



CORPORATE BLOGGING: IS IT WORTH THE HYPE?

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"CORPORATE BLOGGING: IS IT WORTH THE HYPE?"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blogging has caused quite a buzz. From political activists to aspiring novelists, industry pros and avid hobbyists, everyone seems to be starting a blog. Recent articles in Business Week and Forbes demonstrate how even the mainstream media is taking notice of their unprecedented growth and increasing effect on our society. But can corporate blogging really deliver measurable return-on-investment for your business?

In this paper, we address the following questions: why would a company want to start blogging? Who should blog? What makes a blog successful? And how can companies use this type of website to facilitate positive business growth?

To find the answers to these questions, we surveyed bloggers at hundreds of companies and conducted in-depth interviews with representatives from six corporations currently leading the way in blogging activities. What we discovered was that for the majority of our survey sample—including some of today's largest corporations and scrappiest underdogs—corporate blogs are, in fact, living up to all the hype. Corporate blogs are giving established companies and obscure brands alike the ability to connect with their audiences on a more personal level, build trust, collect valuable feedback and foster strengthened business relationships. More importantly, these companies are enjoying tangible returns on their blogging investment in the form of increased sales, partnerships, business opportunities, press coverage and lead generation.

Companies that employ a well thought out blogging strategy encourage the strongest community goodwill,

and that goodwill, in turn, promotes significant marketing and sales gains. It is said that success breeds success. This holds very true for successful blogs. There is a chain reaction that begins with a real desire on the part of the blogger to provide value and connect with their audience. The blogger shares useful and engaging content—the latest information, help, discussion topics and ideas. The way the audience responds to that content is key. When customers start commenting, posting or tracking back to a blogging community, it can have a viral effect—spreading out across the blogosphere. In addition, companies that harness their customers' knowledge and ideas find better ways to satisfy their needs and wants, thus facilitating goodwill in the community. For example, it is a common practice in blogging to provide a link back to a thought originator, which is valuable because backlinks are a way that search engines distinguish the order of the editorial rankings. Higher search engine rankings translate into significantly higher web site traffic and more sales leads. Thus, successful blogging breeds success in other marketing and sales initiatives.

Greater word-of-mouth buzz on- and offline, higher search engine rankings, increased press coverage and superior lead generation are just some of the potential benefits of blogging in a corporate setting. In the next chapters, we will examine the blogging strategies of a number of companies, and learn how they are already reaping the rewards of their investment in corporate blogging.

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SURVEY & CASE STUDIES OVERVIEW

518 bloggers were contacted for the corporate blogging survey, resulting in 816 people visiting the survey page. Anecdotally, we were surprised to discover that there are not as many corporate blogs on the Internet as the volume of current media interest might indicate. Even though a few companies have several hundred, if not thousands of blogs listed, not every blog at a major company actually had a lot of posts and comments. In situations in which we found blogs with hardly any content, we did not contact that blogger. We have had 97 people take the corporate blogging survey, and of those respondents, 75 were bloggers and 22 were non-bloggers. Backbone Media's survey engine diverted non-bloggers to a series of questions about blogging in general. Those results will be published at a later date. This paper contains the published results of the respondents who stated they ran a corporate blog.


The corporate blogging survey at Backbone Media was developed on top of the corporate blogging research one of the principal authors conducted during the spring of 2004. Backbone Media's 2005 corporate blogging survey consists of an online survey with 32 questions. In addition, a series of interviews were conducted with six corporate bloggers in conjunction and independently of the survey. Many of the companies that were interviewed for last year's corporate blogging survey were interviewed again—Microsoft and Macromedia specifically. Different bloggers from those companies were interviewed for

this year's survey.

Anecdotal evidence from bloggers in last year's survey demonstrated that corporate blogs give companies the opportunity to promote their companies through improving search engine rankings, directing traffic, and generating PR. This year's survey was an attempt to assess the value of blogging in general and find out the current state of the corporate blogging environment. It was our hypothesis that the search engine optimization value of blogs is very high because blogs are easy to read for search engines and the best blogs generate relevant link popularity. [1] We will also explore what makes a blog successful and who should consider blogging in a company? If a company is considering blogging, what will they gain from blogging? We will give examples of successful blogs in the consumer products and software industries. To achieve the best results in search engine optimization companies should focus their efforts on writing about their own products and their development.

Using information from the case studies, we will suggest that each company is using a different

1 "Link Popularity" makes a big difference with search engine rankings. Link popularity is essentially the number of links pointing back to a specific page and domain (a.k.a. "backlinks") combined with the relative popularity and relevance of each of the backlinks.



blogging content strategy. It is a company's blogging content strategy that will determine the overall relative success of a corporate blog when it comes to building a community. The success of building community will determine a company's level of direct traffic, higher search results, and online PR. Using the survey results and examples from the case study interviews, we will demonstrate the results that companies have received from their corporate blogging efforts, thereby demonstrating the reasons why a company should consider blogging. We will also explore what makes a blog successful and who should consider blogging in a company. If a company is considering blogging, what will they gain from blogging? We will give examples of successful blogs in the consumer products and software industries.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS: SURVEY & CASE STUDIES

THE SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

The survey respondents indicated that they believe there is a broad array of benefits to starting a blog—including quick publishing, thought leadership, building community, sales and online PR.

We had a good cross section of bloggers, including 49% who have run their blog for over 7 months. The biggest concern about starting a blog was the time needed to devote to the blog; the next concern was legal liability. A slight majority of bloggers took less than 1-2 months to start their blog after initial management review. The most used blogging platforms by the bloggers were Typepad, Blogger, WordPress, and Movable Type.

Once they started, bloggers saw immediate results from publishing content and ideas quickly. Search engine rankings and links results appeared before sales. Overall, thought leadership and idea sharing were the biggest benefits for bloggers.

Timeline of results

- First week - publish ideas quickly, RSS syndication. Being able to publish content quickly and RSS syndication within the first week makes sense, as blogs are easy to set up and their content management systems make it easy to start publishing.
- First month - provide thought leadership, boost search engine rankings, and increase links.
- 2-3 months - interview requests and building a community happen now.

Over 83% of bloggers saw a traffic increase, while for 54% of respondents the blog represented less than 35% of their traffic. For 5% of bloggers their blog represented 100% of traffic.

Journalists contacted 59% of survey respondents. Less than half of bloggers received a published article from the contact. 18% of bloggers have experienced negative PR.

54% of 65 respondents stated they target keyword phrases in blog articles to achieve higher search engine rankings. Respondents stated 'providing their blog as a place to write about issues' was their most important search engine optimization issue. Also receiving more qualified traffic through search engines, and increasing the number of links to boost ranking were important issues.

The roles of bloggers include: President (45%), head of department (33%), and staff (22%). Most bloggers (73%) were from companies with 1-100 employees. However, 19% had over 500 employees. The majority of bloggers were from small companies. 74% had less than \$50 million revenue, while 11% had over \$1.4 billion. Blogging innovation is coming from small companies and large companies alike, including several technology industry leaders. Industries are diverse but weighted towards software, tech, marketing, consumer-packaged goods, and manufacturing.

Most bloggers were over the age of 30. The largest age bracket was 30-39. Respondents were highly educated with 52% having achieved an undergraduate degree and 48% having attained a graduate level. 77% were male and 23% were female.

THE CASE STUDIES CONCLUSIONS

We interviewed six selected bloggers over the telephone to gain insight into each company's blogging strategies. Specifically, we asked questions about each company's efforts towards product development and open transparency. The companies included in the case studies are:

- Annie's Homegrown

- IBM
- iUpload
- Macromedia
- Maytag
- Microsoft

ANNIE'S HOMEGROWN - The new Annie's Homegrown blog is a character blog. Where the blog has discussed products and asked for feedback, the blog has generated a great deal of customer response. The company's blog is less active than others we profiled, with only 17 entries over 5 months. Most of the feedback has been received through comment links on the blog.

iUPLOAD - iUpload is a small software company, and has a blog for every employee in the company. One blogger wrote about their customers' ideas and posted them, and they also pick a customer of the month to be profiled. Both strategies received a good response from the blog's audience. When asked if iUpload blogs had been successful, the bloggers gave feedback that they were a success. We consider that one reason for the success in terms of search engine rankings comes from the number of blogs within the company and how the many different blogs help with back linking.

IBM - Customers do not give product feedback on

IBM developerWorks blogs. Our IBM blogger reported examples of product feedback were not available, and IBM developerWorks blogs have not seen improvements in their products or services from blog comments by customers. In addition, our IBM blogger reported product builders or executives currently do not publicly blog at IBM as far as he was aware. Based on the interview with the IBM blogger it appears, IBM developerWorks blogs are not following a product development blogging content strategy currently; IBM developerWorks blogs current blogging strategy is one of thought leadership. The thought leadership content strategy still brings success to IBM's blogging efforts.

Blog content is dependant on the writer of the content and what is being discussed on the blog. According to the IBM blogger interviewed, IBM developerWorks does not have its product builders blogging and they are not using the content strategy of writing articles about products and encouraging customer feedback.

MAYTAG - The Maytag SkyBox Blog gives customers a place to focus on customer service at Maytag. The blog effectively leaves an online record of any customer service comments that can be reviewed by future customers over time.

Maytag's product design team has received more product feedback through blogs than from any other communications channel. Moreover, customer

feedback comes directly to the design team with no filtering. Maytag's content strategy of asking for product feedback makes customers feel more engaged in getting the products they would like to buy. Because the exchange of customer ideas takes place on such a public forum, Maytag clearly demonstrates a desire to get input on their products.

MICROSOFT - With Microsoft's existing channels of customer support, it is sometimes difficult for customers to get a message through to the person responsible for making a software change at Microsoft, but blogs appear to be helping the customers interact more directly. Using the example of a spelling mistake, we see that a customer could not get through to a programmer who would be able to make a spelling correction. A number of customers have their own blogs, when the customer blogged about the issue on their own blog, Microsoft bloggers picked up the issue and responded to the bug in their software immediately.

The Microsoft blogger in the case study described how Microsoft is in the midst of developing strategies for dealing with complaints and reports of software issues discussed on blogs and on the web in general. Several departments and individuals in Microsoft are already monitoring the web for such complaints, but these are efforts by individuals undertaken under their own recognizance. Blogs are helping Microsoft to redefine their approach to that of "customer focus" from "goal focus" through

one-on-one interaction with customers. Our Microsoft blogger reported on three examples of customer feedback, product bug reporting, receiving new ideas and how this demonstrates Microsoft is using blogs to converse with customers.

Previously, the Microsoft blogger reported product builders at Microsoft didn't understand their customers' needs, and were not able to receive many complaints. Blogs are helping Microsoft gather customer feedback, and in the process, become more customer focused. Using blogs, individual Microsoft departments are changing the culture of Microsoft to one of openness and transparency. Sometimes that transparency means that customers and even employees will criticize Microsoft. The new management thinking at Microsoft is that such criticism is good because it provides the opportunity to react, respond and learn from customer feedback. With blogs, communicating that response quickly and effectively has become a lot easier in the last few years. Customers are delighted that Microsoft is listening and responding to their suggestions quickly.

MACROMEDIA - According to the Macromedia blogger interviewed, blogs have produced a radical change in culture at Macromedia. Macromedia's core expertise, software development, has been entirely changed by blogging.

Early on at Macromedia, blogs were thought of as a

way to get information out quickly to customers and help build a bigger community by being more open and transparent. Slowly, Macromedia developed the strategy that exists today, openly asking for product development ideas early in the software development process.

Before implementing blogs, the product development process at Macromedia was much more closed. There was some customer interaction, but most product development work was completed in-house. Through the use of blogs, Macromedia has changed the process; it is much more open and transparent.

Macromedia management realized that by allowing their customers get involved at an early stage, they would be more committed to purchasing the product and recommending Macromedia products on their own blogs and in discussions with other colleagues. Macromedia had to open up the software development process to build that greater sense of customer involvement in product development.

This risk has produced positive results for Macromedia.

- Significant online PR, where customers have become brand evangelists and write about Macromedia products on their own blogs.
- Higher search engine rankings - lots of links to Macromedia's blogs and website from other blogger's sites.

- A more committed core group of customers willing to buy and evangelize Macromedia product on their own volition.
- Increased sales and improved product development for Macromedia.

Macromedia's strategy is to focus their blogging efforts on 50-60 blogs. The company directs its bloggers to write only when there is something of value to say to customers. Typically, this means writing about their products. We contrast Macromedia's strategy with that of Microsoft and IBM. Both Microsoft and IBM encourage many people to blog. However, IBM does not yet have any external blogs where bloggers are writing about any particular IBM product development process. While Microsoft is learning that product feedback is helping to improve their products, the interview with the Microsoft blogger did not reveal that Microsoft has changed its software development process as yet. We do know that several departments are attempting to achieve more openness and transparency through their use of blogs, however.

WHOSE IDEA IS IT ANYWAY?

Thought leadership matters in blogging. Many business blogging survey respondents ranked thought leadership as an important factor in starting their blog and as one of the results they have received from writing their blog. Case study interviewees reported they gained the best results when they used their blogs for suggestions and feedback on their products, as the interviewees stated they received lots of product ideas from their customers in return. Therefore we can distinguish between different peoples' thought leadership, and that it is not necessarily the blogger's thought leadership that is important to a company blog. Here's why: a company must attempt to satisfy the needs and wants of its customers, and customers are typically the people who actually know most about a product or service. As often it is the customer who uses a product more than even a product's developer or manufacturer. Customers think a lot about the products they use and come up with new ideas for improvement. If a company can harness their customers' knowledge and ideas on how to improve their products, they will find better ways to satisfy their customers needs and wants.

