

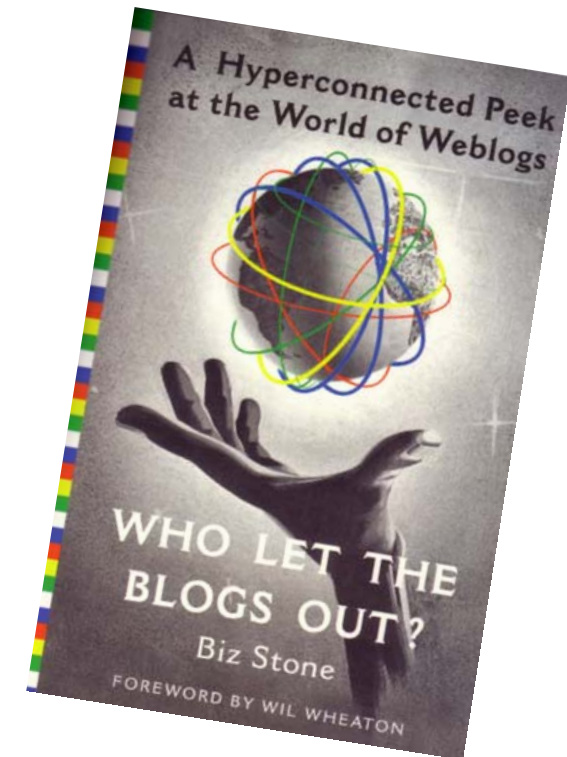
Who let the blogs out? Digital Book Club

Biz Stone

St Martin's Griffin, New York

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“Who let the blogs out?”



Billed as a ‘hyperconnected peek at the world of blogs’, Biz Stone unpacks the rise of blogging and delivers a simple, accessible, ‘how to’ guide for those who want to get to grips with one of the latest crazes to hit the online mainstream. But the technology is only the starting point: what should you write and why? Stone has some intriguing answers.

Billed as a ‘hyperconnected peek at the world of blogs’, Biz Stone unpacks the rise of blogging and delivers a simple, accessible, ‘how to’ guide for those who want to get to grips with one of the latest crazes to hit the online mainstream. Publishing tools that would have cost \$100,000 a few years ago, are now given away for free, letting anyone enjoy the benefits of powerful content management systems. But the technology is only the starting point: what should you write and why? Stone has some intriguing answers.

Who let the blogs out? A hyperconnected peek at the world of blogging

It doesn’t slow down, this digital stuff. While you were still getting the company website up people started telling you about web advertising. By the time you’d started on your banners, viral marketing had become all the rage. Just as you were getting ready for your first viral, search engine keywords became the new customer acquisition tool. In the midst of building your keyword lists, metrics and analytics came into vogue. And now it’s happened again: blogs are another you can’t put off any more.

The good news is that spending a couple of hours in the company of Biz Stone and his new light read ‘Who let the blogs out?’ will give you a good start – and as a simple orientation to the next phase in the development of online communities, it’s probably all you need.

If you are reading this review online then chances are you’re either on a blog, or on a feed from a blog. The blogging craze grew from the humble origins of private home pages, a trend that started to build in the mid nineties, but one that was held back by the lack of easy-to-use technology. What began as a trickle of personal home pages back then, has become a tidal wave of personal publishing. A new blog launches into the ‘blogsphere’ (yep, it really is called that) every second. What are they? Imagine a fusion between personal home pages, micro-sites, chats in the pub with your mates and an old style ‘Dear Diary’. Mesh all of that together and you’re probably close. The truth is that blogs are simply what the publisher and their audience make of them. They’re a tool to harness. But collectively these are the voices of millions and millions of people, all chatting and all connected. With the cost of starting up now zero, and the content management tools something you’d have been charged thousand of dollars for just a few years before, this is also the new entry point for anyone wanting a web page: publishing just doesn’t get easier than this. Add to that a bunch of features that come from the economy of scale that the toolkit developers have (there are millions of blogs out there using the same technologies), and you have structured, searchable content that can be easily referenced and permanently linked to.

