

A BLOG IS A TWO-WAY STREET: Benefits of Business Blogs

by Mary Sullivan

Suddenly, business blogs are hot. Major publications are telling businesses, “Catch up, or catch you later” ([BusinessWeek, May 2, 2005](#)). Why should businesses use blogs when they’re already expending time, energy and budget on traditional media and Web content? Must you have a blog just to show you’re forward-thinking and cool?

KickStart Alliance thinks there’s more to it than that. While the press has focused on the mechanics and the politics of blogging, this article emphasizes the business benefits of public blogs. [Internal knowledge-sharing tools including internal blogs, along with Wikis, forums and file-sharing are fascinating, but that’s another article or two.]

What is a blog? – If you know the answer, you can skip to the “Why” section below. If not, “blog” is short for Weblog, a self-published journal that is accessible via the Web. Unlike a corporate Web site, content on a blog can be published “on the fly” and is interactive. An author posts a short article to which readers can attach comments, like a conversation.

Blogging software is like Web content management software which allows authorized individuals to post content to a corporate site. Like content management systems, blogs bypass the IT department and allow the writer to get content online swiftly.

A blog’s interactive nature is worrisome to some executives who are afraid to expose their companies to dialogues with the public. They shouldn’t be. The benefits of business blogs can be huge.

Why have a business blog?

Feedback – The least appreciated attribute of blogs is that they are powerful vehicles for market feedback—from customers, partners, prospects. Blog comments provide up-to-the-minute information on what your target audience is thinking. *What would customers like to see your product do? What would make it easier for partners to work with you?* Businesses that ignore what customers want do so at their peril. (U.S. auto makers come to mind.)

Blogs create two-way communication with a highly targeted audience. These “conversations” permit rapid testing of new concepts and, in the process, strengthen relations with the audience.

Speed – The immediacy of publishing content via a blog suits fast-paced business environments. There are no logistical problems and no lead time requirements. Just write it and publish it.

Exposure – Blogs can dramatically improve your rankings in search engines. You can make each posting searchable and elevate your position in a Google search almost overnight.

Positioning – Executives who publish blogs establish themselves as thought leaders. Other bloggers develop reputations as subject matter experts. The blogger controls the agenda. Microsoft uses blogs to soften their image. Cisco uses a blog to promote a point of view. Smaller companies use blogs to improve their visibility.

Targeting – A company can have multiple blogs dedicated to special audiences or segments. A partner blog can focus on developers. A vertical industry blog talks to a niche or micro-market. Blogs let you establish conversations with special segments and develop special relationships with them. Macromedia uses blogs for partner communication.

Reach – A blog may be the only way to truly reach some audiences. Generation X is tuning out traditional marketing communications and media. They want control over what they read, and blogs are a format that let's them get what they want through an informal medium.

How do you get people to read your blog? (And what is RSS, anyway?)

Isn't it hard to get people to read your blog? Isn't it easier to just publish e-newsletters? No, and no. Email is a challenging marketing tool these days because of spam filters and general email overload. Little of it actually gets read. Blogs, on the other hand, can be distributed through a syndication process without using email. Your links to other bloggers and theirs to you will establish a network of readers.

RSS stands for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication, depending on who's talking. RSS "feeds" deliver news to a Web page. Readers subscribe to blogs that interest them, and a **newsreader** aggregates news summaries for them. They receive a headline, abstract and a link for each new posting from the blogs they choose. No surfing, no email with spam filters blocking content. The news they need just gets delivered by their newsreader.

Will blogs and feeds replace email newsletters? Probably not for a while. The good news about blogs is that email isn't required for blog delivery. The bad news is that it's harder to collect data on newsreader users than it is on newsletter readers. For now, let them co-exist.

Sold on the benefits of blogging? If you are, here are a few last thoughts before you start:

- Use of RSS newsreaders is still very low. Less than 5% of Internet users today subscribe to news feeds. However the number is growing rapidly and certain audiences, especially in the tech community, have much higher concentrations.
- Blog writing takes time, so when you start, make the commitment to keep your blog fresh. Post information to your blog at least weekly if you can.
- Unauthorized content on your company's blog, or even on your own off-duty blog can get you in trouble, maybe even fired. That's exactly what happened recently at Wells Fargo, Delta Airlines, and even at Google.

For more Blogging Tips, see the sidebar of this newsletter.

Thanks to [Robin Stavisky](#) of of New Venture Marketing for sharing her knowledge about business blogs.

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