Based on the results of the case studies, we would suggest that it's the customer's thought leadership that is more important than the company blogger's ideas. As customers post new ideas on a blog, a blogger can collect them and become a thought leader through their customer's ideas. To become a successful thought leader we would suggest based on the case study examples that a blogger should listen to their customer's ideas, needs, and wants. Harnessing the power of a community of customer bloggers can help a company to create better product ideas, and test them in the forum of customer opinion quickly.

In essence, blogs are learning tools. Specifically, a company can use a blog to learn how to improve or develop new products by communicating more effectively with their customers through the use of corporate blogs. Any company should encourage customer ideas, reward them and learn from their customer's example. If they do, they will build more successful products which also have ready customers who want to adopt new ideas and products because they have participated in the process of product development. Such a strategy will also have additional Internet marketing benefits in the form of more backlinks and higher search engine rankings, as well as direct traffic from links on many different websites.

WHICH STRATEGIES SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

We discovered from the survey and case studies that, in general, having a lot of blogs at a company does not necessarily mean the company is getting the most value out of their blogging efforts. There are definitely some SEO benefits from having a number of blogs. It's our hypothesis that discussing both company and customer thought leadership is the best way to build community.

According to bloggers at Microsoft and Macromedia, both companies are crossing a cultural divide, from a closed system in product development to one of openness and transparency. Our Macromedia blogger stated the company has already crossed that cultural chasm. Both Microsoft and Macromedia are getting tremendous benefits in marketing product development and marketing promotion. Literally, individual Macromedia customers believe Macromedia built and developed the product based on their suggestions.

If you helped build a product as a customer, you are much more likely to buy the product and tell your peers about the product. Here lies the online PR opportunity for corporate bloggers. The best ways to market a product are through customer referrals and good PR. Building a community of bloggers and online customers will increase the likelihood of online PR being generated on your audience's blogs as they will be discussing their ideas about

your products. That online conversation about your company's products produces direct traffic and links back to a company blog and site, resulting in higher search engine rankings and more traffic.

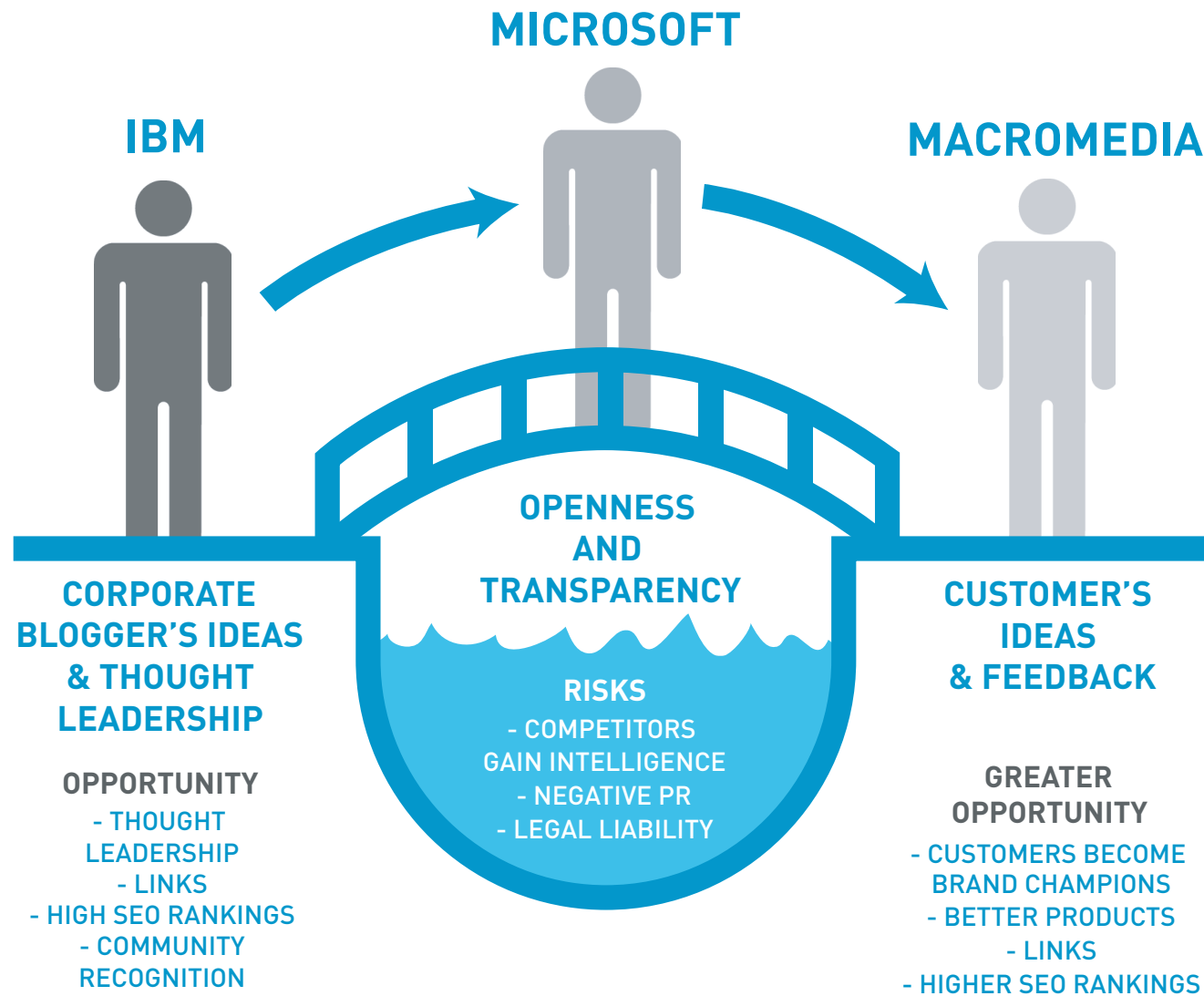
Following Macromedia and Microsoft's examples and considering the survey overall, we recommend that companies, when developing a blogging content strategy, should encourage their product builders to blog and to write about their products. Any thought leadership presented on the blog should focus on the development of a company's product, and new ideas should come from both the blogger and from customers.

CROSSING THE CORPORATE BLOGGING CULTURAL DIVIDE - THE CULTURAL CHASM

We developed a diagram (next page) that illustrates the process of a company crossing the corporate blogging cultural divide. By developing a corporate culture around openness and transparency, and focusing on their customers' ideas and feedback, a company can gain even more from their customers. The left side of the divide represents companies who are blogging but have not totally embraced the concept of openness. The right side represents a great openness in terms of sharing ideas and internal thinking about future products, as in the case of Macromedia. We are not making any judgments about one side being bad and one being good. There are pros and cons to both modes. As you can see in the diagram, based on our discussions with bloggers at the three companies, we place IBM and Macromedia on opposite sides of the divide and Microsoft is somewhere in the middle. We believe that IBM is on the opposite bank of the cultural divide; it must be said that IBM is gaining a lot from its external blogs in terms of thought leadership, links, high search engine rankings, and community recognition, and is a leader in corporate blogging. However, according to our interview with the IBM blogger, IBM's external blogging strategy is not as developed as its internal blogging strategy. When a company crosses the corporate blogging cultural divide, a company carries all of the benefits and opportunities blogging presents. Once over the

bridge, a company can expect greater opportunity. Microsoft is in the middle of the bridge at the moment. Once crossed, as Macromedia's example demonstrates, customers become blogging brand champions, better products are developed, even more links and higher search engine rankings are achieved. While crossing the corporate blogging cultural divide makes sense for some companies, especially product companies, we believe the idea may not make sense for every company.

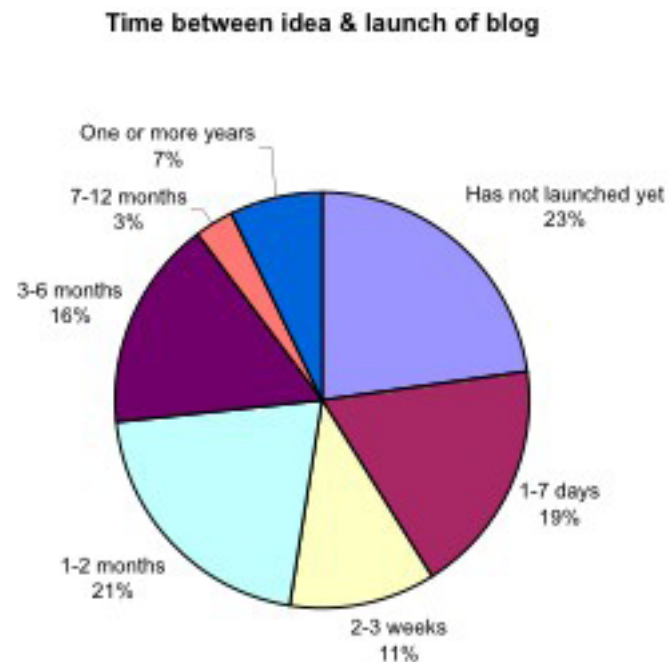
CROSSING THE CORPORATE BLOGGING CULTURAL DIVIDE - THE CULTURAL CHASM (CONTINUED)



ANALYSIS & COMMENTARY OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

QUESTION 1 - HOW MUCH TIME PASSED BETWEEN THE TIME WHEN YOUR COMPANY'S MANAGEMENT TEAM FIRST CONSIDERED THE IDEA OF STARTING A BLOG AND WHEN IT WENT LIVE TO THE PUBLIC?

A majority of the 97 survey respondents, 51% took less than 1-2 months to start the process of thinking of launching a blog and actually launching the blog. Ten bloggers or 10% of the respondents took over seven months between the time they first considered the idea of starting a blog and when the blog actually went live. 23% of the respondents had not launched a blog yet, if a respondent selected this option the survey respondent was diverted to another survey for non-bloggers.



QUESTION 2 - ARE YOU A PRINCIPAL OPERATOR OF A CORPORATE BLOG?

The majority, 92% of the respondents, were sole bloggers on their blog.

Principal operator of blog



QUESTION 3 - WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND THE MAJOR PRIORITIES IN STARTING A CORPORATE BLOG. BEFORE LAUNCHING YOUR CORPORATE BLOG, WHAT ROLE DID THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS PLAY IN YOUR COMPANY'S DECISION TO START ITS CORPORATE BLOG? PLEASE RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES ACCORDING TO THE SCALE AT THE TOP OF THE QUESTION.

'Another way to publish content and ideas', 'Thought leadership', and 'Build a community' were the top three priorities for bloggers starting a blog. While 'Crisis communications', 'Customer registrations', and 'Respond to negative comments' were the bottom three priorities in starting a blog. It appears the chief priorities of bloggers are publishing ideas and building a community. These priorities had a higher priority than 'Increasing sales' or 'Boost search engine positions', and 'Increasing link popularity'.

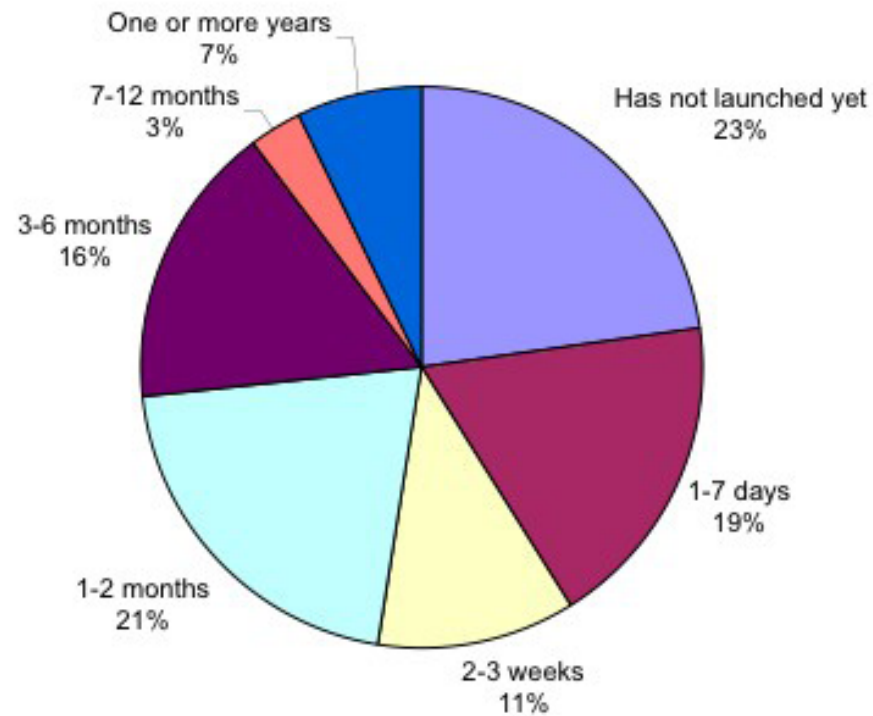
	1	2	3	4	5	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
11. Another way to publish content and ideas	0%	4%	13%	31%	52%	71	306	4.31
8. Thought leadership	4%	3%	18%	27%	48%	71	292	4.11
13. Build a community	3%	6%	21%	24%	46%	71	288	4.06
15. A way to get information quickly to customers	10%	10%	11%	34%	34%	70	261	3.73
14. Increasing sales	13%	10%	18%	37%	23%	71	246	3.46
9. A way to get feedback from my customers	10%	15%	20%	34%	21%	71	242	3.41
3. Boost search engine positions	17%	13%	20%	32%	18%	71	229	3.23
4. Increase link popularity	14%	14%	26%	33%	13%	70	221	3.16
12. RSS syndication	17%	19%	19%	26%	20%	70	219	3.13
2. Gather feedback on a product or service	15%	25%	23%	28%	8%	71	205	2.89
1. Customer service	25%	21%	23%	25%	6%	71	188	2.65
5. A way to get interview requests from journalists	32%	18%	32%	13%	4%	71	169	2.38
7. I was curious about blogging, and wanted to try it	34%	21%	23%	16%	6%	70	166	2.37
10. Respond to negative comments	34%	18%	28%	17%	3%	71	168	2.37
16. Customer registrations	43%	23%	19%	6%	9%	69	147	2.13
6. Crisis communications	51%	21%	21%	4%	1%	70	128	1.83

Scale: 1 = Not a factor, 2 = Some, 3 = Important, 4 = Very important, 5 Primary reason

Note regarding table: Many of the 75 survey respondents did not answer every section for each question. Where a scale was used with multiple sections to a question, we multiplied the number of answers by the value of the answer, i.e. 1 equals 'not a factor' and 5 equals 'primary reason'. The total results were calculated and an average for each section was calculated based on the actual number of respondents for a section of the question, thereby we could account for the differences between the numbers of respondents for each section. The issues in the table are displayed in descending order by the priority that received the highest respondents average first.

