



IS BLOGGING RIGHT FOR MY BUSINESS?

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OVERVIEW

One in four Americans who are online are reading blogs, and 11 percent of Americans online are writing on blogs, according to Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff's *Groundswell*. Blog-related activity is growing by the day, and blogs are now competing with major news networks for viewers. Over 175,000 new blogs are created every day, and bloggers post over 1.6 million posts per day, according to Technorati.

Blogging can be very beneficial to your business and your customers, but the world of blogging may be overwhelming if it is unfamiliar territory. This white paper aims to break down the essentials of blogging for you, so that you can take those next steps with confidence, whatever those steps may be.

WHAT IS A BLOG?

A blog is many different things to many different people, but most of us can agree on one point: A blog is simply another avenue through which to communicate. In technical terms, a blog, or contraction of the words "Web log," is a Web site containing user-generated commentary, graphics, and/or video.

Blog purposes cover a broad spectrum, with user-generated content ranging from personal diary-type entries to newsworthy

events and links. Although blog topics run the gamut, from blogs about White House politics to those dedicated to pictures of cats, the most successful blogs generally stem from a particular interest and are geared toward a particular audience.

What really sets blogs apart from traditional media is their emphasis on user interaction, with reader comments, high traffic, returning visitors and links to and from others' blogs and sites the utmost indicator of their success – or failure – to truly communicate with their audience.

Blogs have at least one "owner" or "author," but many (such as The Huffington Post, Gawker, Mashable, and the official Google Blog) have several commentators contributing to site content.

At their core, blogs are about creating a meaningful connection with your audience. In the business world, blogs may be used internally to improve your company's communication and culture; or externally with the goal of marketing, public relations, or branding in mind. Blogs may also be used to attract candidates to your company, as potential employees can find out what your company culture is like on a real and personal level and garner information that they can't necessarily obtain from a face-to-face interview or a Google search. Your

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company blog can also give candidates an avenue in which to communicate and build relationships with each other – and, more importantly, with you.

TO BLOG OR NOT TO BLOG

Many companies are excited about starting a blog, but too many jump blindly on the social media bandwagon – without really knowing what their goals for the blog are. Before you pour your corporate heart out to the public, you must decide: Is blogging right for my business? There are a few key steps you can take to help you decide if your goals and business objectives are aligned with a corporate blog.

1. READ OTHERS' BLOGS.

Learn from those who have done it well. By reading blogs from some of the leading corporations and highest-rated bloggers out there, you will have a benchmark for success and be one step ahead of the game as you consider starting your own. Check out blog search engine Technorati, which maintains an updated list of the 100 most popular blogs and a link to and description of each. (www.technorati.com/pop/blogs/)

By reading other blogs, you can also learn what people think about your company. By doing a simple Internet search (Google allows you to search blogs exclusively) with your company name, you may be surprised by what you find.

2. INTERACT WITH THE BLOGS YOU FIND.

You can also use sites like Technorati to conduct searches for blogs similar to yours. Commenting on others' blogs and becoming a part of the community is an integral part of being successful in your own blog efforts.

3. DECIDE WHAT YOU REALLY WANT TO GET OUT OF IT.

As a blogger in the business world, your blog must be in line with your business goals and objectives. It is important to first define who you want your audience to be, and then plan your content around that ideal audience in order to attract them to your site. You don't want to alienate anyone, but you should still keep a concrete focus on your objectives and the range of your planned blog content in order to stay relevant and avoid straying from your purpose.

LAUNCHING YOUR BLOG

Don't be overwhelmed with getting everything perfect upon the launch of your blog, or with mastering the technological side of blogging. The key really is in testing and experimenting – and figuring it out as you go. At CareerBuilder.com, we launched our employer blog, The Hiring Site (www.thehiringsite.com), in May of 2008. Over the past several months we learned a lot, both from each

other and our audience. Some things worked well, while others didn't, spurring us to try a fresh approach. We have been surprised many times by traffic numbers, user feedback and fellow bloggers who link back to our site, and we expect to be surprised much more in the future. We get great feedback from our readers, and we are learning more than we ever expected simply by listening. The conversations among commenters are simply fascinating to watch.

More than anything, we are learning that we have a long way to go; The Hiring Site is a work in progress, and the blogosphere is constantly changing. It is important to be open and adapt to these changes, while still keeping a strong grasp on your ideals.

