

A blog is for life and not just for Christmas **Weaving blogs effectively into digital marketing**

Digital Insight Report

January 2008

Bloggng moved from the margins to the mainstream of digital publishing around 2003, changing the way firms could relate to their customers, and offering the potential to transform the role of corporate communications. By developing their own blogs, or carefully raising discussion and comment on those run by others, brands can extend their footprint and reach wider audiences. It can be an exceptionally powerful, cost-effective and intimate way of developing a message, but comes with real risks and limitations. The digital networked society has given a voice to anyone, and this democratisation of access to discussion creates a new landscape for messaging. It's a powerful reminder of the new era of communications we all work in, and getting it right demands strategic thinking and a sustainable plan, as well as authenticity and tenacity. This Digital Insight Report explores how and why this is the case, and gets you thinking about how you might be able to harness blogging for your brands.

Published: January 2008

At a glance

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Speed read

- With blogs come the freedom to express, connect and discuss – the engine for a much deeper cultural change in society.
- Blogging, like much of web marketing, is turning the traditional ‘push’ model of communications on its head
- Online has created a new type of media consumer: one that’s both in control, and knows it.
- It’s not about how loudly the site (or the blogger) shouts. Instead, it’s about how much and how deeply your audience wants to listen.
- Just in the way there can be strong or weak advertising, so too can there be strong or weak blogging.
- Most firms have made a bit of a hash of getting involved in online communities, but those that get it right, are proving that there’s a new model for how business should talk.
- For a small firm, this is now one of the easiest forms of marketing and really builds into a resource over time.
- Before creating your new blog, taking a step back to gather your thoughts helps you evaluate what you’re doing and decide where and how you use your effort.

**Analyst's profile:**

Danny Meadows-Klue has been a researcher and commentator in the digital networked industries since 1995. He managed the UK's first online newspaper - The Daily Telegraph – and has helped run web businesses ranging from social media and mass market portals to online stores, magazines, search and email services. He is the co-founder of the UK and European IABs, held their presidencies for four years, and has been lecturing on digital media and marketing for more than a decade.

“In the digital networked society, the mix of communications is radically different. Control moves into the hands of the audience, and brands need new approaches to achieve reach, recognition and respect. We’re still in the early stages of transition, but smart marketers are already recasting their approach to place participatory marketing, social media, and the digital channels at the core of how they talk with customers. From professional services to mass market consumer products, the media mix of 2010 is unrecognisable to that of 2000. The challenge for our transition generation is knowing how to get there.”

Introduction

A new model for publishing

The rise of blogging is more than a simple addition to the publishing mix. It's had the same transformative and democratising effect on web content that word processors had on conventional publishing two decades ago. Today blogging has woven its way into the majority of large scale websites, and through the access to fresh and personalised information that it provides, the blogosphere has created a whole range of new touchpoints between consumers, businesses and media. In this Digital Insight Report, we look at some of the ways blogs can deliver messages and give newcomers key perspectives on how to get started.

Since 2000, we have been talking about the digital networked society and the implications for firms as their sectors make the transition. Our Digital Insight Reports explore patterns within these changes and provide some simple navigation to successfully make the transition.

Definition

What is a blog?

Blog is short for weblog and is most commonly used like a journal with dated entries written by a user or many users. Blogging has become very popular in recent years and many companies have their own blogs to keep customers up to date on latest developments.

Blogs typically contain mostly text, but most support special formatting and can insert pictures and photos directly into the posts.

Blogs are normally accompanied by XML or RSS feeds that other websites or programs can read and present the content of the blog in another format or notify users and search engines when a new post is created on the blog.

From a technical viewpoint, a blog can be seen as a simple kind of content management system, and increasingly blogs are proving a low cost web publishing solution for a wide variety of stakeholders.

(Source: www.DigitalJargonBuster.org)

Where does blogging fit?

Getting to grips with blogging

Blogging is one of the most flexible of web communication tools. Its content can be used to deliver anything from rich information and technical data, to the emotive columns and opinions of a firm's leadership team. The ripples spread far and wide: from building the firm's brand, dealing with complex repositioning, to feeding news and information to journalists and stakeholders in the sector. Internal blogs can help teams in large organisations exchange information, while at home, blogging allows enthusiasts to indulge and share their passions. As the price of the software collapsed, the technologies became accessible to the smallest businesses with the most slender margins. For many the model of the blog has replaced the idea of a web page, and their ease of use guarantees that anyone with the skills to handle a word processor has the skills to build a blog. Easy, free, and highly effective: it is no surprise that blogging has moved from the margins to the core of web publishing so fast.

Casestudy: BBC News – adding value with blogs

The screenshot shows the BBC News website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, TV, Radio, Talk, Where I Live, and A-Z Index, along with a search bar and 'Search' button. Below this is a red banner with 'Contact us | Help'. The main content area features the BBC News logo on the left and 'Nick Robinson's Newslog' on the right, accompanied by a small profile picture of Nick Robinson. Underneath, a 'LATEST ENTRY' section highlights a post titled 'A bloody and bitter battle?' by Nick Robinson, dated 17 Oct 07, 03:53 PM. A sidebar on the right contains several links: 'Welcome to Newslog', 'How this weblog works', 'About the author', and 'New to weblogs?'. The beginning of the post text is visible: 'This will be a bloody and a bitter battle. So I have been told again.'