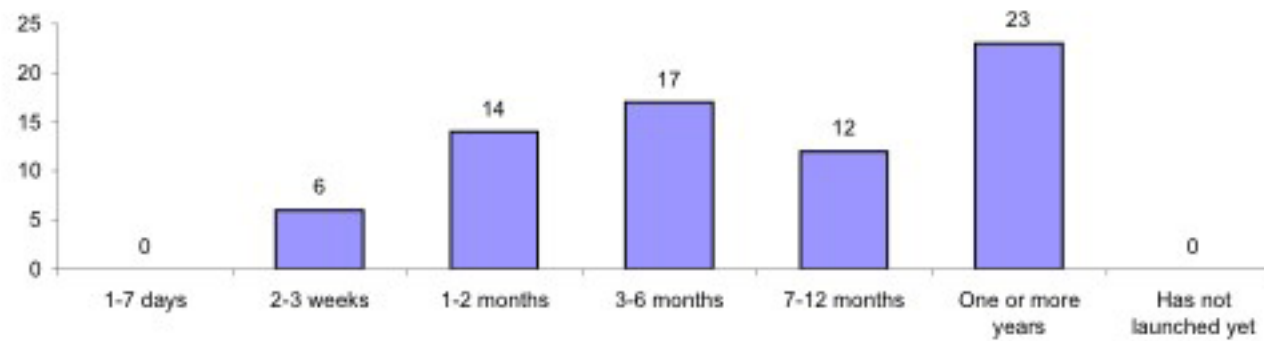
QUESTION 4 - HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE YOU LAUNCHED YOUR CORPORATE BLOG?

49% of the respondents had been running their blogs for over 7 months, while 8% of bloggers had been running their blogs for 2-3 weeks. The survey had a good cross section of bloggers in terms of their time of blogging, considering that blogging has been around since 1998, and corporate blogging is only about 3 years old.



QUESTION 4 - HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE YOU LAUNCHED YOUR CORPORATE BLOG?
(CONTINUED)

Duration of blog



QUESTION 5 - MOST COMPANIES WHO CONSIDER DOING A CORPORATE BLOG UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE POTENTIAL GAINS FOR DOING A BLOG BUT THERE ARE ALSO POTENTIAL RISKS AND COSTS. PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IN TERMS OF THEIR STRENGTH AS ROADBLOCKS TO STARTING YOUR BLOG.

'Costs in terms of man hours' was seen as the biggest potential roadblock to starting a blog. This makes sense, its in the nature of blogs the requirement to post a lot of comments, that it requires a lot of discipline to post comments on a regular basis. It is therefore important to develop good solid content strategies before starting a blog. Conducting interviews, reading other blogs, surveying your audience and employees on a regular basis, keeping current on industry trends are all strategies for developing content. 'Legal liability' was the next most important factor, thinking about and seeking advice from colleagues or industry bloggers will help to mitigate any posts that might cause liability. Many companies are now developing corporate blogging policies based on blogger experience and legal advice. Reviewing other company blogging policies can help you to develop your own policy.

	1	2	3	4	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
1. Costs in terms of man hours	6%	36%	37%	21%	70	192	2.74
2. Legal liability	4%	16%	47%	33%	70	216	3.09
4. Do we really have something to say that is valuable?	3%	21%	38%	38%	68	212	3.12
5. Could this backfire?	7%	14%	37%	41%	70	219	3.13
3. Rules and obligations to shareholders	6%	14%	13%	67%	70	239	3.41

Scale: 1 = Almost a roadblock, 2 = Speed bump, 3 = Crack in the road, 4 = We did not consider this

Note regarding table: Many of the 75 survey respondents did not answer every section for each question. Where a scale was used with multiple sections to a question, we multiplied the number of answers by the value of the answer, i.e. 1 equals 'Almost a roadblock' and 4 equals 'We did not consider this'. The total results were calculated and an average for each section was calculated based on the actual number of respondents for a section of the question, thereby we could account for the differences between the numbers of respondents for each section. The issues in the table are displayed in ascending order by the issue that received the lowest respondents average first.

QUESTION 6 - NOW THAT THAT YOU HAVE BEEN BLOGGING FOR A WHILE, WHAT ROLE DO THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS PLAY IN YOUR CURRENT STRATEGY? PLEASE RATE EACH CATEGORY'S LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE.

'Thought leadership and or idea sharing' was the most important factor with a respondent average of 4.46. We can also state that the response was overwhelming as the spread between this factor and the next most important consideration was wide as the next factor was 3.21. 'Customer service and or product feedback' and 'search engine marketing and or linking' were equally weighted in second position.

	1	2	3	4	5	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
3. Thought leadership and or idea sharing	1%	4%	6%	24%	65%	71	317	4.46
1. Customer service and or product feedback	11%	24%	24%	28%	13%	71	228	3.21
2. Search engine marketing and or linking	8%	21%	27%	28%	15%	71	228	3.21
4. Public relations and or crisis communications	13%	21%	21%	31%	13%	70	217	3.10

Scale: 1 = Not a factor, 2 = Some, 3 = Important, 4 = Very important, 5 Primary reason

Note regarding table: Many of the 75 survey respondents did not answer every section for each question. Where a scale was used with multiple sections to a question, we multiplied the number of answers by the value of the answer, i.e. 1 equals 'not a factor' and 5 equals 'primary reason'. The total results were calculated and an average for each section was calculated based on the actual number of respondents for a section of the question, thereby we could account for the differences between the numbers of respondents for each section. The issues in the table are displayed in descending order by the category that received the highest respondents average first.

QUESTION 7 - HOW QUICKLY DID YOU SEE RESULTS FROM YOUR BLOG ON THE FOLLOWING FACTORS?

The first table for question 7 is sorted by the respondents average for all of the factors.

'Another way to publish content and ideas' is the most important factor where bloggers saw results quickly. 'RSS syndication' was second and 'A way to get information quickly to customers' was third. 'Help you to handle crisis communications' and 'Getting interview requests from journalists' were at the bottom of the table, largely because many bloggers had received no results for these factors. What was interesting about the results was that bloggers received results more quickly on the search engine marketing factors 'Increase link popularity' and 'Boost search engine positions' than bloggers received on 'Increasing sales'.

Average							
	1	2	3	4	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
9. Another way to publish content and ideas	74%	18%	3%	6%	68	96	1.41
10. RSS syndication	62%	13%	12%	13%	69	121	1.75
13. A way to get information quickly to customers	59%	15%	9%	18%	68	126	1.85
6. Thought leadership	29%	43%	16%	12%	68	143	2.10
2. Boost search engine positions	23%	43%	22%	12%	69	153	2.22
11. Build a community	30%	26%	32%	12%	69	155	2.25
3. Increase link popularity	22%	40%	25%	13%	68	156	2.29
1. Gather feedback on a product or service	39%	20%	13%	29%	70	162	2.31

Scale 1 = First week, 2 = First month, 3 = 2-3 months, 4 = No results

QUESTION 7 - HOW QUICKLY DID YOU SEE RESULTS FROM YOUR BLOG ON THE FOLLOWING FACTORS?
(CONTINUED)

Average							
	1	2	3	4	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
7. A way to get feedback from my customers	31%	29%	15%	25%	68	159	2.34
8. Respond to negative comments	21%	15%	19%	46%	68	197	2.90
12. Increasing sales	15%	19%	28%	38%	68	197	2.90
14. Customer registrations	18%	16%	21%	46%	68	200	2.94
4. Getting interview requests from journalists	10%	16%	35%	39%	69	209	3.03
5. Help you to handle crisis communications	10%	13%	9%	68%	68	227	3.34

The second table for question 7 is sorted by factor, as to when respondents received results in the first week.

'Another way to publish content and ideas' again saw the most results in the first week. 'RSS syndication' and 'A way to get information quickly to customers' were two other factors that were checked as having received results by a lot of bloggers in the first week. Again 'Help you to handle crisis communications' and 'Getting interview requests from journalists' were at the bottom of the table for the first week in terms of results. In the first week more bloggers received results on 'Gather feedback on a product or service' and 'A way to get feedback from my customers' than search engine results or increasing sales.

First week							
	1	2	3	4	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
9. Another way to publish content and ideas	74%	18%	3%	6%	68	96	1.41
10. RSS syndication	62%	13%	12%	13%	69	121	1.75
13. A way to get information quickly to customers	59%	15%	9%	18%	68	126	1.85
1. Gather feedback on a product or service	39%	20%	13%	29%	70	162	2.31
7. A way to get feedback from my customers	31%	29%	15%	25%	68	159	2.34
11. Build a community	30%	26%	32%	12%	69	155	2.25
6. Thought leadership	29%	43%	16%	12%	68	143	2.10
2. Boost search engine positions	23%	43%	22%	12%	69	153	2.22
3. Increase link popularity	22%	40%	25%	13%	68	156	2.29
8. Respond to negative comments	21%	15%	19%	46%	68	197	2.90
14. Customer registrations	18%	16%	21%	46%	68	200	2.94
12. Increasing sales	15%	19%	28%	38%	68	197	2.90
4. Getting interview requests from journalists	10%	16%	35%	39%	69	209	3.03
5. Help you to handle crisis communications	10%	13%	9%	68%	68	227	3.34

Scale 1 = First week, 2 = First month, 3 = 2-3 months, 4 = No results

The third table for question 7 is sorted by factor, as to when respondents received results in the first month.

'Thought leadership', 'Boost search engine positions' and 'Increase link popularity' were all top factors that received results in the first month. We might say that it took some time to receive search engine results and that most people started to really receive search engine results after one month. With blogs, a blogger should expect to see some sort of result after about a month with search engine rankings.

First Month							
	1	2	3	4	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
6. Thought leadership	29%	43%	16%	12%	68	143	2.10
2. Boost search engine positions	23%	43%	22%	12%	69	153	2.22
3. Increase link popularity	22%	40%	25%	13%	68	156	2.29
7. A way to get feedback from my customers	31%	29%	15%	25%	68	159	2.34
11. Build a community	30%	26%	32%	12%	69	155	2.25
1. Gather feedback on a product or service	39%	20%	13%	29%	70	162	2.31
12. Increasing sales	15%	19%	28%	38%	68	197	2.90
9. Another way to publish content and ideas	74%	18%	3%	6%	68	96	1.41
14. Customer registrations	18%	16%	21%	46%	68	200	2.94
4. Getting interview requests from journalists	10%	16%	35%	39%	69	209	3.03
13. A way to get information quickly to customers	59%	15%	9%	18%	68	126	1.85
8. Respond to negative comments	21%	15%	19%	46%	68	197	2.90
10. RSS syndication	62%	13%	12%	13%	69	121	1.75
5. Help you to handle crisis communications	10%	13%	9%	68%	68	227	3.34

Scale 1 = First week, 2 = First month, 3 = 2-3 months, 4 = No results

The fourth table for question 7 is sorted by factor, as to when respondents received results within 2-3 months.

'Getting interview requests from journalists' and 'Build a community' are the top factors in the 2-3 month time frame. 'Getting interview requests from journalists' is one of the factors that have received no results the most amongst blogger respondents. The chart indicates that if want to expect to receive some results from journalists contacting a blogger, a blogger will have to wait at least 2-3 months.

2-3 Months							
	1	2	3	4	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
4. Getting interview requests from journalists	10%	16%	35%	39%	69	209	3.03
11. Build a community	30%	26%	32%	12%	69	155	2.25
12. Increasing sales	15%	19%	28%	38%	68	197	2.90
3. Increase link popularity	22%	40%	25%	13%	68	156	2.29
2. Boost search engine positions	23%	43%	22%	12%	69	153	2.22
14. Customer registrations	18%	16%	21%	46%	68	200	2.94
8. Respond to negative comments	21%	15%	19%	46%	68	197	2.90
6. Thought leadership	29%	43%	16%	12%	68	143	2.10
7. A way to get feedback from my customers	31%	29%	15%	25%	68	159	2.34
1. Gather feedback on a product or service	39%	20%	13%	29%	70	162	2.31
10. RSS syndication	62%	13%	12%	13%	69	121	1.75
13. A way to get information quickly to customers	59%	15%	9%	18%	68	126	1.85
5. Help you to handle crisis communications	10%	13%	9%	68%	68	227	3.34
9. Another way to publish content and ideas	74%	18%	3%	6%	68	96	1.41

Scale 1 = First week, 2 = First month, 3 = 2-3 months, 4 = No results

The fifth table for question 7 is sorted by factor, as to when respondents did not receive any results. 'Help you to handle crisis communications' was the highest factor.

