Private conversation is aim of new blog software

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - The next big blog trend is about what you and your friends see and others don't.

The online medium built for loudmouths is taking an inward turn to focus on private conversations among friends and family, instead of requiring bloggers to write for a public stage as most current publishing tools do.

On Thursday, Six Apart Ltd., a supplier of the software used to publish blogs, unveiled a widely anticipated blog-writing tool called Vox (http://www.vox.com).

The free service, which has been in test mode with 50,000 users for several months, encourages new categories of bloggers to publish personal text, photos, audio or videos to share with known acquaintances.

While Vox blogs may look like other blogs, they are distinguished by five levels of privacy settings that can be placed on each item a user publishes. Who comments and who reads comments are also under the publisher's control.

"Not everything has to be published for public consumption," said Mena Trott, who with her husband Ben co-founded Six Apart in 2002.

"Everyone has their own assumptions about blogs. We think it is about publishing the stuff you care about to the people you care about," she said in an interview.

Vox, aimed at adults over 25, hopes to expand the appeal of blogs to audiences missed or ignored by the phenomenon. At the same time, it appeals to burned-out bloggers looking for a private place to publish.

In its private aspects, Vox serves some of the same purposes that e-mail or instant messaging do by allowing friends to hold secure conversations away from prying eyes.

Many features are designed for parents who want to stay connected with friends but do not have the patience or time to maintain a public blog, Six Apart officials said.

Vox is not alone in seeking to carve out private spaces on the Web. Social sites like MySpace, owned by News Corp., and Facebook rely on creating a clubby, members-only feeling, although actual blog writing is secondary to finding new people to meet.
Private conversation is aim of new blog software – Yahoo! News

Other social network sites like Piczo or iMeem have made privacy features core to their design, but they largely appeal to younger groups.

"Clubbing every night gets old. You may want to blog, but you may not want to blog in public," Forrester Research analyst Charlene Li said of the appeal of new sites like Vox.

Vox offers hundreds of pre-designed templates, replacing the "blank page" problem of many blogs. A conversational "question of the day" appears on Vox blogs each day to encourage users to get in the habit of writing.

Users can pull in links to other popular sites like Amazon.com, Google's YouTube and Yahoo’s Flickr. Mobile phone users can also publish to Vox.

Vox initially is available in the United States, Japan and France, with new markets due to be added early next year.