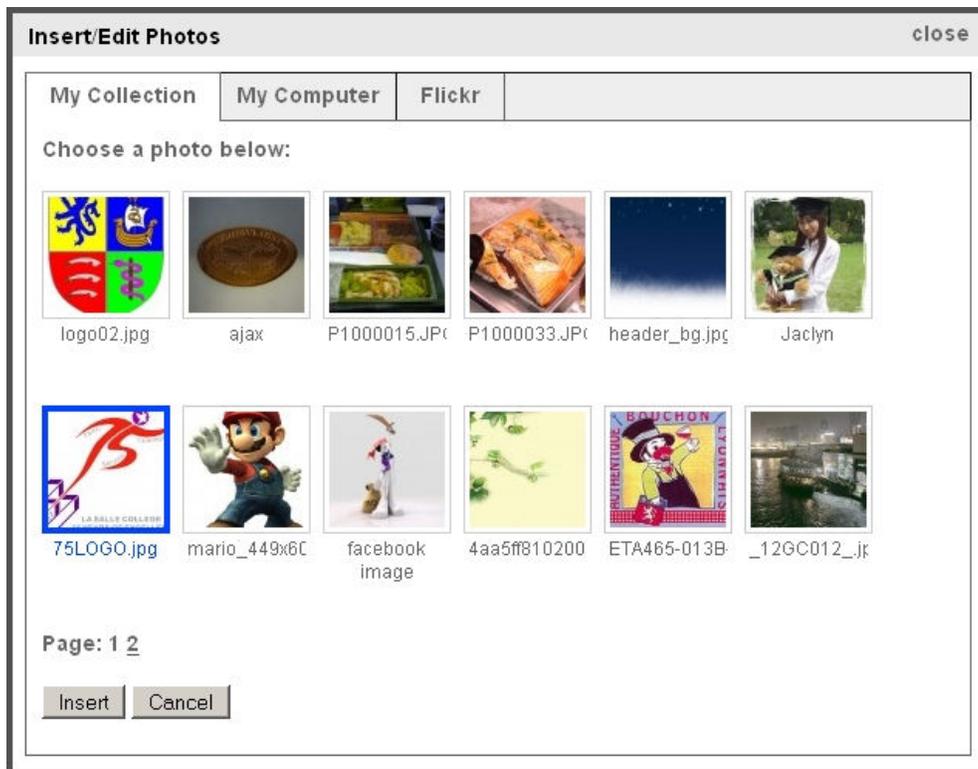


APPENDIX 2: UPLOAD A PHOTO

Step1: Click on the “Photo” icon.



Step 2: A new window will show up as an overlay. In this window, users can choose to insert photos from “My Collection” (photos that are already uploaded before), upload photos from “My Computer”, or upload photos from “Flickr”.



Insert/Edit Photos close

My Collection **My Computer** **Flickr**

Choose a photo from my computer:

Please upload photos in JPG, GIF or PNG format. Please limit each of your photo to 4MB.

Tags: Enter descriptive keywords, separate by comma

Who can see this photo?

Insert/Edit Photos close

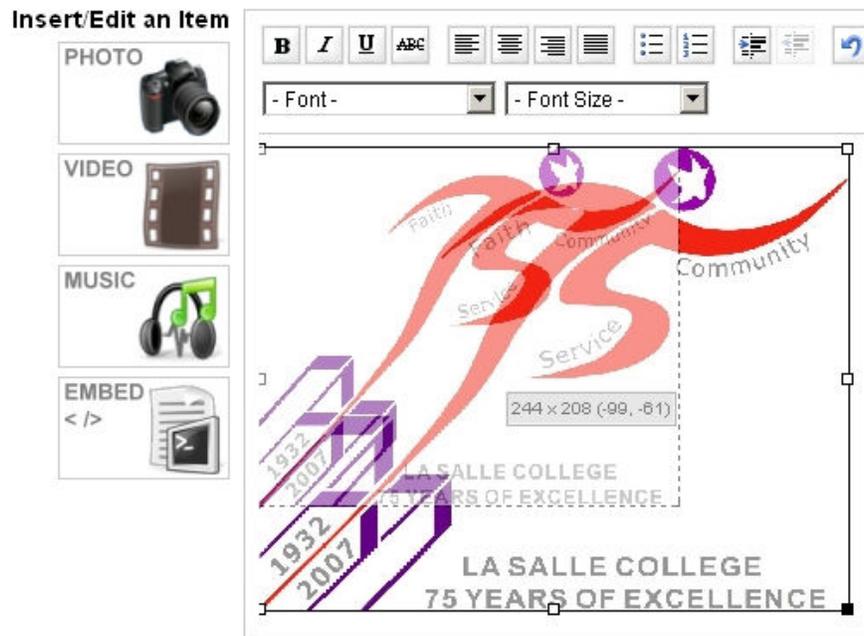
My Collection **My Computer** **Flickr**