No Results							
	1	2	3	4	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
5. Help you to handle crisis communications	10%	13%	9%	68%	68	227	3.34
14. Customer registrations	18%	16%	21%	46%	68	200	2.94
8. Respond to negative comments	21%	15%	19%	46%	68	197	2.90
4. Getting interview requests from journalists	10%	16%	35%	39%	69	209	3.03
12. Increasing sales	15%	19%	28%	38%	68	197	2.90
1. Gather feedback on a product or service	39%	20%	13%	29%	70	162	2.31
7. A way to get feedback from my customers	31%	29%	15%	25%	68	159	2.34
13. A way to get information quickly to customers	59%	15%	9%	18%	68	126	1.85
3. Increase link popularity	22%	40%	25%	13%	68	156	2.29
10. RSS syndication	62%	13%	12%	13%	69	121	1.75
11. Build a community	30%	26%	32%	12%	69	155	2.25
2. Boost search engine positions	23%	43%	22%	12%	69	153	2.22
6. Thought leadership	29%	43%	16%	12%	68	143	2.10
9. Another way to publish content and ideas	74%	18%	3%	6%	68	96	1.41

Scale 1 = First week, 2 = First month, 3 = 2-3 months, 4 = No results

QUESTION 8 - PLEASE RATE YOUR BLOGS IMPACT ON THE FOLLOWING FACTORS IN YOUR COMPANY.

'Another way to publish content and ideas', 'Thought leadership' and 'RSS syndication', 'A way to get information quickly to customers' are the top four factors in terms of having an impact on companies running blogs. While 'Crisis communications' is the factor where blogs have had the smallest impact on companies. Interestingly blogs have had a bigger impact on boosting search engine rankings and linking than increasing sales.

	1	2	3	4	5	Respondents	Total Results	Respondents Average
10. Another way to publish content and ideas	0%	3%	17%	20%	60%	65	284	4.37
7. Thought leadership	3%	3%	17%	36%	41%	66	270	4.09
11. RSS syndication	0%	13%	22%	18%	46%	67	266	3.97
12. Build a community	0%	11%	14%	42%	33%	64	254	3.97
14. A way to get information quickly to customers	0%	11%	18%	37%	34%	65	256	3.94
3. Boost search engine positions	0%	13%	28%	28%	30%	67	251	3.75
4. Increase link popularity	0%	13%	27%	33%	27%	67	250	3.73
8. A way to get feedback from my customers	0%	17%	36%	33%	14%	66	227	3.44
2. Gather feedback on a product or service	3%	29%	25%	29%	14%	65	209	3.22
13. Increasing sales	3%	32%	32%	21%	12%	66	203	3.08
1. Customer service	3%	42%	28%	13%	13%	67	196	2.93
5. A way to get interview requests from journalists	4%	39%	27%	21%	9%	67	195	2.91
9. Respond to negative comments	6%	39%	29%	20%	6%	66	185	2.80
15. Customer registrations	8%	38%	31%	15%	8%	65	180	2.77
6. Crisis communications	8%	55%	18%	15%	3%	65	163	2.51

Scale: 1 = Not a factor, 2 = Some, 3 = Important, 4 = Very important, 5 Primary reason

Note regarding table: Many of the 75 survey respondents did not answer every section for each question. Where a scale was used with multiple sections to a question, we multiplied the number of answers by the value of the answer, i.e. 1 equals 'not a factor' and 5 equals 'primary reason'. The total results were calculated and an average for each section was calculated based on the actual number of respondents for a section of the question, thereby we could account for the differences between the numbers of respondents for each section. The issues in the table are displayed in descending order by the factor that received the highest respondents average first.

QUESTION 9 - WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A BLOG THAT YOU COULD NOT DO WITH A CORPORATE WEBSITE? WHY IS THAT?

The following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"It's much more casual, less stuffy than a traditional 'business' website. It is more conversational and in the moment than a static site. Enabling blog like features into a corporate site would be pricey."

"A blog enables me to easily update information and put a 'human' face on my company. It enables me to connect directly with stakeholders. Websites don't have the flexibility the blog format does."

"Get content up and running immediately, without involving web experts. Chat with customers, rather than tell them things we want them to know"

"Communicate, interact, discuss, share, build and grow your relationships with customers and prospects and thought leaders in your industry. A website is static, rigid. By comparison a blog is flexible, modifiable, current. That precipitates a conversation, a sharing of ideas and knowledge with peers. A website kills the conversation. It says 'here's the information, take it or leave it.' A blog allows discussion, a partnership."

"Allows us to develop a marketing center of excellence, where we're able to compile a resource of information for our prospects and customers."

"Our web site is more product and company-focused, and a blog allows us to interact more with our intended audience."

"Update quickly and easily because I have the freedom to do this without IT and without needing approval of Sr. officers."

"Update on a regular basis - participate in industry related discussions - 'real time' marketing"

QUESTION 10 - WHAT ADVANTAGES IN TERMS OF WORKING WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS, VENDORS, WORK COLLEAGUES AND JOURNALISTS DOES YOUR BLOG GIVE YOU?

The following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"I've made contacts with people I would never have met. The blog opens new opportunities."

"It significantly increases our credibility by demonstrating the quality of our thoughts."

"We have built a community of people who are interested in our products and what we have to say about them."

"Blogs are flexible enough to allow a dialogue, a conversation, a sharing of ideas, the revelation of the parties true insights and resources without corporate filtering. That, and only that, encourages and develops a relationship based on trust."

"It has given us a much better two-way conversation with our consumers than we'd have without it. We've also had several interviews with journalists because of the weblog, though that is likely because it is still unusual to have a corporate weblog."

"Gives our participants a 'human face' for our community; also allows us to share ideas and insights into our products and the way we architect solutions."

"A blog allows us to have an open dialog with customers. This open dialog allows us to align ourselves with our customers (ex: whatever they are passionate about, we are passionate about)."

"Blog is OK, but I'm finding my wikis to be more valuable in interactions with my customers."

QUESTION 11 - HOW HAS YOUR BLOG AFFECTED YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR AUDIENCE?

The following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"Too early to tell."

"We have to be upfront and honest with them. The communication now is personal."

"Better understanding of the customer to make more accurate decisions in feature design"

"It has made us much more accessible, in my opinion. Generally, everyday customers were previously only exposed to marketers and evangelists and had limited interaction with rest of the company. The blog allows anyone the ability to say anything to our customer base."

"It's been very positive. The negative aspect lies mainly in the fact that customers expect me to blog and if I don't blog for a while, they send me a mail to ask if I'm dead! ;-)"

"Gives them a way to interact with our brand. They can now participate vs. just passive reading."

"Defined it. People will quickly open up with you about what they really think online in ways that could only happen in person after years of relationship building."

QUESTION 12 - HAVE YOU SEEN ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FROM YOUR BLOG?

39 people said no in various forms, as for the rest, the following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"It consumes resources."

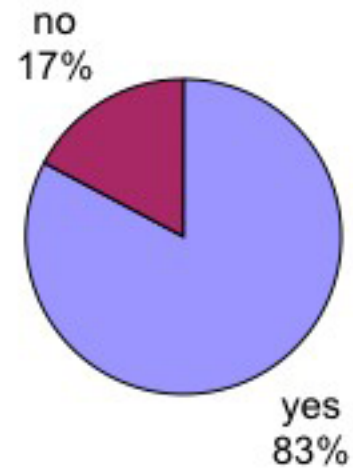
"We have had a few cases where a blogger almost revealed confidential information but that has lessened with experience."

"Yes and no, we lost a customer due to philosophical differences, but this happened in 2 weeks as opposed to the normal cycle 6-24 months. It removed all of the trauma for all parties concerned."

"Re-use of content without reference or credit (has happened @ 5 times to date)"

QUESTION 13 - HAVE YOU SEEN A TRAFFIC INCREASE FROM YOUR BLOG TO YOUR WEBSITE?

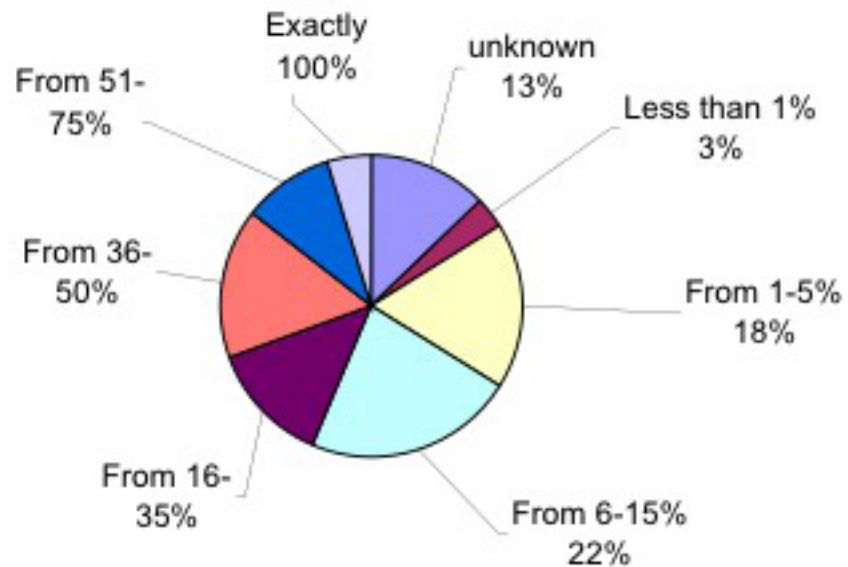
**% of people who have seen a traffic increase to
their website from their blog**



QUESTION 14 – WHAT % OF YOUR TOTAL TRAFFIC DOES YOUR BLOG TRAFFIC REPRESENT?

For 54% of respondents their blog represents less than 35% of their traffic, while for 5% of respondents their blog represents 100% of the respondent's total traffic, presumably the blog is a company's web presence in this instance.

What % of your total traffic does your blog traffic represent?



QUESTION 15 - HOW DOES YOUR BLOG FIT INTO YOUR ENTIRE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN?

The following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"Our brand upscale and multi-dimensional. We project the brand image through many roads and the blog gives us even more dimension "

"Boosts our Search Marketing. Also drives conversions as we have links to conversion points in blog template. Also assists in branding and PR as it gives our 'brains' a forum to show off, establishes us as the smart guys in our industry."

"We are building a strategy. It is not defined yet. It is in the experimental and evangelization stage."

"Small but important part. "

"While traditional press releases seems to reach to the media better, mirroring those releases on the weblog seems to let us reach consumers better."

"It's one tool in the toolbox"

"It is a major part of it; everyone in the company part of the marketing 'team'. Every post on my blog either directly or indirectly markets the company. "

"The blog is a key component - we are using it to build a community of interest on RSS, etc - the people that participate are journalists, analysts, thought leaders, customers, partners, etc. Its for relationship building long term."

QUESTION 16 - HAS YOUR BLOG HELPED YOUR OTHER MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS EFFORTS? HOW AND WHY?

The following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"Drive traffic to web site; increased search engine ranking; put us in touch with opinion leaders; generated buzz"

"We have not formally linked our blogging efforts with marketing efforts and at the current time there's no intent to do so."

"The ability to write rough drafts of ideas and share them with other bloggers allows me to incorporate their input in creating the much stronger final product."

"We have received positive PR as a result of launching it and we are getting noticed in areas where we were not before."

"It's provided some content we are able to re-purpose. We have sought consumer opinion which, very recently, helped us find an official spokesperson for our product. One blog supported a marketing/promotions effort in a substantial way--but it was entirely accidental."

"It's definitely increased traffic to my main website. I'm interested in testing its ability to drive readers to speaking events and/or to e-newsletter subscriptions."

"I now write more blog-like and it's made writing flyers different and better."

"Yes, dropped my newsletter. Referring prospects and clients to the blog for information."

"Too early to tell."

QUESTION 17 - HAVE YOU SEEN DIFFERENT RESULTS FROM YOUR BLOG THAN YOU ORIGINALLY EXPECTED?

The following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"Not as many comments as I thought "

"Being interviewed by the newspaper was unexpected."

"Yes, connected with experts from the field that I did not expect"

"Increased sales surprisingly."

"I didn't anticipate its power to attract traffic. I've accidentally stumbled on keywords that pull in readers from Google and other engines."

"More impact from Google and Yahoo; much faster search engine indexing and in prime keyword territory - I've got some #2 and #3 spots for popular terms in my niches via the blog "

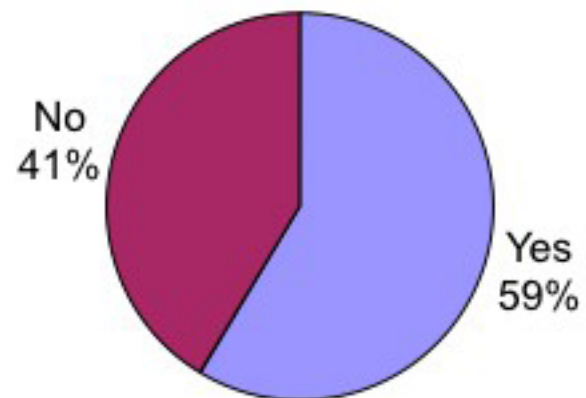
"No. It's about what I expected "

"Yes. Blog has become a 'brand' unto itself. Opened doors to multiple opportunities that had never anticipated such as speaking engagements and new clients. Highlight in a book about blogs."

QUESTION 18 - HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONTACTED BY A JOURNALIST ABOUT CONTENT ON YOUR BLOG?