This is changing the dynamic of the news organisation's delivery. Well written, short posts are allowing the news model to become more dynamic: rather than waiting for the news bulletins on the hour, key correspondents can file snippets of news as they get them. This initially creates a tension in the news business as firms wrestle with whether they should break stories on the web or in their classic channels, but the richness of background on a story that journalists will have means there's always a great deal that doesn't make the classic broadcast piece or printed article – blogs provide an outlet.

BBC correspondent Nick Robinson has become famous for his live political blogging, changing the nature of real-time news and with that the expectations of his audiences. (www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/nickrobinson/)

How do you get started?

Start with the idea, rather than the technology. Savvy marketers will explore blogs in the sector before diving in and become familiar with the issues, the tools and the structures. However, most firms leap before they look, and it's only when faced with the first blank page (on an albeit beautifully designed screen), that the question 'what should I write?' gets raised.

For many the model of the blog has replaced the idea of a web page, and their ease of use guarantees that anyone with the skills to handle a word processor has the skills to build a blog.

At Digital, we've always argued marketing communications in the new environments need to grow from business need. Forgive if this is such a truism that it feels patronising, but many firms get so excited by the technology and the possibilities of this new channel mix, that there's often a complete gap in thinking about why they should be there. Here are some simple steps that can help structure the thinking before getting started in blogging:

1. Tactical and strategic marketing objectives

List out the corporate marketing objectives you have, such as raising awareness of a specific range of services, boosting your press relations contacts, or championing your corporate social responsibility projects.

2. Explore the models for blogging

List out the different ways these scenarios could be satisfied, developing several ideas for each solution – for example, a corporate social responsibility project for a coffee grower in Ethiopia could be from head office about the ethics of trade, or more interestingly for most readers, could include developing blogged copy from discussions with local farmworkers and their families about how ethical trade changes lives.

3. Rationalise and roleplay

Rationalise the choices and talk them through with stakeholders. Bounce ideas off people outside the firm to avoid group-think, or corporate delusion (are the chief executives statements to shareholders really that interesting?). Normally at this point a couple of lead ideas will emerge.

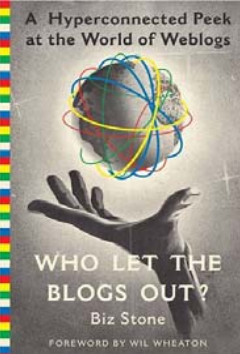
4. Get stuck in

Small firms will probably be ready to just leap at this point; larger firms may want to run a beta in -house for a few months.

5. Key considerations

There are loads of areas you'll want to explore once you start, but don't forget to focus on these key areas:

- Develop your voice and focus – Whether long or short, posts should have a consistency, style and personality to them which is reflective of you or your firm
- Subject passion – Commercial blogs are still conversations; they should contain emotion and enthusiasm
- Frequency – Think through what makes for a realistic frequency of posts
- Depth – Set yourself some ideas around the depth of content for each post and the links, images, video and data that goes with
- Comments and community – Look for ways to involve readers and their community; give value out and find ways for them to give value back
- Activation – Keep in mind what you want the reader to do as a result of seeing your pages
- Monitoring and evaluation – Retain this classic marketing discipline and look for how you can track and describe what success looks like



Digital Book Club: Who let the blogs out?
www.DigitalStrategyConsulting.com/bookclub

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.



Digital Insight Reports
www.DigitalStrategyConsulting.com/insight

In times of huge economic and technical change, knowledge becomes a critical success factor. We created the Digital Insight Reports to bring you insights from a particular part of this fast changing industry. They are independent perspectives on key issues around business or marketing in the digital networked economy.

Entering the blogosphere

A blog is for life not just for Christmas

When we were training agencies about blogging at the end of last year one of the agency folk piped up that “the problem is that these clients want to try, but we just don’t think they can follow through. What happens when they need to pull out, do we just close the blog? Can they do that?”

This is an attitude many firms have. The answer is not “Sure, pack up, go home, walk out. Write off the web as being a place not to belong.” That line of thinking means being comfortable just giving up altogether on anything other than shovelling the company brochureware from desktop publishing software to FrontPage.

When senior managers are starting their thinking with the exit strategy in mind, you know the logic is going to be upside down. That firm was thinking about creating conversational spaces, but didn’t yet seem to have either a conversation topic or a reason for the audience to engage. In fact, they seemed so absorbed in the exit strategy that it was worth suggesting the braver challenge: imagine that the route back through the forest has gone, imagine Hansel and Gretel’s breadcrumbs have been gobbled up and you’re on your own to figure things out. The energy in digital tams needs to be focused on growth.

The problem is the idea of a dialogue with customers; two way, unfiltered, unmanageable. Yet the era of monologue corporate communications has gone for good. Where we’re at now is this space of conversation - billions of conversations – and that means brands also need to be taking part. The world of dialogue may take more after sales support and follow-through than classic media did, but that’s all part of the communication landscape now.

I’m wanting to help, but clearly the brand team is still nervous. So here are a few simple pointers to get you started...

- **Test it first**

Try the blog out internally – test in a safe place first. Many firms are doing this to check they can author and figure stuff out in a semi private space. One of the investment banks in this class said “We’re doing it just internally for a year first, making sure we get it right.”

