



1. Introduction to Business Blogging

Business blogs are quickly becoming the preferred way to communicate with your clients and with those who could become your clients. Web sites will continue to be essential, but if you want to market your products and services on the Internet, a company blog is now the preferred vehicle.

A business blog is an online conversation about your people, your products, and your services. Entries are displayed in reverse chronological order, and updates are therefore very easy to find — because today's "post" is always at the top of the page.

A. Blogs Can Generate New Traffic for Your Site

Your blog can also generate traffic from new sources for your company Web site; the technology associated with blog software is very powerful in this regard. From the point of view of the technology involved, it's a world away from Web site technology. But we have mastered it, and we're prepared to help you unleash it for your business. If you blog and if the technology is set up just right, you'll be amazed at the traffic you eventually get as a result.

Notice that we say *eventually*. Blogging is not a quick fix for increasing traffic (there's no such thing), but there's no question that it's now the way to go to secure your site's future. Blogging has already changed the essential nature of search engine optimization (SEO).

B. Blogs Build Trust

By showing the human face of your company or organization — by being honest and authentic — you can gradually build trust. As your blog begins to mature, it will gradually become a two-way conversation your company and your target audiences.

Your business blog will give readers an opportunity:

- to become interested in what you and your company are doing; when appropriate, they will be able to follow the progress of new products and services. Blogging is much better than email campaigns, which have been seriously compromised by the spam tsunami.
- to know that people at your company are approachable.
- to get to know you well enough that they will eventually want to do business with you.
- to help you improve your products and services.

- to hear from you quickly during times of crisis or when there's a problem with a product — and if you're willing to be open about problems, your blog can be your most effective way of dealing with any issues which may arise.

The advantage to your company will be gradual — because building credibility takes time — but the long-term benefits will be very real.

C. Blogs Help Recruit Talented People

Business blogs are starting to become important tools for recruiting the most talented people; in some industries, blogs may already be more important for recruiting than the job postings on your Web site.

Recent college graduates — who grew up with myspace.com and facebook.com — will be able experience your company's openness, get to know some of your people, and get a good feel for what it's like to work for your organization. If your company does not have a blog, that may eventually become a problem for recruitment.

2. Getting Your Business Blog Started

Businesses have been using the Internet to communicate for more than ten years, but now we are entering a new, more dynamic phase. The best and brightest people at more and more businesses will be blogging within the next couple of years.

Robert Scoble — Microsoft's most famous blogger — said this as he left the company in June 2006: "Blogging? Bill Gates hadn't heard the word five years ago. Today he owns one of the most popular blog services and has 3,000 of the most-respected corporate bloggers."

Don't be embarrassed if you're five years behind Gates on this, but the clock is ticking. The early adopters are already doing it, and companies that aren't at least preparing to blog may be letting their competitors gain the advantage of being first-in-the-niche to go for it.

Some companies think about starting a blog, then put the idea off to the side after considering how complicated and time-consuming start-up could be.

Get Familiar with the Business Blogosphere

The term "blogosphere" is at least a little bit awkward, but it's becoming a standard way of referring to that part of the Internet. There's email, the Web, IM, and now there's the blogosphere. If you're going to blog for your company and having been hanging out in the blogosphere, that's

where to start. There may not be much — or anything — in your particular niche, but that doesn't make any difference. At first you're just getting up to speed with the culture and the process.

Read a few business blogs every day, and after you get a feel for how it's done, add comments when you feel that you're ready.

Read Online News Sources

Make your own personal set of links to the best online news sources in your field, whether it's financial services, sports, mining, or whatever. Then read those news sources *every day*, always thinking about possible topics for your own blog.

3. The Blogging Process

A blog includes four basic elements:

1. the entries you post;
2. links to your sources, to other blogs, and to resources for additional information;
3. a way for visitors to your blog to comment on entries; and
4. an archive of previously published entries arranged by year and month.

A. Official Company Blogs

- Official company blogs are generally produced by employees who work as a team. They blog on a company-hosted site as part of their jobs.
- *The company Web site is for describing and promoting your products and services, but your blog has a completely different function.* It gives people an opportunity, over time, to get to know and trust some of the people at your company.