Choose a photo from edwonglsc
(change user)

 P1000651	 P1000592	 P1000589	 P1000578	 P1000486	 P1000485
 P1000477	 P1000460	 P1000458	 P1000411	 P1000401	 P1000396

Who can see this photo?

Step 3 (optional): After the photo is uploaded, users can easily control (e.g. resize) how the photo should appear in the blog post.



APPENDIX 3: IMPORT A USER PROFILE FROM FACEBOOK

Step 1: In the “Edit Profile” page, click the “Import Profile from Facebook” link

Edit Profile - Edmund Wong -OR- [Import Profile from Facebook](#) NEW!

Sex:

Interested in:

Birthday:

Show birthday

Country:

Current Location:

College:

High School:

Member Photo: 

[Change](#) -OR- [Import from Yahoo! Avatar](#)

Step 2: If bloggers have not previously used this feature, they will be asked to login to their Facebook accounts. Otherwise, they will be automatically directed to step 3

facebook
login register

Facebook Login

[Import Profile to LifesterBlog](#)

Login to Facebook to enjoy the full functionality of Import Profile to LifesterBlog. If you don't want this to happen, go to the normal Facebook login page.

Email:

Password:

Optional: Save my login info to avoid logging in to Facebook again to use this application.

[Login](#) or [Register for Facebook](#)

[Forgot your password?](#)

Security Note: After login, you should never provide your password to an outside application. Facebook does not provide your contact information to Import Profile to LifesterBlog.

Step 3: Facebook profile imported and users can modify the profile entries if they want

Import Profile from **Facebook** - Edmund Wong NEW! -OR- [Back to Edit Profile](#)

Sex: Male

Interested in: Female

Birthday: August 19 1983

Show birthday

Country: Hong Kong

Current Location: Hong Kong

College: Berkeley 2007

High School: La Salle College 2000

Member Photo:



About Me:

B *I* U

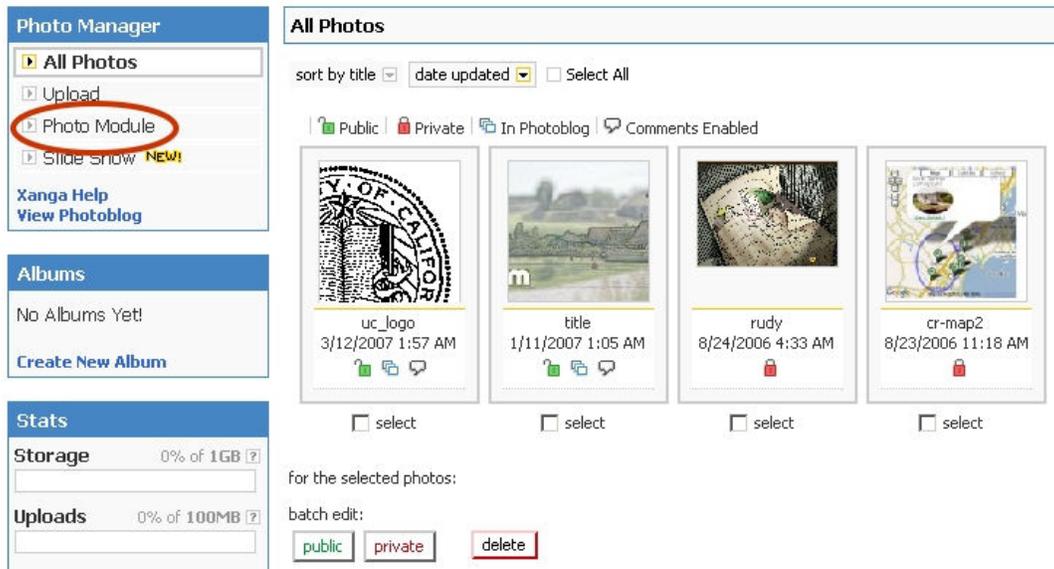
This is my Facebook profile

APPENDIX 4: ADD A PHOTO MODULE IN XANGA

Step 1: In the “Photo” page, users click the link “Photo Manager”