- **Don’t be a perfectionist**

Accept that some of your posts you might regret, some might be less polished than you’d have liked, but all of them will be you. If it’s an open and honest dialogue, if it’s one that speaks from the heart, then accept that you’ll make a few gaffs – hey, look at my little blog! – but be proud to be taking part in that conversation

- **Find your voice**

Focus on what the firm believes and write through that lens: find your voice

- **Be brave**

Resist the safe ground of corporate cover, and be bold enough to develop some personality and vibrance. Even if it means running taped interviews with your leadership team so you can hear their own words, try out the tools and gave it a go

- **Persevere**

I’ve been saying that “a blog is for life and not just for Christmas” for five years or more, and the permanence of digital marketing is one of the big differences companies need to appreciate. Waves of campaign based communication gets superseded with layers that gradually build up. That permanence means marcoms value builds over time: from link equity to FAQs – getting out of the mindset of campaign thinking can unlock something brilliant.

- **And commit** to being in that conversation for a long, long time, well beyond seeing it as a comms fad washing over the marketing team

The permanence of digital marketing is one of the big differences companies need to appreciate. Getting out of the mindset of campaign thinking can unlock something brilliant.

Four questions to ask yourself before starting

There are lots of hurdles to creating successful blogs, and ironically many firms leap straight to the technology and the production process. We’ve found that taking a step back to gather your thoughts helps you evaluate what you’re doing and decide where and how you use your effort.

To help you, we’ve identified a series of simple questions that are worth reflecting on before launching yourself and your team into the blogosphere. For the seasoned marketer they may all be obvious, but they’re worth some discussion with your colleagues before making that commitment.

1. Do you have something to say?
2. Is what you say interesting to your community?
3. Can you articulate what you want to say effectively?
4. Can you produce and sustain your voice and your space?

Getting the perspective right

It's not how much you shout that matters it's how much your audience want to listen

Blogging, like much of web marketing, is turning the traditional 'push' model of communications on its head. The marketing industry's rapid growth from the 1970s was based on the ability to push messages to large volumes of potential customers, and do structure the communications in ways that persuaded people to buy. The crescendo of print and then broadcast advertising was based generally on these models, and delivered much success. The era of mass marketing proved so successful that it triggered a new level of economy of scale and globalisation in markets. The tactics worked just as well from New York to New Zealand, and even the channels such as direct mail that often had the appearance of customisation and dialogue, were often little more than the crude database driven swapping of names and a few elementary elements.

Audiences are being more selective, but strong content will always find its audience.

Then came deeper relationship marketing. A paradigm of marketing thinking that began to gain ground in the late 1980s as the innovative application of databases enabled firms to begin segmenting their audiences and then segmenting their segments. Around the same time the exponential growth in the supply of media outlets triggered the fragmentation of media audiences, pulling the rug from under the feet of marketers who had relied on the mass media tools for aggregating their customers into a viable communication platform.

With all this change in media, consumers started to rethink where they spent their time and how they choose to value the media they are involved with. It's a reappraisal that happens irrespective of the arrival of the web in people's lives, but it does trigger some changes in media consumption behaviour.

Then the web arrived. It mushroomed up in homes and offices in most countries (and for most marketers) within a terrifyingly short period of time. Not only was there a new media channel in place, but one which the consumer had exceptional control over. That tendency to evaluate and rethink media offline, was amplified with the aid of Google, back buttons and bookmarks, to create a new type of media consumer: one that's both in control, and knows it.

So what does this hold for blogging? Audiences are being more selective, but strong content will always find its audience. Just in the way the web has removed many of the frictions that held back the supply of poor information, it's also removed those that held back the spread of

strong information. If the material on the blog satisfies a customer need, then, eventually, customers will discover it and tune in.

There are many tools and tactics website publishers can use to help with the process of getting their message out, but it's not about how loudly the site (or the blogger) shouts. Instead, it's about how much and how deeply your audience wants to listen. And that's the challenge most site publishers face, and why most sites fail to gain the traffic they seek.

Blogging: naked marketing

What scares many firms about the concept of blogging is the raw and unprotected nature of the medium. It's neither familiar, nor comfortable. Whether you're the marketing director, the CEO, the product's creator, or the hands-on field worker, when it comes to blogging, this is about you. It's also just about you. There are none of the clothes of a brand ad campaign, the layers of cosy corporate ID you've been cloaked behind, the protection and management of an ad agency, the vault of statistics a research department can manufacture, the glitz of events, or even the padding of a simple brochure.

Instead, you stand naked before your customers. Unclothed, and under a spotlight. They can see you, and you can only see them if they choose. The playing field is level, or even skewed in their favour. They can judge you and you might not like what you hear. Their voice can be as loud as yours, and you have only your knowledge and beliefs to fall back on. There is nowhere to hide and no criticism that won't find you. Layers of hierarchy and the frictions of the traditional world all melt away.

Conclusion? Naked marketing takes guts, as well as skill.

Research: Audiences leap

Rank	Brand	Unique Audience (000s)	Active Reach
1	Blogger	4,112	12.8%
2	WordPress.com	1,076	3.4%
3	Six Apart TypePad	975	3.0%
4	BBC Blogs	833	2.6%
5	LiveJournal	425	1.3%
6	Xanga.com	147	0.5%

The participation and discussion in blogs has fuelled rapid audience growth. The scope to create content is a seductive creative outlet for people looking to air their voice, while the effortless way Google finds blogged content guarantees the "discoverability" of a blog.