Much of blogging is learned through trial and error, and you will likely find that you, too, will make some mistakes along the way. With this said, it's important to keep some things in mind so that you don't get "blogged down" with cleaning up your messes.

- **BUILD RELEVANT CONTENT THAT YOUR READERS FIND VALUE IN.** If there's nothing there that gets you or your team excited, chances are readers won't bother to visit the site, and if they do, they won't return.
- **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND HAVE A FOCUS.** If you try to accomplish everything, you will accomplish nothing. Find your niche, and run with it.
- **BE HONEST AND OPEN.** In other words, be human. Much of the appeal of blogs is in their conversational tone, which makes readers feel like they are listening to a trusted friend.
- **MAKE TIME FOR YOUR BLOG.** Be prepared to dedicate several hours each week to posting and attending to blog-related issues. Update your blog regularly. A strong and growing blog is a terrible thing to waste.

WHO SHOULD WRITE YOUR BLOG?

Should yours be a solo effort? For a company blog, possibly not, unless someone such as your CEO wishes to have a sole blog to communicate his or her product updates, insight and musings. The number of people involved in your blog really depends on the scope of the blog and the time you intend to dedicate to it; this will determine the resources and people needed for your blog to run smoothly and successfully. Be natural. Remember, readers will feel more comfortable and be more engaged in your content if you let your bloggers' personalities shine through.

CREATING A BLOGGING POLICY

It is important to have a blogging policy in place before setting up your blog, in order to keep your goals top of

mind and keep the process – and each other - organized. Depending on your company, your legal team may want to approve a list of rules before you go live.

For instance, as mentioned in *Groundswell*, as HP's number of participating bloggers grew, they needed a way to keep the enthusiasm going without letting chaos creep in. Alison Watterson, editor-in-chief of their Web site, designed "a straightforward blogging policy and a course that would-be bloggers could take to keep them within the guardrails." One of these rules was, "Your blog must comply with financial disclosure laws, regulations and requirements," which satisfied concerns from their legal team. HP's blogging policy resulted in wider company blog interest, because having a policy in place meant that corporate was on board with the project.

It is important to align your initiatives so that everyone is on the same page. This applies to businesses large or small, as employees on all company levels should be aware of your blog's existence and have the means to communicate it out to others. As Reem Abeidoh writes in his blog entry, *A Guide to Corporate Blogging*¹, "It is important for all the key players to be aware that the company is launching a blog that represents a specific component of the company. Providing them with the strategy document or an executive summary will increase their willingness to contribute to the blog."

BLOGGING BEST PRACTICES

A BRIEF COMMENT ON BLOG COMMENTS

Some companies have a strict comment regulation policy. Many sites regulate and delete comments that are abusive, use foul language, and include ad hominem attacks or various slurs. On the other hand, other companies are very lenient in their policy, and may not regulate at all, but rather sit back and let commenters battle it out and come to a resolution. Offensive commenters may also be "flagged" by fellow commenters after abuse, leading to them being banned from commenting. How you handle this depends on what you decide is in your company's best interest.

ON BEING AUTHENTIC IN YOUR BLOG

Just as you expect candidates to be consistent in the way they present themselves, they expect you to be natural in your communication with them. Don't try to force being "hip" or "cool" to fit into their world. Remember what your parents always said about just "being yourself"? Well, it rings true here as well.

CHOOSING A BLOG HOSTING SERVICE

As mentioned before, it is important not to get caught up in the technological details. Start small and slow and build as you go. A few companies that will host your blog for little

to no cost: Wordpress, Typepad, Blogger, LiveJournal, MovableType, Vox or Tumblr.

HOW TO START A BLOG, IN THE TECHNICAL SENSE

Creating a blog differs depending on the type of platform you choose or how linked it is to your existing Web site. With that said, the following references will help you make some of your platform decisions and help you get over the question of how to start from a technical standpoint.

- **CHOOSING THE BEST PLATFORM:** www.probblogger.net/archives/2006/02/15/choosing-a-blog-platform/
- **STARTING A BLOG:** www.howtostartablog.org/
- **SETTING UP A BLOG USING WORDPRESS:** www.realblogvideos.com/?hop=oziii
- **SETTING UP A BLOG USING BLOGGER:** www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU4gXHkejMo

SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Blogs, when undertaken with a spirit of innovation and relevance and with a solid strategy and audience in mind, can take your business to an entirely new level. Blogs give you the power to engage with customers or candidates in ways you might never have thought possible. Best of all, it's easy to get started, and there are a lot of resources available to help you along the way (some of which we have listed below).