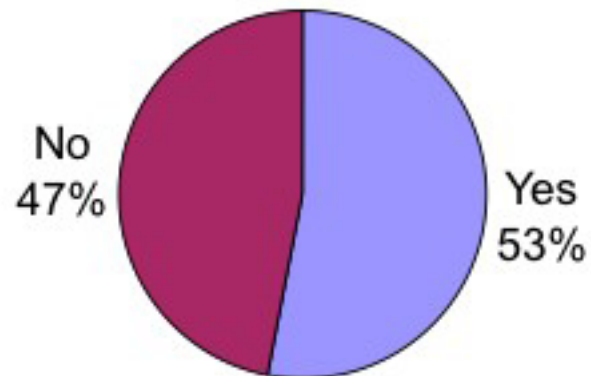
Out of 70 respondents, a journalist has contacted 59% of respondents.

Has your blog ever been contacted by a journalist?



QUESTION 19 - HAS THAT CONTACT EVER RESULTED IN A PUBLISHED PIECE IN THE MASS MEDIA?

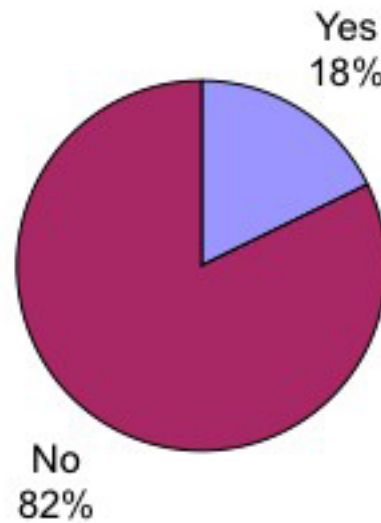
Out of 66 responses, 53% of the bloggers stated that a contact from a journalist had resulted in a published piece from a journalist. A number of bloggers gave examples of press pieces published.

Has a journalist contact ever produced a published piece?

QUESTION 20 – IF YOU HAVE EVER RECEIVED ANY NEGATIVE PR?

Out of 67 responses, the majority of respondents 82% had not received any negative PR.

Has your blog received negative PR ?



QUESTION 20 – IF YOU HAVE EVER RECEIVED ANY NEGATIVE PR? (CONTINUED)

The following quotes from the responses to this open question summarize the majority of the responses.

"Comments were taken out of contact on another employees blog. However, those comments were clarified in a further post and everything was okay."

"Negative PR can come from the misunderstanding of a statement potentially by lack of background information. It's quite easy to address ... not that easy to have the correction published."

"A blogger was claiming something about us that wasn't true. The blog let us respond quickly and thoroughly."

"Our blogosphere program has generated negative PR, so it's very important to us to use our blog responsibly - so we never do what those who accuse us expect us to do. Promote our solution ad nauseum in our own blog."

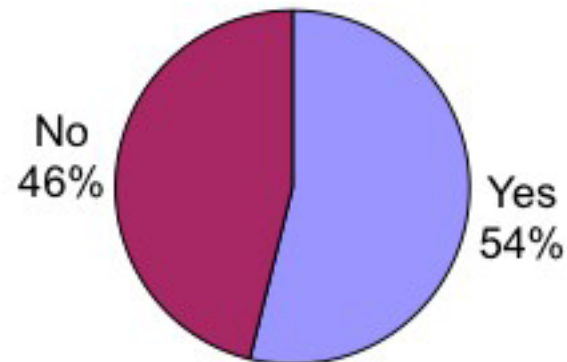
QUESTION 21 – SEARCHERS USE KEYWORDS TO FIND WEBSITES ON SEARCH ENGINES LIKE GOOGLE & YAHOO! IF YOU ARE ATTEMPTING TO GET A HIGH RANKING ON SEARCH ENGINES, PLEASE LIST THREE KEYWORD PHRASES WHERE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOUR BLOG GAIN A HIGH RANKING ON SEARCH ENGINES?

22 respondents gave 1-3 keywords they target, we conducted a search on Google and 9 of the respondent's blog's had top ten positions on their targeted keywords. Most of the keywords were broad terms.

QUESTION 22 – DO YOU TARGET THOSE KEYWORD PHRASES IN YOUR BLOG ARTICLE POSTS?

Out of 65 respondents, 54% of bloggers target keyword phrases in their blog article posts.

Do you target those keyword phrases in your blog article posts?



QUESTION 23 – PLEASE RATE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR THEIR IMPORTANCE TO YOUR BLOG.

The top search engine optimization consideration that has the most importance for bloggers was 'My blog provides the only place where I can write about certain issues'. This indicates a company's corporate site does not provide a place to write about certain issues that enable bloggers to include keywords and perhaps frequency of posts. 'A way to get a top ranking for a keyword related to my competitors and in the process increase traffic to my website' was the least important factor.

	1	2	3	4	5	Respondents	Results	Total Respondents Average
6. My blog provides the only place where I can write about certain issues	13%	16%	12%	35%	25%	69	236	3.42
1. Received more qualified traffic	13%	12%	17%	43%	14%	69	231	3.35
4. A way to increase the number of links to my site	12%	15%	26%	35%	12%	68	218	3.21
5. A way to increase the quality of links to my site	14%	13%	28%	33%	12%	69	217	3.14
3. A way to get a top ten ranking for my keywords	29%	9%	22%	28%	13%	69	198	2.87
2. A way to get a top ranking for a keyword related to my competitors and in the process increase traffic to my website	29%	18%	18%	21%	14%	66	180	2.73

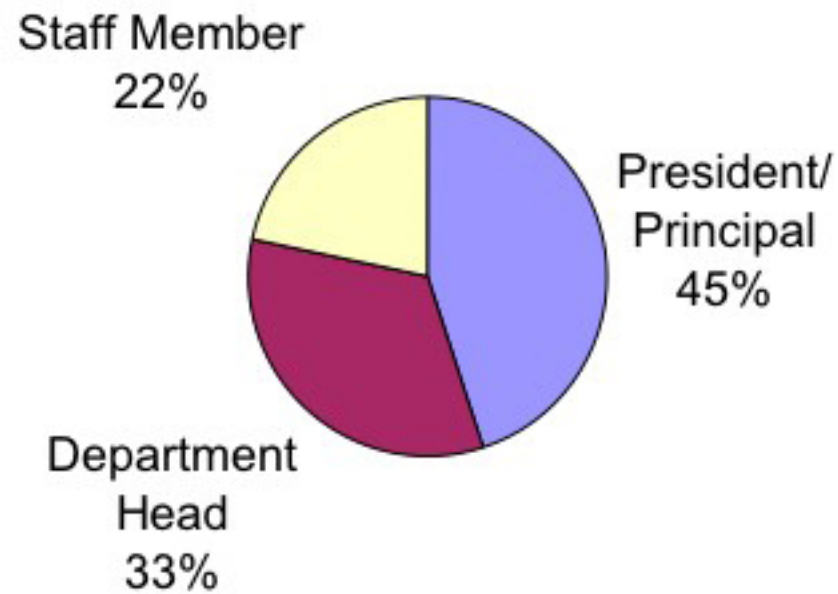
Scale: 1 = Not a factor, 2 = Some, 3 = Important, 4 = Very important, 5 Primary reason

Note regarding table: Many of the 75 survey respondents did not answer every section for each question. Where a scale was used with multiple sections to a question, we multiplied the number of answers by the value of the answer, i.e. 1 equals 'not a factor' and 5 equals 'primary reason'. The total results were calculated and an average for each section was calculated based on the actual number of respondents for a section of the question, thereby we could account for the differences between the numbers of respondents for each section. The issues in the table are displayed in descending order by the SEO consideration that received the highest respondents average first.

QUESTION 24 – PLEASE SELECT THE JOB ROLE YOU SERVE AT YOUR COMPANY?

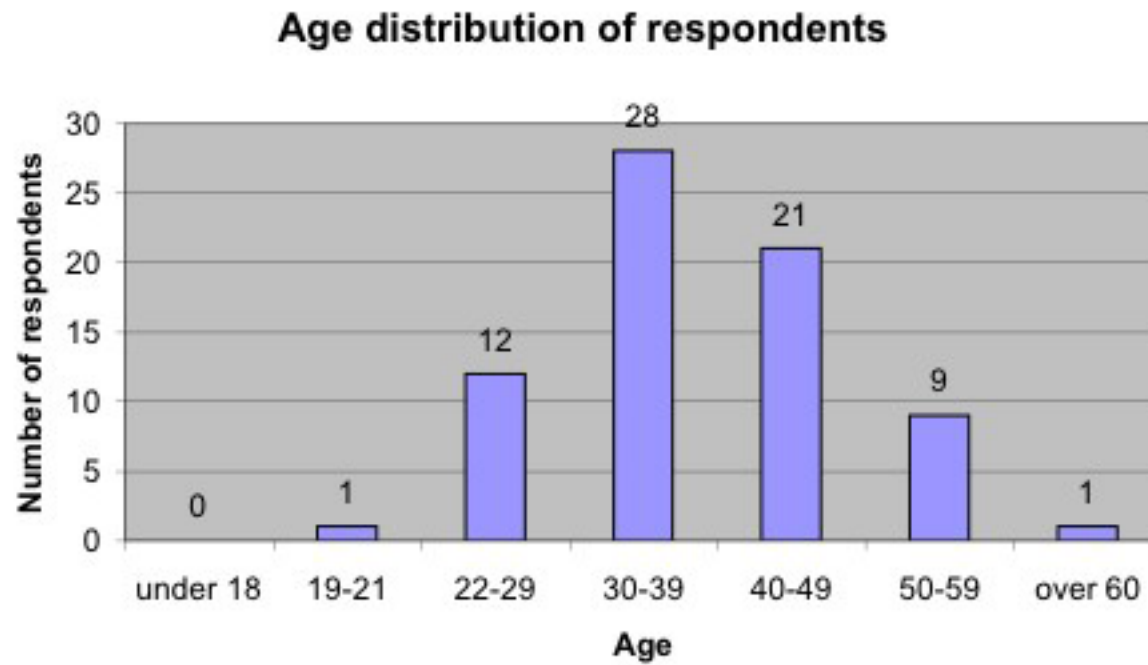
Out of 69 respondents, 45% of the bloggers were President's or principals, 33% were department heads, and 22% were staff members.

Who is blogging?



QUESTION 26 – WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

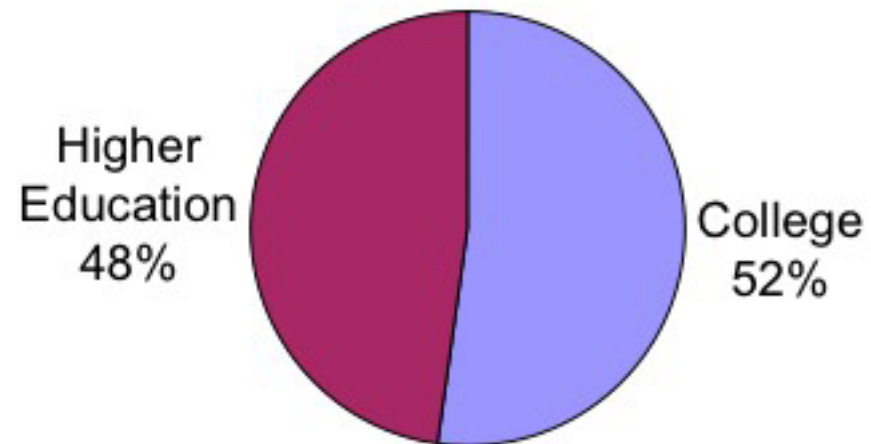
Out of 72 respondents, the largest single age range was 28 bloggers aged between the ages of 30-39.



QUESTION 27 – WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION?

Out of 69 respondents, 52% have a college education, 48% have taken higher education.

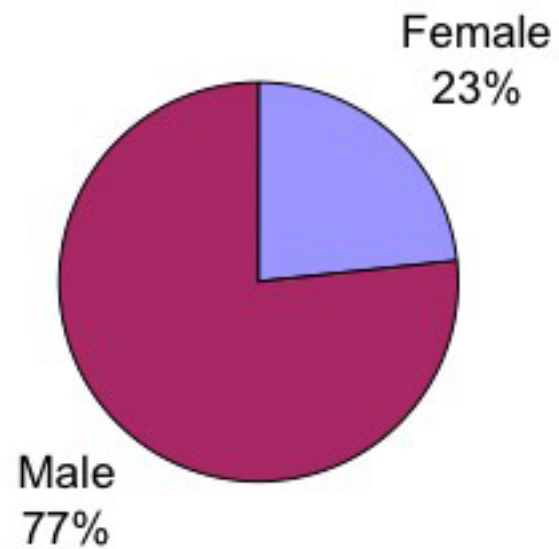
Education Level of Bloggers



QUESTION 28 – ARE YOU MALE OR FEMALE?

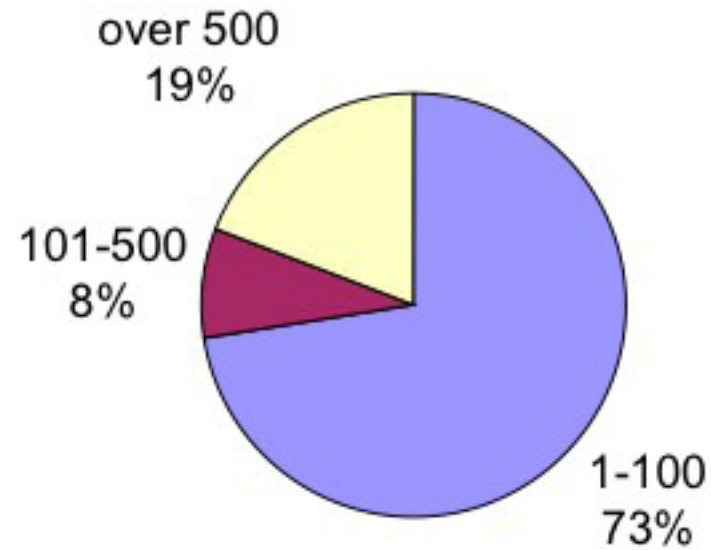
Out of 73 respondents, 77% were male and 23% were female

Male or female?