Source table: Nielsen Online, NetView, home & work data, including applications, August 2007

Blogging: “Just for kids”

You still hear far too many senior brand managers say such crass things as ‘it’s just for kids’, and during the last few years I’ve heard that said quite a bit about blogs. And sure, there’s a lot of teenage angst being poured out into the blogosphere. With the launch of two new blogs every second I guess it’s just maths that confirms that the majority are probably not things you’re going to readily want to read about. But the same could be said for phone conversations, chats in the pub and a bunch of other communication events. It’s the people who are doing the blogging who count.

Lost Teenager @ Angstville isn’t going to make it onto my RSS feed, but someone like Jonathan, the chief operating officer of technology gurus Sun Microsystems, well he certainly is. His writing is powerful, provoking and insightful.

He’s using a blog as he might use a column in a newspaper, and yet this is instantly and freely available. This type of corporate blogging has a really powerful role in our communication ecosystem. Most firms have made a bit of a hash of getting involved in online communities, but those that get it right, like Jonathan here at Sun are proving that there’s a new model for how business should talk. Let’s ditch the corporate speak, rip up the spam-ridden press releases, sit down and have a conversation; just like we were in the pub.

Blog culture grew from the individual rather than the corporate, and in the early days blogs were synonymous with diaries and personal expression.

Blogging: large to small

Can corporations really blog?

This simple question has come up repeatedly in our marketing management coaching sessions. The answer is tricky: like all good exam answers, much of the skill is in clarifying the question and being sure of the terms and the context. The problem is that ‘blogging’ has several meanings here. It can describe the technology (the content management systems that power blogs) as well as the process of writing, both of which any company can readily embrace. At one level blogging technology is simply the use of accessible content management systems, and the explosive growth at which new blogs appeared from 2005 onwards reflected the way many smaller firms simply switched their website engines to blogs.

But blogging has a more emotive meaning as well. Its culture grew from the individual rather than the corporate, and in the early days blogs were synonymous with diaries and personal

expression. Although that personal publishing has grown – and continues to grow – as the tools have broken into the mainstream the context of blogging has changed.

Some firms have succeeded in combing both of these strands; articulate business leaders writing passionately and personally about their industries and their firms. Leaders like the President and founder of Sun Microsystems have proved it can be done (<http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan/> and <http://www.sun.com/aboutsun/executives/mcnealy/>), but unfortunately they’re the exception rather than the rule. The problem is that much corporate blogging activity either tries to rework press releases into blog posts, reading like the marketing copy from the company brochure or sticks to the middle ground in a way that’s as uninspiring as it is unchallenging and unreadable. The conclusion? Corporate governance and passion don’t readily mix.

Casestudy: Sun Microsystems

This is powerful corporate communication that is both ‘on brand’ (in marketing speak) and ‘on message’ (in PR terms). Blogging can let the personality of a firm breathe, and this adds material value, not just to the specific corporate communications, but to the wider brand of the business. Corporate communications has a justifiably stuffy image: many senior marketers are buried behind a firewall, writing formulaic press releases that journalists increasingly don’t want to read. The new models of business communication – email, feeds, blogs, RSS, demand a different type of engagement, and while the press release and the fax machine may still suit some, the news processing industry has moved on. Blogs like these from Sun go way further than simply providing content for their customers – they give journalists the context and background they need to enrich debate, and myriad links to follow.

A clear and strong voice from Sun Microsystem’s CEO/President provides insight INTO the company’s decisions and direction. His blog speaks directly to industry observers and potential customers in a tone that is honest and personal. Powerful, mature; very effective. (<http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan/>)

Should sole traders blog?

Getting online can still be tough for small firms but a web presence can really give a lift to micro-businesses, and these days it just doesn't take much. For firms prepared to fit within the framework of the blogging platforms like moveable type, there's a wealth of opportunity available at almost no cost. However, many firms are still asking the question: should small businesses blog?

The answer? Yes, yes, and yes again! There's probably more argument for the sole trader to blog than any other type of firm. It's fast, simple, valuable, and introduces you as the face of your company, the person your prospective clients will be working with. Okay, so it may take some practice to get into the swing of it, and you may even need a little extra support from friends or family when it comes to developing your voice and your pages, but it's a phenomenally powerful tool and one every sole trader should explore.

It also gets sole traders over one of their biggest problems: small businesses just don't scale well - let's face it, when the chief executive is also the chief envelope-stuffer, bookkeeper and salesman, there's a lot competing for every hour of your day. Classic marketing is typically campaign driven: a burst of energy to produce marketing messages that are distributed and then lost. This perishability of classic marketing always struck me as a massive waste; yet not so in blogging. Perishability gets replaced with permanence. Your marketing builds over time into layers rather than replacing what went before. And a weblog lets you scale; always being there even when you can't actually be there.

For a small firm, a blog could work like a magazine column, packaging up bite-sized chunks of information, giving enough information to deliver value, but holding back from publishing everything. This replaces the idea of small company websites as being the brochure-ware of the late nineties, with sites as a reference point of real value. It's now one of the easiest forms of marketing and really builds into a resource over time. I just wish more small businesses realised just how easy it can be.