So why does it matter to you? Well, if you are part of a micro business run with almost no overheads, then it’s a great way to save money on your website, and to develop an interesting way of talking with your customers – one that builds content and information over time. But the real reasons you need to understand the blogging explosion are way more profound than saving a few bucks on your advertising. Here’s a few to think about:

Bloggers are talking about you already: google your brand and you’re bound to find mentions in some blogs. If it hasn’t happened yet then give it another few months

and they'll be there. (They're also talking about your competitors by the way and you might like to see what the verdict is).

Some of the people in your organisation probably have blogs: like it or not they're free thinkers and at some point may talk about your firm. You may like the idea, you may be terrified of the idea, but being ignorant of it is pointless.

Your brand could be blogging as well. It's a new communications channel marketers can harness and include within their wider mix. You may even be able to post on other people's blogs, because that's how this community works – though my plea is that you get real smart to and are then real sensitive about the etiquette of these personal spaces before you go near any of that.

And blogging is now going mainstream (think about Google and Messenger if you're trying to get a handle on the scale of what that means).

If that's not enough then try this: the attitudes your customers have will undergo another seismic shift as they wise up to blogs. The new hyperconnected world has enabled an explosion of conversations. Harness this with the instant ability to discover information about anything at the click of a search engine, and you have a radically new landscape for marketing. If your messages are not accurate, your brand promises not fulfilled, your products not matching expectations, then it's not one customer you're losing any more, it could be all of them!

On the bright side, if you have something useful to say then you can use blogs to draw your customers' attention: you can create your own new constant relationship channel.

So what Stone usefully does is provide a simple induction to the tools, the world, the etiquette and the role blogs are filling. It's enough to engage and familiarise you, without scaring the uninitiated into hurling their laptops and marketing plans out of the window, and it's insightful enough to help the more web-savvy fill in some knowledge gaps. Anything that demystifies the digital world is seriously good news and Stone's contribution ranks well.

You'll discover how it all began, why it has ignited the interest of millions, the scale of its growth and even how you can build your own blog. You'll find out why politicians and backpackers are turning to them, why employees got fired for them, and some important etiquette of blogging (like never writing posts after a night at the pub!)

For the more sophisticated reader there's a clear case why the social software behind blogs will have much wider implications on knowledge management, intranets, market research and product development. You'll come away with useful insights into the challenges firms will soon

have in responding to this, but at the same time a confidence that there are some smart ways through. Along with this site you'll find some other useful starting points.

So there you have it, an easy-going romp through another digital channel that as a marketer or senior executive you need to be aware of. What you do afterwards is up to you and your imagination.



Recently in Digital Book Club...

Chronicles of the future don't come richer, better grounded or more intense than this. Mitchell's Me ++ untangles the way fleshware weaves into the urban futurescape with such clarity and intensity you're left reeling. But here's a warning: if you are one of those who 'want a simpler life, choosing to unplug and to live off the grid in Idaho', then this is not for you. Mitchell describes himself as an electro-nomadic cyborg; 'Disconnection would be amputation. I am part of the networks, and the networks are part of me. I show up in the directories. I am visible to Google. I link therefore I am'.

Actions

If you're not already signed up, then start reading a few blogs on topics that will hold your interest; learn about the publishing model through exposure. Why not try one out one of the tools and give it a go yourself?

Consider whether your organization should be using blogs: which communication would be enhanced and how?

Contact the Digital team for personal or corporate training in blogging and online community development and management

Resources & Links

Look out for more reviews at the DigitalStrategyConsulting.com Digital Book Club

Blogger.com is a great tool to get you started with

Technorati.com will give you a useful window into the blogosphere

About the Digital Book Club series

In times of huge economic and social change, knowledge becomes a critical success factor. We created the Digital Book Club reviews to bring you closer to the people and ideas shaping the digital networked economy. They are short reviews of texts we'd recommend, and are published monthly. We also publish similar Digital Thought Leadership interviews and Digital Insight Reports to accompany our own talks and training workshops. Knowledge and training can unlock the potential of your team.

About the author

Danny Meadows-Klue has been a commentator on the digital networked industries since 1995. He managed the UK's first online newspaper and has helped run web businesses ranging from mass market portals and consumer magazines, to online stores, search and email services. Among his industry roles he is the co-founder and former chairman of the UK and European Internet and Interactive Advertising Bureau, and has been lecturing on digital marketing for more than a decade. He set up Digital Strategy Consulting in 2000 to help firms accelerate their own digital networked media strategies.



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