QUESTION 29 – WHAT IS THE SIZE OF YOUR COMPANY IN NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES?

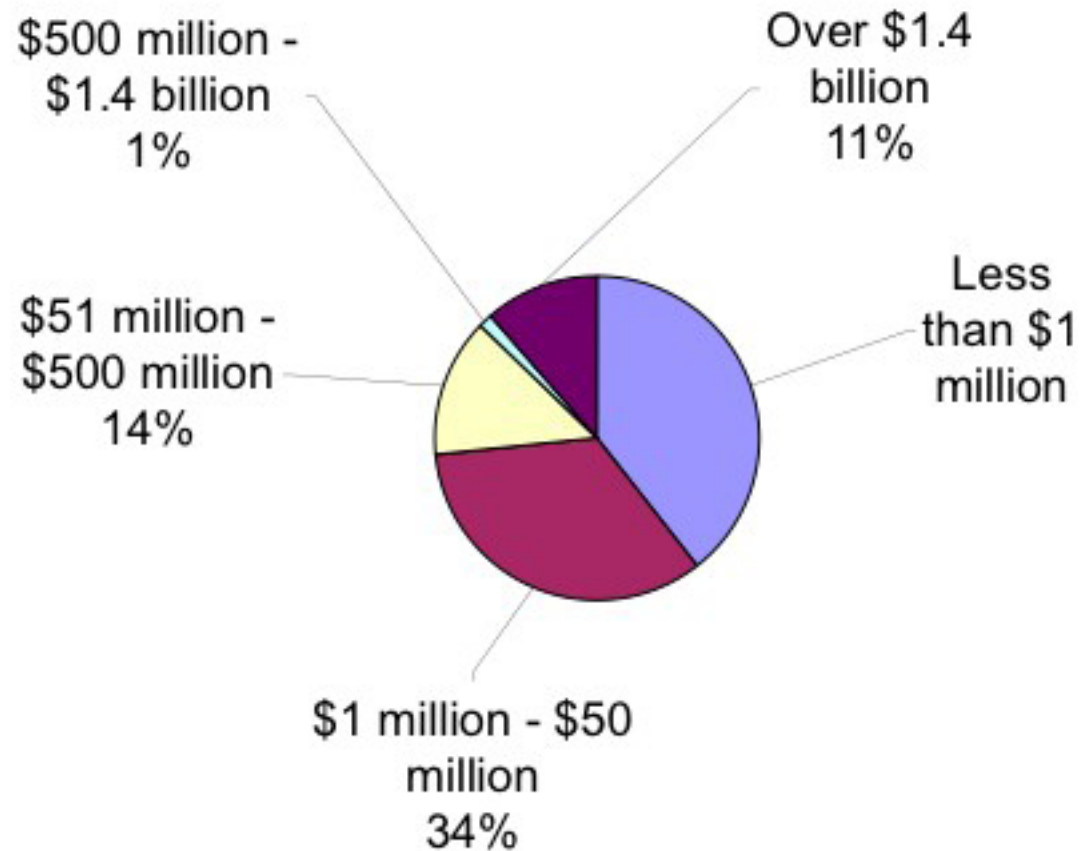
Out of 73 respondents, 73% of bloggers were from companies with 1-100 employees, 19% were from companies with over 500 employees.

Number of employees in company

QUESTION 30 - WHAT IS THE SIZE OF YOUR COMPANY IN REVENUES?

Out of 71 respondents, companies with less than \$1 million in sales employed 40% of the survey respondents, and 11% of bloggers were from fortune 500 companies, with over \$1.4 billion in revenue.

Revenue size of companies taking the survey

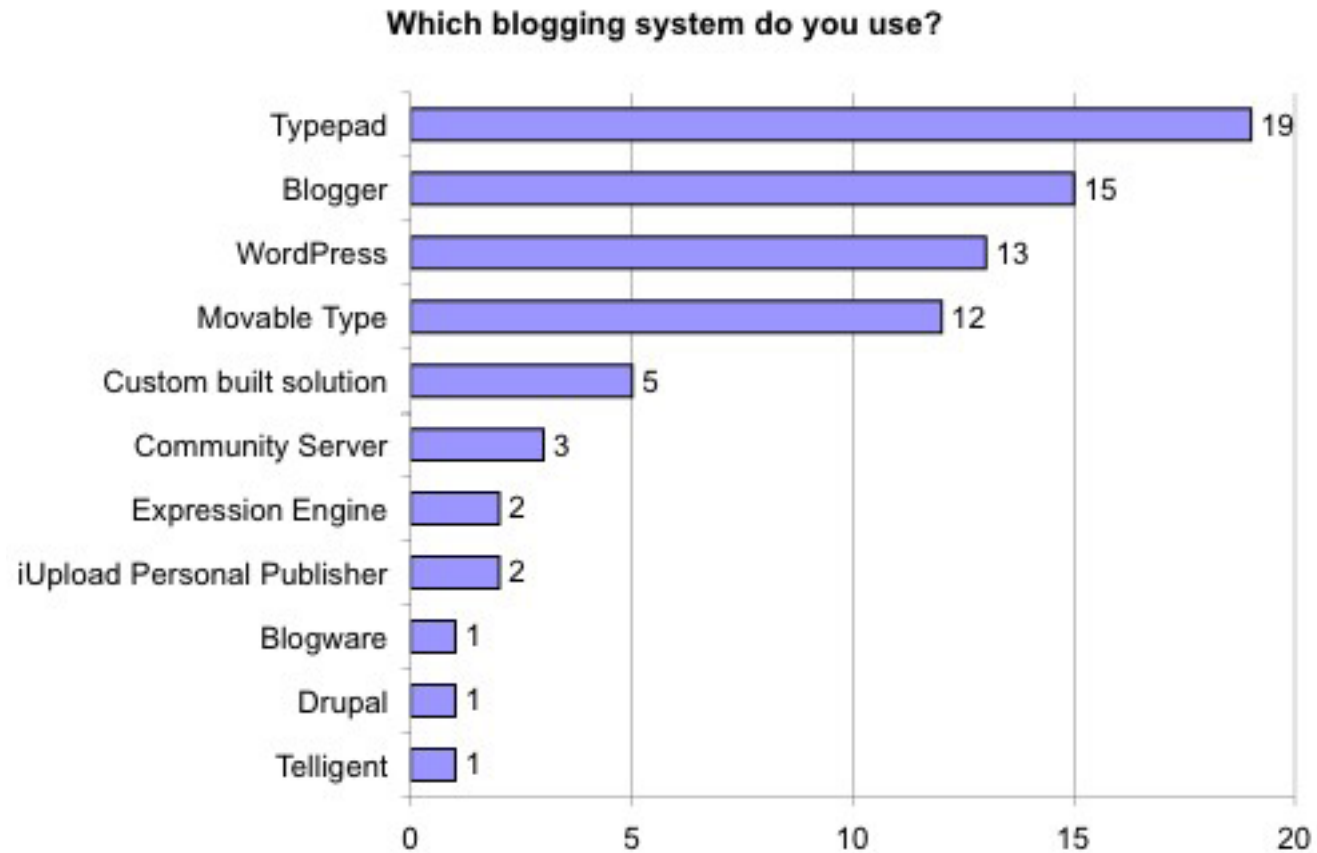


QUESTION 31 – WHAT IS YOUR COMPANY’S INDUSTRY?

To summarize the 70 responses, many software and technology companies, marketing and advertising companies, and a mix of consumer packaged goods, manufacturing, non-profit, and other distinct types of companies took the survey.

QUESTION 32 – WHAT BLOGGING SYSTEM DO YOU CURRENTLY USE?

The top blogging platforms were Typepad, Blogger, WordPress and Movable Type. Six Apart's products Typepad and Movable Type from San Francisco were most used by respondents.



CASE STUDIES

ANNIE'S HOMEGROWN: "BERNIE'S BLOG" CASE STUDY

Mark Berger, web-marketing manager at Annie's Homegrown helped Backbone media to put this case study together.

Community

Annie's Homegrown is an established company who makes natural macaroni and cheese as well as other organic food products. Their blog was started in February 2005, and it is a "character blog" written by their mascot, "Bernie, the Rabbit of Approval".

Some people are skeptical of character blogs, but in the case of Annie's Homegrown, it works quite well. Many of Annie's products appeal to children, and having the bunny "writing" the blog entries can draw children in. Berger explained, *"Bernie the Bunny is our mascot and blogs need a single voice, so Bernie was chosen"*.

For a new blog, Bernie's blog is very successful in terms of receiving comments. It was actually successful right off the bat; they received comments on their very first entry. Right now, there have been 17 entries over the past five months, and 27 blog comments in total. Their blog already has a small community of regular readers who leave comments

and feedback. Bernie's blog is a blend of news in the health food world and talking about different company products. The entries that discuss Annie's products are the entries that receive the most comments. Bernie will talk about different product ideas and future products.

Customer Feedback

There was a recent entry where Bernie asked his readers to tell him what kind of gluten-free products they wished to see made available. Two customers responded; one wished to see gluten-free pizza and the other did not have any gluten-free ideas but suggested a soy-based macaroni and cheese pizza.

In another post, Bernie talked about the bunny cookies Annie's was planning on launching and asked his readers what they thought about it. That entry received numerous comments from people urging them to make those cookies.

The entries with links to articles and information about healthy eating also get comments and have some interesting facts, but by far the most popular entries are the ones about Annie's products.

Conclusion

In blogs like Annie's, customer feedback can be both useful to the customers and the company. Customers can participate in discussions about Annie's existing products and give input on future products that they want to be produced. Annie's has the opportunity to hear from their customers in an informal way and to understand what their desires are in Annie's products. Annie's has a successful blog for those reasons, and for a relatively new blog, their success with comments is particularly impressive. Based on discussion with bloggers at Annie's Homegrown we are certain their blog will continue drawing in regular customers, especially if they continue to talk about their products.

IBM CASE STUDY

Working with Bill Higgins, a Systems Engineer and blogger at IBM on this case study; we wanted to understand if his blog had helped with any product development, customer service issues and brand issues.

Bill Higgins

IBM Systems Engineer

<http://www.ibm.com/developerworks/blogs/higgins/in>

Product Development & Customer Service

Bill explained to us that in all of IBM developerWorks' blogging efforts he had not seen very much feedback on their blogs, and that IBM developerWorks has not had any examples of where a post or communication on an IBM developerWorks blog has helped IBM to improve their product or deal with a customer service issue to his knowledge.

Bill explained that none of their key company executives or product managers' blog on developerWorks, at this moment in time. Bill went on to explain that, "at IBM the people who ultimately make product decisions are:

- Group and brand executives and staff (e.g. Software Group SVP, Software Group Strategy)
- Product management (a.k.a. marketing)
- Development leaders
- Customer service organizations

Most of the existing IBM bloggers on developerWorks are people who use IBM products; they are in services, rather than people who define product scope. There are about thirty bloggers active on developerWorks. And of those people who work on IBM's product, Rational, none of the bloggers will get into the level of detail about the product that might solicit product related comments on their blogs.

Conclusions

Why is it that IBM, as a technology company does not get the same response as Microsoft and Macromedia in terms of product development and customer service? According to the IBM blogger interviewed it appears that IBM developerWorks is not getting very much feedback on product development and customer services issues. This contrasts with Microsoft and Macromedia's situation, both companies have asked for feedback on products from their customers, based on the case study with Bill Higgins the reason for the lack of customer feedback on products through blogs may lie in the fact that product builders are not blogging at IBM developerWorks at the moment.

It may be that there are other factors involved; IBM might actually have very good channels of communication with its existing customers. IBM developerWorks bloggers are not actively seeking feedback on product development and customer service issues. Or IBM's resellers might be doing a better job of providing support to IBM customers.

Now the fact that IBM and specifically Bill's blog is not getting results in terms of product development and helping with customer service issues does not mean that the blog is not successful. Bill Higgins thought that overall his blog has been successful in

terms of thought leadership, building a community and getting information out to his audience quickly.

Brand & Transparency

In our research, it seems that the most successful companies in terms of the number of blogs are larger companies; we wondered if this is because they have the resources and existing customer audience to sustain many successful blogs. We asked Bill Higgins for his thoughts on the nature of blogs relative to their success and if it really is dependent upon the size of a company.

Bill Higgins said, *"I think the key thing to having a popular blog is:*

- 1) *Amount of individuals interested in the topic (product, service, technology, etc.).*
- 2) *The quality of the information both in terms of content and ability to communicate content.*

This is why you see so many comments on the Microsoft Internet Explorer blog. This little formula doesn't depend on company size directly; for instance BEA is much smaller than IBM yet their WebLogic application server is comparable in market share to our WebSphere application server; therefore if there is a BEA blog on WebLogic and an IBM blog on WebSphere, and the bloggers are equal writers, I'd expect the blogs to have equal readership.

Now it would be possible for an independent blogger to write about some topic and get as big an audience (or bigger) as a company. For instance, Ted Neward writes about .NET and probably gets more hits than many MS employees working on .NET simply because he's famous as a published author and also has good writing skills.

So net, company size and blog popularity are loosely correlated, but there isn't a causal relationship in either direction. The causal relationship is that successful technologies tend to make companies get bigger and successful technologies tend to attract more users; more users lead to more interested blog readers for said technology.

One other thought, I think bloggers who focus on the topic of some platform (e.g. Java, XML, web, WebSphere, whatever) will tend to draw big audiences because successful platforms create large ecosystems of complementary products and technology (i.e. the stack) and anyone involved in that platform ecosystem will be interested in someone writing intelligently on the base platform."