Blogging and revenues

Whenever there's the chance to create a new marketing channel, marketers always have to make a detailed evaluation of where the benefit really comes. In digital marketing it's particularly easy to be investing time and getting no return, because the sense of intuition we all have about cause and effect is less mature than in the classic channels.

A useful technique our team developed is to look at blogging through two lenses:

- Influencing the influencers
- Customer journey analysis

In the first, what blogging as a tool provides, is a hyper-efficient way of letting your message reach people who choose to select it. It's still about the content rather than the technology (the material has to be powerful, engaging and satisfying to the customer), but the combination of blogged content and RSS feeds can prove to be devastatingly effective at getting the message into the hands of those most interested. Where the 'influencing the influencers' model kicks in, is simply that in a world where we trust our peers more and institutions less, on the whole, people are more likely to pay greater attention to the messages that come from their friends. In the Digital Viral & Buzz Marketing Academy we look at how messages spread, and by joining the thinking of message diffusion, to the model for blogging, it becomes clear how one well written post can be picked up by an enthusiast and taken much further. And all that before you've even thought about the syndicated headlines, blogrolls and Google indexing.

Customer Journey Analysis is a technique the team here at Digital explore deeply in marketing. Back in 2000 Digital's team started to uncover the way purchase decisions are rarely concentrated on a single moment, but instead spread across many steps in a more complex journey. When you buy a can of Coke you may just be satisfying a simple need (Maslow's hierarchy of needs is still useful in understanding some of those drivers), but for many purchases, people weave rich and winding journeys before parting with their cash. If the purchase requires the need to be stimulated, understand the perspective of others, reflect on their stance, or drill deeper for more information, then blogs can provide a powerful catalyst. They can move a prospective customer further from one step to the next, and whether it's about buying a new car or a new novel, for those connected to the digital networked society, these new resources can be powerful.

The big healthcheck in both cases is one of quality. Just in the way there can be strong or weak advertising, so too can there be strong or weak blogging. Corporations struggle to find their voice in these new egalitarian blogging spaces; authenticity and personality regularly evade, and if the brand doesn't have something to say, then there isn't much reason to listen.

Digital Thought Leaders
www.DigitalStrategyConsulting.com/thoughtleaders

In periods of huge economic and social change, knowledge becomes the critical success factor, so we created the Digital Thought Leader interviews to bring you closer to people and brands shaping the digital networked economy. They are based on discussions we've had with them and are published monthly.



Digital Thought Leaders
Insight into
Author and President of Digital

"You are the community you keep - or more importantly you are the community that keeps you."

DIGITAL STRATEGY CONSULTING

Digital Blogging Academy

If you need to harness blogging and social media marketing for your brands, then our digital management coaching workshops will create the right roadmap for your blogging activity, teach you about the rules of the medium and get your plans on track.



“The sailor does not pray for wind, he learns to sail.”

Gustaf Lindborg, Swedish author

Who is it for?

A programme for to help marketing teams and board directors explore how to harness blogging effectively as a way of getting corporate and brand messages across.

What is it about?

Blogging has moved into the mainstream and transformed the role of corporate communication. This Academy shows you how to make your writing work hard for you online, build traffic to your blogs and avoid the common pitfalls.

Digital Training Academy: Exercise

Getting familiar with blogs and blogging

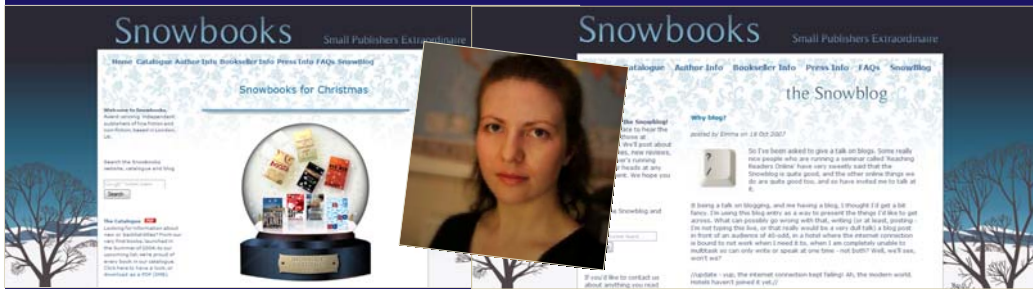
Blogging can fit into the marketing mix in many different ways, but they need some thought and strategy in order to create something valuable and sustainable. Blogs on your own site are a great way of firming up the voice of the brand and ensuring your message gets out just the way you'd like. Independent blogs in your industry can be a powerful way of letting people know about what you - or the projects your company is linked to - are doing, but it comes with an ethical dilemma about transparency that marketers need to be particularly savvy about. If you've never commented on a blog before, then try these simple steps.

1. Find a blog you are comfortable commenting on. Look for one that covers the interests and passions you share, but if you are nervous and just starting out, then you can always use one of ours (on <http://meadows-klue.blogs.com> we can delete the posts afterwards if you like). Read the blog, look at how others comment, and then add comments yourself.
2. Think about what you want to say: maybe it's a comment of endorsement to the point, maybe it's something you disagree with, maybe there's an alternative perspective you have, or maybe there's a link to something else on the web that you've seen.
3. How long? Comments can range from very short one-liners to extensive posts of several hundred words; maybe try just a couple of short comments first of all.
4. Use a word processor first if you like... Many blogging engines will not have the spelling and grammar checkers you use on your desktop, so if you're uncomfortable about writing straight into the posting fields then copy and paste from a word processor.
5. Manners: just remember these are other people's spaces you're commenting in, so always be courteous, stay on-topic and treat other participants with respect.