So take a deep breath and start planning... and then, start blogging.

KEY DEFINITIONS:

- **BLOG:** A contraction of the words "Web log," a Web site containing user-generated commentary, graphics, and/or video. In using "blog" as a verb, it means to maintain or add content to a blog.
- **BLOGOSPHERE:** A collective term encompassing all blogs and their interconnections in the blogging community.
- **RSS FEED:** Allows you to subscribe to a site's content and automatically receive updates through your reader of choice (Google Reader, Bloglines, Outlook, etc. or through your email provider or built-in area in your Internet browser), eliminating the need to visit individual Web sites.
- **COMMENTS:** Feedback which blog readers can submit on a blog post. Comments are generally intended to encourage interaction and conversation among readers.
- **WIDGET:** Chunks of code that can be embedded on a HTML-based Web site; on a blog, often used for

¹ <http://www.probblogger.net/archives/2008/10/15/a-guide-to-corporate-blogging/>

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Web-based tools to enhance appearance or function of a blog.

- **MICROBLOGGING:** A form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates and publish them. Popular sites include Twitter and Pownce.
- **PLUG-IN:** An “add-on” program that interacts with the blog to provide a specific function on demand.
- **BLOG SEARCH ENGINE:** Search engines such as Technorati index millions of blog posts, introduce site visitors to blog content, and compute and share rankings of blogs in the blogosphere.
- **BLOGROLL:** A list of other recommended or frequented blogs, usually placed in a sidebar of a blog.
- **BLOGGER:** One who blogs.
- **SOCIAL MEDIA:** Media that creates a two-way conversation rather than a one-way filter of information. Commonly represented by blogs, podcasts, vlogs, wikis, user-generated content and social networks.
- **VIRAL:** Term used to describe how individuals voluntarily pass information and media to others, who then pass it on to others. Such sharing is hard to contain, creating potential for limitless exposure of a single message.
- **TAGS / TAGGING:** Associating keywords with pieces of content such as blog entries, video clips, and digital pictures. Content may be tagged with the intent of simply classifying information, but users can also share and view each other’s tags, and people can view what others like and recommend. Tags are “read” by search engines and help online users locate content quickly and efficiently.
- **WEB 2.0:** Term describing the “second generation” of the Web. Characterized by the shift away from one-way information sharing, this marks the rise in sharing/collaboration, online communities, and user-created content.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & ADVICE:

- **TECHNORATI:** www.technorati.com – Technorati “was founded to help bloggers to succeed by collecting, highlighting, and distributing the online global conversation.”
- **PROBLOGGER:** www.problogger.net – A site “dedicated to helping other bloggers learn the skills of blogging, share their own experiences and promote the blogging medium.”
- **COPYBLOGGER:** www.copyblogger.com – helping bloggers succeed by writing compelling copy
- **FORRESTER RESEARCH’S GROUNDSWELL DISCUSSION:** www.groundswelldiscussion.com – Forum dedicated to further discussion around the book Groundswell and the world of blogging and social media.

BLOGS OF NOTE:

- **THE HIRING SITE:** www.thehiringsite.com CareerBuilder.com’s “community for hiring professionals and other curious-minded individuals to discuss the attraction, engagement and retention of their #1 asset – their people.”
- **HP BUSINESS BLOGS:** www.hp.com/hpinfo/blogs/index.html – List of HP’s employee business blogs.
- **DIRECT2DELL:** <http://en.community.dell.com/blogs/direct2dell/> – Dell’s user community forum.
- **OFFICIAL GOOGLE BLOG:** www.googleblog.blogspot.com – The official blog of Google.
- **WIRED BLOGS:** <http://blog.wired.com> – Various blogs on Wired.com, the online site of Wired magazine.
- **DELICIOUS: DAYS:** www.deliciousdays.com – “Delicious:days... is my way of combining these two passions, thrown into the mix: Munich, the wonderful Bavarian town we live in, our occasional travel experiences, cookbook reviews and to cut to the chase all things delicious.”
- **POSTSECRET:** www.postsecret.blogspot.com – an “ongoing community art project where people mail in their secrets anonymously on one side of a postcard.”
- **BUZZMACHINE:** www.buzzmachine.com – Jeff Jarvis’s blog about news and media.

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