Conclusions

According the IBM blogger, IBM developerWorks just does not a lot of feedback from its blogs as companies such as Microsoft, and Macromedia have in terms customer responses. IBM developerWorks bloggers are not seeking feedback on product development and customer service issues.

A suggestion for any company thinking about blogging is that they should blog about their products and services extensively if a company is hoping to get more interaction from customers on product development and customer service and in so doing build a stronger brand. Brand as we define it is not just a logo or company color, it's the whole product or service experience for the customer. Blogging can help to build brand.

Again Bill Higgins' goals as a blogger are to build a community and achieve thought leadership in his space. He believes he is getting good results in this area. Anytime a company ventures out into the blogosphere and starts a blog to open conversations with their potential audience they do have the opportunity to change the perception of the relationship or company's brand through blog posts. To understand how a blog has changed the perception of customers we also have to survey the audience.

iUPLOAD CASE STUDY

iUpload.com is a Toronto-area based software company. They were founded in 1998, their products manage website content and blog publishing. Every iUpload employee has a blog located at iUblog.com.

Blogs are a very big part of iUpload, because about eighteen months ago they introduced blogging software for corporate bloggers to their already successful software suite. So not only does every employee have a blog, but iUpload is heavily involved in the blogosphere because part of their business is corporate blogging.

We corresponded with Robin Hopper, founder and CEO of iUpload. We asked him a few questions about the impact that the corporate blogs have had on iUpload in general.

"Blogs have become a staple for communication here," Robin told me. "All staff blog and much of that content is available for public consumption and that has done a lot in terms of good will with customers - several of our customers contribute to those blogs as well which has served us well."

Their blogs have also helped get iUpload involved in a wider community. *"Many of our staff members have become to be considered experts on topics because of their posts and have been drawn in as contributors to other communities,"* explained Robin.

We browsed around through the iUplog employee blogs, and found a lot of interesting things. Different employees used their blogs in completely different ways.

Anita Zuzul uses her blog to write about the products and communicate with customers. She takes ideas from customers and posts them on her blog with her responses to their ideas. She also picks a user of the month and profiles them. Robin Dindayal also writes about iUpload's products, industry news, and links to things he finds interesting or cool. Robin also includes industry humor and witty wordings to draw readers to his blog on a regular basis. Other iUplog bloggers like Robin Hopper, Bob Royce, and David Carter blog about tech and product news.

Conclusion

Measuring a blog's success can be difficult. Robin Dindayal has seen a lot of successes through his blog. Within the first week of launching his blog, he was able to gather feedback about a product from customers, and this response increased both link popularity and sales. Another iUpload blogger, Aaron Flemming, also saw major results within the first week of starting his blog.

While the iUpload blogs do not get an abundance of comments, according to iUpload they do have a substantial amount of readers. Most of their blogs have a Google page ranking of four while iUpload.com and iUplog.com both have page rankings of five.

In spite of the lack of comments in comparison to the blogs in other companies, it seems that does not hurt the popularity of their blogs. Perhaps some blogs for major companies such as Microsoft and IBM get more comments because they are more established brands.

MACROMEDIA CASE STUDY

Macromedia is a successful software technology company with many well-known products; Flash and Cold fusion are examples. We spoke with Mike Chambers the product manager for Flash about Macromedia's experiences with blogging.

Mike Chambers' Weblog

<http://weblogs.macromedia.com/mesh/>

Product Development

Macromedia has run blogs for about three years, initially blogs were started to build a better community and get information out to customers more quickly than existing channels. Over time Macromedia discovered that blogs could be used for the development of their products. This shift in product development thinking was gradual, and required a substantial change in thinking about the Macromedia product development process.

Formerly a Macromedia product would not be announced until 2-3 weeks before a release.

The company was very concerned that revealing information about the development of the product would leak information to competitors. Programmers were sworn to secrecy.

Customer community has always been a strong element in Macromedia's brand, a merger between Macromedia and Allaire Corporation in 2001 brought the very strong ColdFusion customer and reseller community of Allaire to Macromedia. Macromedia has a strong community through forums and local user groups, the company gets product feedback from talking with customers directly, at user groups, and by visiting specific customers.

Building on both companies experiences

Macromedia experimented with the use of blogs to build a stronger customer community. Early on Macromedia used blogs to get information out to customers quickly. The company wanted to be more open and transparent with their developers.

Over time developers gave their input through blogs on feature suggestions, as time passed Macromedia started to ask what features developers wanted and what they wanted changed in new versions of products on their blogs. The Macromedia programmers would discuss in open on their blogs what needed to be done and reported back to customers if they were able to make any suggested customer changes. Macromedia came to understand

that the tool of blogging would help their company to get more information from their customers on product development.

Chambers explained that the software development process *“was a very closed process, the blogs made it more open and transparent process.”* Chambers had been working on the Flash team for about eight months, and he thought it was very important to be working directly with customers on the development of future release updates. Chambers said, *“customers use [our products] more than we do, they know them better than we do, we wanted to tap into that.”*

“Why a simple fix is not always so simple” Example

Macromedia was working on an update to its Flash product codenamed Ellipsis and had asked for feedback from their customers. One customer asked if a fix could be implemented in the next release. When searching for script in the application’s scripting editor a panel window is opened, the ‘find panel’. However if the panel window remains open it is not possible to change or edit any text in the scripting editor. The Macromedia team initially thought this problem would be very easy to fix.

In the development process of Ellipsis the team determined they would focus on those issues that affected a lot of users and do not risk or touch a lot of the code in the software. Reviewing the ‘find panel’

issue, the Macromedia team had thought that the issue would be easy to fix, however they discovered that it was not easy to fix. The team had a criterion for whether they would fix the find panel problem.

1. How easy (code wise) it would be to fix the problem.
2. How risky the fix would be (would it affect code that affects other parts of the app).
3. Would the fix cause any new usability issues.

As it transpired the fix would have affected every aspect of the three criteria and there would have been a significant changes required of the application. Quoting from an email posted by Chambers on his blog http://www.markme.com/flashteam/archives/2004_09.cfm:

“The head of engineering asked an engineer to look into the issue. It looked like it would be an easy fix, and an easy win for users (which is a win for us). So, the first item that came up was actually usability related. There were concerns that it would be confusing to users if the Find Panel was open but the ActionScript editor had been closed. What should the panel do if the user clicks find then?”

What if they keep the panel open, but open a new frame of ActionScript? We looked at how other programs handled this (Visual Studio, EditPlus and Notepad), and determined that this would not affect many users, and that the other programs have similar issues.

So, the engineer then looked into how easy and risky it would be from a code standpoint to make the change. It turned out, that in order to make it non-modal, we couldn't just flip a Flag, but rather had to call a new method. Ok, a little more risky, but not that big of a deal.

After further investigation, we discovered that we would actually have to change the window type, which in essence would mean we would have to reprogram the Window. Again, not yet that risky, but now we are getting into more significant changes.

Finally, and the straw that broke the camels back, we found out that we would have to completely rewrite how the Find panel actually finds data. This is because currently, when you open the Find Panel, it takes a snapshot of the text in ActionScript editor (since the user won't be able to change it). I am not sure why it is done like this, but do know that it is faster than dynamically loading the text each time and keeping the cursor position each time.

Changing how the Find Panel searches text is big code change and risky. Furthermore, making the change could now lead to significant performance decreases when searching large amounts of text.

These factors combined to make the change too risky for Ellipsis, and we deferred it to the next version of Flash (at which time we are basically re-writing all panel and window code).

Anyways, I just wanted to share this with the list to give some context to why something that may seem simple, doesn't get fixed for Ellipsis. This was an issue that I thought would be very simple for us to fix, but it turned out to be a lot more complicated and risky than I expected."

Here is an example of how Macromedia used weblogs to answer a customer's specific request for a change in the application, but because of the work that would be required to fix the issue, the whole project would of taken longer to complete and costs would have risen for customers. With this post, Macromedia demonstrated they involve customers in the process of fixing problems.

Customers commented on the blog post stating that they appreciated understanding the Macromedia development process and understood why Macromedia was making the decision they were for the development of the product. If customers are involved in the process of software product development it changes customer's perception of the process, rather than them and us, involvement in the process empowers customers, they start thinking

that they are part of the Macromedia team. Chambers said, *"The customers feel more vested in the whole development process, they have more ownership."*

"How can we improve trace" Example

This link: <http://www.markme.com/flashteam/archives/007357.cfm> illustrates how blogs have helped Macromedia and their clients improve features within a Macromedia product. A blog article asking for feedback on a Macromedia product feature was posted on a blog on March 29th and over a six-week period customers and Macromedia employees posted 90 comments. A real discussion ensued with customers giving suggestions and their thoughts about possible changes or even if they did not want any changes. In the process Macromedia gained a lot of valuable insight into the development of this section of the application and empowered customers to help build a better product.

Conclusions

Blogging has completely changed the way in which Macromedia conducts its software development process. Before blogs, Macromedia would not release any product information until 2-3 weeks before the release day. This was how the software industry worked. Software development was a relatively closed process, some feedback was gathered from customers, but a lot of the work was completed inside a company.

Macromedia slowly realized there were big benefits, and manageable risks to opening up the process of product development to their customer community. Internal blogs helped to evangelize the idea of using blogs to encourage feedback and suggestions from customers in an open way. Slowly through trial and error Macromedia determined how best to make the process work. As yet there have been no major issues, and the whole process of using blogs to communicate with customers for the development of new products has been a huge success. That success has come in terms of better products, more committed customers, more sales and positive PR results.

One of the biggest benefits to Macromedia has come from the increased number of search engine higher rankings. The blog posts of 50-60 Macromedia blogs has meant the company has more content on the web, and because the posts are valuable to Macromedia customers the company's blogs are receiving links from customers. Chambers explained, *"weblogs will appear first [on search engines], even before our site, because of conversations, we were getting linked."* One of the factors determining the ranking of a web page in a search engine are the number of sites linking to a web page. Through online conversations and discussion Macromedia's blogs are getting a lot of links, which in turn is giving Macromedia higher rankings and producing more traffic from search engines.

Brand and Transparency

Macromedia has worked hard to open up its software development process over the last few years, and in the process they have been given a great gift from their customers in terms of commitment and partnership to build better products.

Macromedia's blog strategy is not to develop a lot of blogs, they think it is more worthwhile to develop a few blogs with quality content rather than develop a lot of blogs with hardly any content. Macromedia has about 50-60 blogs at the moment. They could have a lot more people blog at the company, however Macromedia's blog strategy is only to add content that will bring value to their customers. While Macromedia encourages its people to give enough personal information so that customers have a sense of the Macromedia employee, they do ask that bloggers focus on the theme or product at hand for content.

The blogging strategy has been a great success for Macromedia, helping to build a stronger brand with customers by using the techniques of openness and transparency with blogs.

Macromedia wanted to go one step further with the idea of blogging, and to that purpose they have started to aggregate non-Macromedia employee blogs in a blog aggregator website. All 50-60 Macromedia blogs

are in the site, and also over 440 non-Macromedia blogs are aggregated within the site.

Macromedia XML News Aggregator
<http://weblogs.macromedia.com>

The Macromedia blogging community had grown so large; Macromedia wanted to build an aggregator blog that would help customers and employees at Macromedia filter through all of the data out there on the Macromedia related blogs. Customers have to request to be included in the blog aggregator; Macromedia reviews the blog, checking to determine the content is truly relevant for their community. The site has been so successful there is currently a backlog of 50 or so blogs waiting to be reviewed.

Chambers said, *"we wanted to 'bring the community even closer, there's a lot of different reasons for creating the aggregator, no one easy way to keep up with all of the different Macromedia related blogs. What we wanted to do was bring the conversation to one place. We wanted good and bad comments. In so doing the site has proven to be a great resource, tracking the hot topics."* The News Aggregator has been a good success, traffic has really taken off and information is now easier to find. Macromedia is even adding non-English blogs.

MAYTAG CASE STUDY

Gary Petersen former blogger for Maytag's blog Skybox, helped with the preparation of this case study.

Customer Service Issues

Maytag has a reputation for customer service; surprisingly contra to their advertising campaigns they do get calls from customers. The new blog has helped answer customer questions and provide information quickly to individual customers. However the Maytag service organization is not part of the blog. It is not possible to schedule a service call through the blog. The main benefit of the blog was to provide another method of communication for customers to ask questions and for Maytag to respond and leave a permanent record of the response.

It seems that the blog is making it easier for Maytag customers to connect with Maytag over the Internet for those customers who prefer using the web. But maybe the biggest benefit to Maytag and their customers is that by responding to customer questions on the blog it is very evident that Maytag is very approachable. Petersen went on to say, *"I am sure that we're getting more feedback than before the weblog, though. We did and do get some feedback through our normal customer service system, but not as much as we get through the weblog."*

Product Development

The Maytag Skybox site did receive customer feedback on products. Specifically, the Peter asked for feedback on the display panel kit designs for their Skybox product. Customers gave feedback about the existing displays and made suggestions for other displays.

Petersen said, *"In some cases, folks just suggested what they thought would be cool for us to provide. I can't say that the assistance we received from consumers was revolutionary, but I do believe we created an easier way for consumers to reach us, so we heard from more of them than we would have before. And their input came directly to the design team - it wasn't filtered through anyone else. When I was there, I was the lead designer and project manager. Hearing from folks in that way was great."*

Conclusions

It does appear that even with consumer product companies' product development and research is possible through blogging. It was also interesting to hear that customers were asking customer service questions.

MICROSOFT CASE STUDY

My thanks to George Pulikkathara, Marketing Manager and founder of MSDN Webcasts. George is the blogger for MSDN webcasts who helped us to put together this case study. We asked George the following questions.

How have Microsoft's blogging efforts helped product development and service issues?