Aim to make five blog comments and then reflect on the experience. Think about what this is like for you as a person as well as a marketer, and then put yourself into the mind of the individual who created the blog.

Blogs on your own site are a great way of firming up the voice of the brand and ensuring your message gets out just the way you'd like.

Case study: Snowbooks - Small book publisher of the year



While most brands are still talking about blogging, Snowbooks MD Emma Barnes has put her personality and brand on the line, diving in with one of the best examples of a corporate blog in the whole book industry.

“It’s the epicentre of the activity and we’re not doing this for reasons of cost but because it’s a natural environment for spreading the word based on merit.” Their blog is notching up just under 10,000 visitors a month, and book lovers, publishing industry types and aspiring authors are all equally likely to be hanging out there.

“We primarily aim to get materials in front of bloggers who can choose freely whether they want to talk about our books or not,” explains Barnes, who went on to take vignettes of the content and get them peppered across Facebook, SecondLife, YouTube and a host of online social networks – even Twitter.

Inside the icy polarscape of Second Life, SnowBooks was the first publisher to plant the flag, opening up shop there before many had even started thinking about online communities. And it isn’t only a warm place to hang out, but a commercially powerful way of having events hosted around their books: readers can click through to buy books, read the first chapters or watch videos.

On YouTube their author videos are opening up new frontiers in connecting with customers and marketing to the YouTube generation (Papercut caught my eye: www.snowbooks.com/papercut), and each book has its very own webpage; not a corporate template but something with some real personality...

- www.snowbooks.com/sarahbower/
- www.snowbooks.com/memphisunderground

Since setting up in 2003, Snowbooks has created a storm, winning small publisher of the year and pioneering the new ways to connect readers to the titles they will love. They’re an inspiration for other small firms because they’ve done it without massive marketing budgets, but by simply knowing their customers and reaching them on the terms they want.

Snowbooks chief Emma Barnes

Snowbooks is a young upstart in the book publishing industry. Their founders talk about digital marketing in a way that’s rarely heard among the book publishing giants. Their marketing is ‘100% digital – not just because of price, but because it works’. As part of our Digital Thought Leaders series, we interviewed Snowbooks chief Emma Barnes, and asked whether digital marketing had been key to making them the fastest growing publisher, Publisher of the Year, and Best Small Publisher.

Getting close to blogging - how did you get started with it?

- I gravitate towards free stuff – and after starting Snowbooks I surprised myself by turning into a bit of a geek. Suddenly, when it was my own money on the line the idea of reading IT manuals and googling techie

forums was much more appealing than paying someone to do it for me. Plus Snowbooks is our own creation to nurture and be proud of - or ashamed of if we do things wrong. It seemed very important to be the one in control of the voice of the company. Plus we always like being first with things, or at least early adopters. It’s delicious fun to know that we are doing things years ahead of other companies, with more money and time than us. For reasons of cost and control, then, blogging seemed from the start like my natural habitat!

What can a firm like yours get from blogging as a communication channel?

- Publishing is a linear chain, not a feedback loop. An author comes up with a book (usually); an agent buys it and presses it onto a publisher, who in turn sells it to a retailer. The customer – the reader – eventually stumbles across it on the 3for2 tables (the ‘browser’ buying model) or sees a review/hears good things and buys it (the ‘searcher’ model). But there is precious little feedback after that to the producers. Amazon reviews don’t number sufficiently highly to be statistically significant; publishers don’t do test marketing or anything like the research Procter and Gamble, for instance, do. All publishers know is that they have the reader’s money – they have no idea if the reader ever read the book, or gave it as a gift, or loved it, or hated it.
- What a blog can do is provide one way for that linear chain to turn into a feedback loop. By taking the frankly rather brave step of enabling comments, you allow people to say precisely what they think. Scary – but utterly invaluable.

How do you find your voice? What is it to be authentic?

- Isn’t it sad that being authentic is special? After all, it’s just being human. I think the trick is at the recruitment stage. Only hire people who you are 100% confident in. Then let them say whatever the hell they like – and when they screw up, don’t yell at them. Again, brave – but the alternative is the air-brushed corporatespeak which will do far more harm and open you up to derision from your readers. People like to be proud of what they do: let them talk about it. Let them own their bit of the company.

Practicalities: How long do you and the team spend?

- About a half hour to an hour a day. Seems like a long time, and it is – but this is the essence of the company we’re talking about here. After four years of blogging, we have a lot of readers – every event I go to, someone new comes up and says ‘ooh, I read your blog’. Everything we are is epitomised by the blog, and frankly I’d rather find ways to automate the boring stuff that no-one sees so I have time to do important stuff like projecting our company’s progressive brand. Put in place the fixings for automation – like ONIX compliance, automatic field-fillers for sales spreadsheets and marketing materials, upgrade to a decent, simple bookkeeping system – and you have time enough for blogging.

What does the idea of ‘being brave’ really mean in using the web in book marketing?