Step 2: In the “Photo Manager” page, users click the link “Photo Module”



Step 3: Now, users can select the number of photos to appear in the module, and they need to copy HTML codes (for step 5)

管理相片

- 全部相片
- 上傳
- Photo Module**
- Slide Show **NEW!**

服務中心
相片部落格

預覽

創造相片模組

- 展覽相片數量:
 3 6 9 12
- 型式
 拼圖 列舉
- Copy 以下的資料:**
[選擇全部](#)

```
<style type="text/css">
#xphotomod
ul{float:left;margin:0px;background-color:#f9f9f9;border:1px solid #f9f9f9;padding:6px 4px 4px 6px;width:186px;list-style-type:none}
#xphotomod li{float:right;display:inline;margin:0px 2px 2px 0px;width:60px;height:60px}
#xphotomod li{float:right;display:inline;margin:0px 2px 2px 0px;width:60px;height:60px}
#xphotomod li a{display:block;background-color:#ccc;border:1px solid #fff;width:58px;height:58px;overflow:hidden}
#xphotomod img{display:block;border:none;width:58px}
#xphotomod li.mainphoto{width:122px;height:122px}
#xphotomod li.mainphoto a{width:120px;height:120px;overflow:hidden}
#xphotomod li.mainphoto img{width:120px}
#xphotomod li a:hover{border:1px solid #000;filter:alpha(opacity=90);-moz-opacity:0.90}

/* For non-strict quirks mode doctypes - if you're using a strict doctype, remove below */
```

Copy HTML codes

Step 4: Users have to return to their blogs' homepages, and click the "Look and Feel" link

edwonglsc: weblog - photos - videos - audio - pulse - profile [xan

Welcome back!

Edit

- Your Profile
- Your Friends
- Your Networks
- Account Info
- Look & Feel**
- Xanga Skins
- Photo Manager
- Video Manager
- Audio Manager
- Archive Files
- Email Posting
- Protected Posting
- Blocked Users
- Setup Wizard
- Safe Mode

Search: Search »

[New Weblog Entry](#) [Public Preview](#) [Add Photo](#) [Add Video](#) [Add Audio](#) [Add Pulse **NEW!**](#)

Did You Know?
 Xanga Premium members can upload up to **99 different profile pictures!**
[upgrade now](#) | [learn more](#)

Friday, April 13, 2007

Which is your favorite Social Networking Site?

- LifesterBlog
- MySpace
- Facebook
- Hi5

Step 5: In this page, users paste the HTML codes to complete the steps to add a sidebar photo module

[edwonglsc: reviews - events](#)

[xanga - edwonglsc - sign out](#)

Your Look and Feel

You can edit the Look and Feel of your Xanga Site on this page.

- » [Look & Feel](#)
- » [Comment Settings](#)

[Look & Feel Help](#)
[Back to Your Xanga Site](#)

Your Xanga Look & Feel

remember to "save" your changes :-)

JavaScript Module (?)

Title:

Module:

```
<style type="text/css">
#xphotomod
ul{float:left;margin:0px;background-color:#f9f9f9;
solid #f9f9f9;padding:6px 4px 4px
6px;width:186px;list-style-type:none)
#xphotomod
li{float:right;display:inline;margin:0px 2px 2px
0px;width:60px;height:60px}
#xphotomod
li{float:right;display:inline;margin:0px 2px 2px
0px;width:60px;height:60px}
#xphotomod li
a{display:block;background-color:#ccc;border:1px
solid #fff;width:58px;height:58px;overflow:hidden)
#xphotomod
```

Paste HTML codes

Drawbacks:

- Users have to visit multiple pages to complete the steps
- Require users to copy and paste HTML codes
- The entire process is tedious and error-prone