Are there any minor and major product examples of how a post or communication on a Microsoft blog has helped Microsoft improve their product, or deal with a customer service issue?

Are there any examples where a customer asked for a change to a product, but Microsoft had to explain to their customers that it was not possible to make such a change unless the price, or other factors such as a change in the marketplace occurred? How did the customers handle this issue? And did blogs help resolve the issue?

How do blogs help employees at Microsoft develop stronger product? Can you give us some specific examples, perhaps one or two where employees blogged maybe sharing code?

The spelling mistake incident

Ken Dyck, a customer of Microsoft, noticed they had a spelling mistake in the windows update function. Ken decided to contact Microsoft to inform them of the spelling mistake. He spent some time attempting to tell Microsoft they had a spelling problem in their software by looking around the Microsoft support site at <http://support.microsoft.com/>.

To report the spelling error Ken would have had to call product support services and register an incident, at a cost of \$250. Ken either did not want to spend the money, or was not able to discover how to notify Microsoft they should make a change. Instead Ken decided to blog about the bug on his own [blog](#). A Microsoft employee, as Ken hoped, [read the blog entry](#) and the error is being [reviewed](#) this week.

The wider issue for Microsoft was that even if someone did register an incident, the staff in the support department don't have responsibility for enacting a change, and if an incident was passed on through existing channels because of the number of people it would take to get the incident reported too, the incident may not make the list of priorities for the development team. Blogging provided a

better mechanism for customers to contact Microsoft employees to make a change to their software.

Microsoft employees are now discussing internally how blogging, which several employees consider to be an “unorthodox” channel, can be used to handle such future customer issues. One interesting aspect of this discussion is that people at Microsoft realize that customers might become impatient with the official path to report issues; they may just give up and complain about the issue with friends. That complaint is more of an issue today as the customer may have their own blog, as in Ken’s case, and if they do complain, the complaint is broadcast to the whole world. If Microsoft does not monitor such issues on blogs and forums they lose both the customer and maybe leave some negative PR on the web forever. Several departments, or individuals in Microsoft are already monitoring the web for such complaints, but these are efforts by individuals undertaken under their own recognizance. There is some discussion at Microsoft on how they can automate this process to make sure they have someone at the company monitoring frustrations and issues expressed by customers outside the Microsoft customer support system. Ideas include have a point person in each product group.

For Microsoft, the issues around customer service and how blogging is helping the company to respond to customers quickly have a lot to do with Microsoft’s approach to business in the last few years. The company is very “goal focused,” get this product out by this date etc. Sometimes responding to an immediate customer issue takes product teams away from those goals. But many people at Microsoft recognize that they are in business to serve their customers, and they see that blogs are helping to connect their product teams to customers directly. Effectively blogs are helping Microsoft to redefine their approach to “customer focus” through one on one interaction with customers. As we saw in the example with Ken Dyck an issue that had been around for a while is addressed once a real conversation through blogs is started. The result of using blogs to answer customer issues was that Ken was excited by the response.

This change to a “customer focused” company for Microsoft means that many employees are no longer concerned about giving out their telephone number and email address. Not so long ago employees were not encouraged to give out such information, management thinking was that customers should go through the existing channels, plus any value provided by an individual employee should accrue

to the company rather than an individual. Blogs are helping employees break out of this large company mentality to help Microsoft become more customer focused.

Downloading MSDN webcasts for offline viewing

Ronny Ong wanted to download webcasts provided by MSDN so that he could review the webcasts on his desktop or laptop at a more convenient time. There was no technical way to download the webcasts, so Ronny wrote a VBscript to allow the download. He posted how to download the webcasts and lots of customers used the program.

It used to be that with Microsoft LiveMeeting 2003, a user could only stream the webcasts they were not able to download the file for later use. Ronny Ong posted a VB script, two other programmers Stuart Gunter and Janco Wolmarans had a similar issue with downloading webcasts. Both programmers are based in South Africa and due to the high cost of Internet access in the country; it was costly to stream a video over the Internet. The two programmers created a simpler script and another blog reader Ralf Rottmann set up a website at <http://www.webcasty.com/>.

Mark Lakefish and George Pulikkathara from the Microsoft Webcasts Team met with the Microsoft Office LiveMeeting product team at Microsoft corporate headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

Since the Live Meeting Team was in the building across from them, Mark and George walked over to their building and told them about the issue. The team had not even been aware that anyone would want to download the webcasts. The team had decided not to address the issue of downloading webcasts, as streaming was available for on-demand webcast viewing. Once informed of the workaround the LiveMeeting team made sure they discovered a better solution and incorporated the downloading feature in the next version of LiveMeeting in 2005. The Vbscript solutions from Ong, Gunter and Wolmarans came to light because of the existing blog run by George Pulikkathara. Though the use of blogs Microsoft was able to identify an issue and resolve it in the short term with a customer solution and eventually in the long term with a solution from the LiveMeeting team.

Don't forget about VB6

S. "Soma" Somasegar is Corporate VP for the Microsoft Developer Division; he travels around the country meeting customers, and has promoted the use of blogs within his division. Microsoft was going to discontinue its free support of Visual Basic 6, as the company focusing on Visual Basic 2005 support. Though blog posts and meetings with customers and user groups, Somasegar learnt that many customers were concerned that support for the VB6 would go away. Somasegar was able to explain through blogs that this has been exaggerated, as Microsoft will still

offer paid support for Visual Basic 6, but are also committed to helping developers solve problems using Visual Basic.NET and Visual Basic 2005. Explained that such support would cost more than the VB6 support, but customers were happy to pay, just so long as they had the option to ask for VB6 support.

Transparency comes to Microsoft

All three Microsoft cases are examples of how blogging is helping Microsoft communicate better with their customers. With a company as large as Microsoft with 57,000 employees (2004 Hoovers.com estimate), customers don't know who to contact and the company has a very impersonal face. Employees in the company are not bad people; they just don't understand the customer's needs. Blogs are helping Microsoft to listen and become more customer focused.

The move to more transparency within Microsoft is a big change in mindset. When George Pulikkathara first joined Microsoft in 2001 he ran a giveaway campaign for some Microsoft products, when he was sending out the products he signed the thank you cards sent with the products with his own name. Management told George that he should sign the cards "Microsoft" as any benefit to the good deed should accrue to Microsoft not an individual within the company. Under the direction of bloggers like Robert Scoble and Soma Somasegar there is a new

drive to have more transparency in the company. Microsoft is realizing that to remain competitive the company has to rely on the expertise and skills of its employees, by empowering each Microsoft employee, each employee effectively becomes a real functioning brand manager for Microsoft whose role is to help the customer no matter what role they play in the company. Sometimes that transparency means that Microsoft will be criticized by customers and even employees, the new management thinking is that such criticism is good as Microsoft then has the opportunity to react and respond. With blogs, communicating that response quickly and effectively has become a lot easier in the last few years. Today individual Microsoft product teams are stating their goal is to reach out to customers and humanize their products and technologies. Blogs are helping them to achieve those goals.

LESSONS LEARNED: HOW TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL BLOG

By looking at so many blogs, there are many lessons to be learned about blogging, particularly corporate blogging.

Leaving Comments

Blogs, even corporate ones, are personal. Bloggers put a lot of effort into their blogs, and many put their own personality into them. Most bloggers will be happy to correspond with you if you would like to talk about their blog. However, you must approach them in a personal manner, otherwise it could appear that you are just spamming them or attempting to get links to your own blog.

Leaving comments is part of the foundation for starting a blog community. Generally, there is a link below each post allowing someone to fill out a comment form. In the form, you can fill out your name, email address, website address, and comment. Comments are fundamental for all blogs for several reasons:


1. You can get discussions going on a blog post.
2. It makes it easier for customers to directly comment on what is being discussed in the post.

3. There is a field in the form that allows you to fill out your website address. This shows other people that you, too, have a blog, and people are likely to click on the link to hear what you have to say.

Trackbacks

Trackbacks are also important. You can find a trackback link down at the bottom of a post, usually next to the permalink and comments link.

Trackbacking is a system that notifies a blogger that another blog has written an article about one of their blog posts. For instance, if you decide you wish to write a post about someone else's blog article, you would use a trackback. If you were writing a trackback article, you would go to original article and search for their article's trackback URL. You would then insert that trackback URL into your own blog management system trackback notification system. When the new article is saved with the trackback URL, a notification to the original blog will cause that blog's management system to insert a link to your post to appear on the other next to the original article. The blogger will also receive a notification usually by e-mail that someone blogged about their blog, and sent a trackback.



Some blogging systems do not support trackbacks, but most do. If your blog software does not support trackbacks, either have your developer implement a trackback function, or use a manual trackback. You can do a manual trackback here:

<http://www.forret.com/tools/trackback.asp>

It is a great way to see what kinds of other blog posts your posts have inspired. Trackbacks are also an excellent way to start a community, find blogs to read, and get people to read your blog. They are often looked at differently than comments, and they have certain advantages over leaving comments. They are a non-intrusive way of letting a blogger know you are interested in what they have to say. You can interact and acknowledge interesting blog posts this way. Using trackbacks can be highly beneficial for the traffic you see on your blog.

Tags

Tags make it easy to navigate a blog and find what you're looking for. Tags are category names and people can select keywords for their posts. Usually you will see keyword names on the side navigation of a blog. If you click on one of the keywords, it will show you all of the blogs that are categorized under one of those "tags".


For example, a company writes posts that are usually about the following topics: customer service, product development, or industry news. If someone finds their blog and wants to read all of the articles about product development, tags will make this very easy.

Tagging is recommended, especially if you write about a variety of different things.

Mistakes Bloggers Make

While there are many terrific blogs around, there are also common but easily fixable, mistakes that bloggers tend to make.

1. Not linking to other blogs. Always have a blogroll. If someone were interested in reading your blog, they would likely be interested in reading the other blogs you like to read. Blogging is all about community. Linking to other blogs also sends a positive message to customers because it shows that you are involved in the community.
2. Not having an email link or contact page. Sometimes readers might want to contact you, but not leave a comment on your blog. If you are worried about getting your email address spammed, a simple contact page can prevent that. Otherwise, you can write your email address in this form: name at domain dotcom. This will prevent spam bots from finding your email address.
3. While most bloggers give an easy and accessible way to either contact them via email or leave a comment, I noticed that some blogs do not allow the readers to leave comments. This sends a bad message to customers, because it seems like the company does not want to hear from their customers. More than anything else, blogs are communication tools. If a blog is used only to share information but does not allow communication between the company and its customers, its success and popularity will suffer. Many blogs without a comment feature have low page rankings and likely have less returning visitors.

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4. Not having an RSS feed. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and it is a way for people to read a blog without always actually visiting the blog. They can view the entries through websites such as bloglines.com and feedster.com. RSS feeds are extremely important, because most people will read your blog via RSS feeds. You are more likely to pick up regular readers if you have an RSS feed.
 5. Not updating often enough. The more often you update, the more popular your blog will be. Many blog readers like to read their favorite blogs on a daily basis. If you do not blog regularly, you run the risk of losing readers.

BIOS

STEPHEN TURCOTTE, PRESIDENT & FOUNDER

Stephen Turcotte founded Backbone Media, Inc. in 1996. As one of the first Internet firms to specialize in search engine positioning, Backbone has grown to be a 13 person firm producing online marketing and website development results for large and small companies. With over eleven years of experience in the Internet marketing industry, Stephen continues to pioneer techniques that combine web development technology with online marketing strategies to drive qualified traffic and sales.

Prior to Backbone Media, Stephen Co Founded Music Interactive, a relational database based online music community and website development firm for the music manufacturing and publishing industry. Music Interactive was founded in 1994 and sold to Hal Leonard Publishing in 1996.

Stephen has been featured or quoted in the Boston Globe, Boston Herald, BtoB Online, Boston Business Journal and many other business publication's articles about web marketing. Stephen is a frequent presenter to local audiences on the topic of search engine marketing. The websites he has developed and marketed have been covered by major national media organizations including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Fortune, Time, CFO, and the BBC.

Stephen is a founding member of the Search Engine Marketing Professionals Organization (SEMPO) and Chair of the SEMPO B-to-B Subcommittee. Stephen is also a leading member of the Massachusetts Innovation and Technology Exchange (MITX) CEO Roundtable Content Committee.

JOHN CASS, DIRECTOR OF INTERNET MARKETING STRATEGIES

John Cass was formerly the Marketing Director for 48hourprint.com, an online printer based in Boston, where he helped the company dramatically reduce the company's Online Cost Per Acquisition and managed 48hourprint.com's marketing efforts, including pay per click, e-mail, corporate blog and print media. John has also worked for a number of software product companies; including the consumer security products industry and the web load testing industry. A member of the American Marketing Association, John Cass is the 2005/6 President of the Boston Chapter of the AMA. In 2004 he conducted a corporate blogging survey where his research revealed how such companies as Microsoft and Macromedia are using blogs to communicate with their customers.

KRISTINE MUNROE, MARKETING ASSISTANT

Kristine previously worked at EGW Publishing as a marketing assistant and newsletter editor. She worked on getting more traffic to their websites as well as writing and sending out newsletters to the subscribed members. She also worked as a web designer for SearchUp, designing webpages and logos for both the company and for clients. Kristine studied digital graphic design at Expression College for Digital Art in the San Francisco area before coming to the Boston area and directing her career in a more marketing-oriented direction.

ABOUT BACKBONE MEDIA, INC.

Backbone Media, Inc. is an Internet Marketing consultancy based in Waltham, Massachusetts. Backbone takes an integrated online marketing communications approach with their clients, first setting a strategy then using such appropriate Internet Marketing tools such as SEO, PPC, e-mail marketing and CMS driven websites to get results for their customers.

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