- You don’t need to be brave if you’ve got no secrets. So, ditch the secrets. Go as far back up the supply chain as it goes and be absolutely certain that you are doing the best you can, creating the best books, working with the best processes that you’re perfectly proud of. So you have an amazing plan for next year? Who cares if your main competitor finds out – the trick is in the execution, not the idea. Snowbooks’ business model is incredibly traditional – nothing unique at all – but it’s how we execute that model that is the trick. So don’t be afraid of people getting hold of secrets, because no one cares.
- If you discover things that your company should keep secret, that you’re ashamed of, then REMOVE THEM! So it turns out a range of business books you publish are actually quite crap, and you’re only publishing them because of a sponsorship deal? Well, I’d suggest that’s something you should rectify. Readers are quite possibly buying them and hurling them against the wall in disgust – that’s something that needs fixing.

Is there a particular challenge that large corporates face? You guys are racing away with digital channels much faster than those with much much larger organisation?

- Authentic conversations are at the individual level. Companies – groups of people – find it hard to find a unified, consistent voice, precisely because they’re part of an internal conversation.
- My advice? Find someone in the organisation whose views exemplify the organisation’s own, and let them speak. Ideally, it should be the most senior manager. Isn’t it interesting that we’re talking about blogging here, but the real problems are organisational and strategic?

Digital Training Academy: Exercise**Finding the best blogs**

There are some great services on the web which will help show where your customers are and which blogs carry the most weight. Google blog search and Technorati will point you in the right direction, but for more detailed information you might want to take a look at some of the high end tools that track influence as well as citations. Next up there are a layer of packaged services from suppliers such as Meltwater, and if you want to drill deeper, then it's time to look at the new generation of social network analysis tools such as Analytica. Those guys start to unpack the difference between influence and popularity which is particularly interesting when you're aiming to uncover who the right people are to approach.

But why not simply ask your customers? Having some simple ways of connecting to your customers and asking them where they go and what they do will really help you uncover the reality of what influences your community. It might be the places you expect, but as is so often the case on the web, you might be in for a bit of a surprise.

See where your audiences come from and where they link to – link trails can help you untangle the web of popularity, as well as uncovering the sites that matter.

Looking for the blogs to connect to? Try these five simple steps...

1. **Search**
Use the free online tools like Google and Technorati to give you a sense of who the bloggers are in your sector.
2. **Panels**
Build up a customer panel of 100 people that agree to be asked the occasional question about your brands and their behaviour – give them something in return, but listen carefully to their advice.
3. **Existing sources**
Explore the events and focus groups that might already be in your marketing calendar – explore whether you can feed in some questions about the websites people visit so you can learn more about their claimed behavior.
4. **Track**
Put in place some performance tracking so you can see where your business is today, and how it's changing as a result of your efforts.

Blogging: 2006 was the tipping point for commercial blogs**Four million active bloggers in Europe**

Four million Europeans had become active bloggers according to a report from Forrester Research. The figure equates to 3% of all active European internet users at the time. Blogging was most popular in southern Europe, with 57% of the "blogosphere" living in either France, Italy or Spain. France had the highest population with nearly 1m active bloggers. On average active bloggers tended to be young, early adopters of new technologies and heavy internet users (spending an average 16 active hours per week online). It was a robust survey - Forrester questioned over 7000 online consumers in the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Holland and Sweden. (December 2006)

Vodafone inks deals with leading online brands

Vodafone has had a busy time this February announcing major deals with MySpace, YouTube, eBay and Google, writes ENN. The deal with MySpace will allow Vodafone users to use their phones to edit their profiles and post messages, photos and blogs through MySpace Mobile. MySpace has made similar deals in the US and Japan but this is the first time the firm has moved into the European mobile marketplace. MySpace Mobile will come pre-loaded on a selection of Vodafone handsets with users also able to download it from Vodafone Live! The service will launch in the UK prior to being rolled out across Europe. (December 2006)

Yahoo! describe Germany 2006 as first "internet World Cup"

Speaking on i-level's "Leveller Podcast", Blake Chandlee, commercial director for Yahoo!, said that this year's tournament represented the first "internet World Cup". Internet users were able to directly engage far more online than in previous years thanks to increased video content and the wider use of community platforms such as blogs. Chandlee said that Yahoo!'s sponsorship of the event highlighted the fact that global internet companies are now "sitting at the same table" as traditional media firms. (December 2006)

FT.com opens up content for free

The Financial Times's FT.com website is to start letting users access stories for free, writes Netimperative. Under the new charging model users will be able to access 30 free articles per month before being asked to subscribe. The new system will make it possible for bloggers and news aggregators to link directly to FT.com content. The change in charging strategy coincides with a major site overhaul which will include new blogs, a new markets section and increased editorial content. Standard and premium subscription will cost £99 and £199 respectively. (December 2006)

5. **Watch**

When your blog and social media marketing activity is running, follow through to see where your audiences come from and where they link to – link trails can help you untangle the web of popularity, as well as uncovering the sites that matter.

Blogging and politics

The world is flat: thanks to bloggers

From Gaza with love (<http://fromgaza.blogspot.com>)

We use the phrase ‘the world is flat’ with a kind of disembodiment in its meaning. Ever since the book made it to the heights of a top seller on the marketing director’s Christmas lists, the phrase has washed across the marketing industry like a tide, Orange telecommunications even had it plastered all over the walls of London in one of their outdoor advertising campaigns.

When you remove the frictions of distance, it means information can find its way to the people who want to hear.

But what does ‘flat’ mean? When you remove the frictions of distance, it means information can find its way to the people who want to hear. Barriers melt away and that can mean individuals from across the world suddenly gaining a powerful voice. Dr. Mona El-Farra is a Red Crescent worker living in Gaza. Through her blog, thousands of people have shared an intimate, and often emotional connection with her. In the summer of 2007 as the political situation in Gaza worsened she talked about how ‘bombs fall outside the door’ with the kind of realism that makes you reconnect to a world desensitised by television news.



Digital Book Club: Guide to political blogging

www.DigitalStrategyConsulting.com/bookclub
 Top voted blogger Iain Dale has compiled a list of the best 500 political blogs in the UK, as well as the best 100 Conservative, Labour and LibDem blogs. His book also contains articles by thirty leading bloggers and commentators, and he profiles more than fifty leading blogs.

“Although right wing blogs still dominate the upper reaches of the chart, left of centre blogs are showing signs of coming to life and challenging the right.”

Digital Social Media Academy

Training publishers and marketers to harness the massive power of social networking and communities to build engagement and discussion.



Copyright: Jurgen Sack, 2006

Who is it for?
 Publishers and brands who want to trigger the potential of this evolving publishing model for their businesses.

“Markets are nothing more than conversations.”

The Cluetrain Manifesto


What is it about?
 In social media getting the strategy right is key as much behaviour is still being learned, by both publishers and participants. This Academy will lead you through key issues like data and community structures, building conversations and audiences and explore smart supporting models.

"From Gaza with love" has been going for more than a year. It's the everyday story of life in a not-so-everyday place. Somewhere quietly tucked away in her apartment she's probably settling down at her laptop today. When the power goes down she's even phoned her blog postings to friends to load up: "The situation over the past few days has been very bad, we have no electricity now and I have dictated this post to my son in the UK for distribution". In the frictionless world of web content, stories flow past in RSS feeds, they may touch mass media when they're stumbled upon, but in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace more than ten years back, it's humbling to know that Mona's story reaches people direct to their desktops. Whatever your religion or politics; this freedom to express, connect and discuss is the engine for a much deeper cultural change in society.

When the power goes down she's even phoned her blog postings to friends to load up: "The situation over the past few days has been very bad, we have no electricity now and I have dictated this post to my son in the UK for distribution"

When the lights went out in Burma

The junta-controlled ISP pulled the plug on the country's internet access in the autumn of 2007. The web was alive with stories of what was really happening inside the country and how the regime seemed to be doing its best to cripple the phone network as well. In the midst of killings on the streets, heart-wrenching postings still made it to the web, describing the murder of monks as soldiers shot into the crowd. How bloggers got their messages out is as much testimony to those darkest depths of despair the people found themselves in, as it is to their ingenuity and braveness. Who knows what happens when the lights really flicker out; without the blogs, no one would hear you scream.



Ko Htike's Prosaic Collection

This blogger updates the world on news concerning Burma - the 2007 protests and the ensuing violent crackdown by the country's military junta. The pictures of a monk's bruised and battered dead body, and YouTube videos of armed soldiers firing into crowds of Burmese protesters, are interspersed with calls to boycott the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

(<http://ko-htike.blogspot.com>)

Further reading

Links: blogroll

<http://boingboing.net>

<http://londonbloggers.iamcal.com>

<http://randomreality.blogware.com>

<http://www.butlersheetmetal.com/tinbasherblog>

<http://sethgodin.typepad.com>

<http://byrnebabybyrne.com>

<http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com>

<http://meadows-klue.blogs.com>

<http://www.tescopoly.org>

<http://equityprivate.typepad.com/ep>

<http://mbites.com>

www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/nickrobinson

<http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan>

<http://blog.susan-hill.com>

<http://randomjottings.typepad.com>

www.thepenguinblog.typepad.com

<http://mostly-books.blogspot.com>

www.dykestowatchoutfor.com

http://dovegreyreader.typepad.com/dovegreyreader_scribbles

www.bookarazzi.com

www.snowbooks.com/weblog

<http://fromgaza.blogspot.com>

<http://ko-htike.blogspot.com>

<http://ratchasima.net/saffron-revolution>

Digital Social Media & Web 2.0 Academies

Marketing management training to help brands and publishers navigate digital tools and platforms to build new relations with customers. Learn how to build sustainable audiences, stronger messaging, and great content for the fastest growing part of the web.



Copyright: Renee Lee, 2007

“I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed”

Michael Jordan, basketball player

Who is it for?

Media owners, marketing teams, and anyone involved in architecting or participating in online communities.

What is it about?

Web 2.0 has washed over the industry like a tidal wave, but building the software is only the starting point. This Academy will explore the concepts behind Web 2.0 and explain how you can harness social networking, collective intelligence and user generated content in your marketing.

Our support programme

- Coaching and mentoring
- Customised in-company training Academies
- Senior masterclasses for critical issues
- Workshops for staff at all levels
- Training and development planning

If you have any questions about our approach to training, or the detailed content of the course then please email or call the team.



Making sense of a digital world

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