B. Personal Company Blogs

- These blogs — produced by individuals who work at a company — are more personal. They show that a company is open, and that it supports and trusts the creative people who work there.
- This kind of blog is for writing about who you are, what you do, what excites you, what disappoints you, what your company is doing, and much more. Blog at work, at home, and while you're on the road attending conferences, meeting with clients, or attending trade shows.
- If you are really being yourself, and if you write about what you know, then you will gradually earn a reputation for being credible. If your willingness to be a company blogger includes a commitment to excellence and to the truth, then you're doing it right.

Blogging Software

A blog requires its own kind of software, which will be installed on your Web server — not on your personal computer. We recommend WordPress, a blog publishing system (sometimes called a blog content management system). There is no licensing fee for using WordPress.

Like the other major blog publishing systems, WordPress is written in PHP and backed by a MySQL database. If you have your own Web server with MySQL, and if the server is ready for PHP, then you can download WordPress for use on your Web server.

Many medium and small businesses will want a hosting company to get them set up with WordPress.

How Blogging Works

- You write your for your blog — three or four times a week is great, but no less than twice a week. When there is news to report (new products or services, events, changes at the company), write about that as soon as possible. Make sure that you link to your sources and to sources which will give additional information.
- Readers will eventually start responding to your posts with comments, questions, suggestions, and criticisms.
- Listen to your readers very carefully and make a determined effort to understand their point of view, especially if they are critical. Listening will of course be a very valuable learning experience for you, as will rethinking your own positions.
- Answer questions and respond to suggestions and concerns very respectfully. Don't argue, even with people who are being unreasonable. You can deal with unreasonable people who comment more than once by blocking their I.P. address; Allied Internet can help with that and all other technical issues.
- If you can't respond to a question immediately, say so and promise to get back with a response within 24 hours. Then get back with your response sooner than promised.
- Read other bloggers in your area of expertise, respond to what they say, write about their blogs, engage them in conversation. Read news sources relative to your area of competence. Realistically, you may have to actually schedule time to read news and other bloggers; it's that important.

The Blogging Routine

Blogging works best if you make it part of your ordinary work routine. You don't want it to be something you have to try to remember to do! Because it will be a new part of your routine, it may take some getting used to.

Make sure that reading, researching, and writing for your blog are scheduled, like any other important activity, in your PDA, Outlook Calendar, or whatever your use. If you have a shared company blog where more than one person is blogging, work out a schedule so that there's something new every business day if possible.

But We're Not Ready to Blog!

Despite the unquestionable benefits of business blogging, some companies are, for very good reasons, just not ready to make that move. We have developed an approach to adding new content to a company Web site which permits a business to start to get some of the amazing benefits of blogging without actually making the commitment to blogging. We think of it as our "foot in the door" strategy, and it positions a company (1) to get some of the benefits, and (2) to be able to start blogging quickly when they are ready, because the technology and software is already in place.

5. Frequently Asked Questions about Blogging

If we start a company blog, when can we expect a return on our investment?

The principal investment for blogs is a significant amount of employee time. The concern arises especially during the first year, when the audience may be small.

Note that we use the words “gradually” and “eventually” when discussing the benefits of corporate blogging; we’re not talking about a quick fix.

Some business activities that produce no quickly identifiable return on investment are universally considered to be valuable — press releases, Web site, corporate brochure, industry conferences, charitable contributions, and community service, for example.

Why not just have a video blog?

Sometimes people ask about having video blogs instead of “regular” blogs. Maybe video blogging seems easier because it doesn’t involve writing.

If you’re going to have a video blog that looks professional, the human and technological commitment is considerable, much more than for a written blog.

We suggest that you select at least five corporate or professional video blogs that you feel are helpful to the sponsoring organization, and view them two or three times a week for a year. Before that year is over, you’ll know whether a video blog is right for your company, and you’ll have plenty of ideas.

Anyone with a camera can start getting some experience by shooting video interviews with product developers, consultants, whomever you’ve got. Go for interesting content and respectable production values.

Then upload your videos to YouTube.com and send links to your friends and colleagues. Ask them for constructive evaluations of and suggestions for your videos.

The bottom line: yes, think about a video blog, but not until you have proven to yourselves that you can establish and maintain a “regular” blog for at least a year.

What is RSS? What is Podcasting?

RSS — **R**eally **S**imple **S**yndication — a relatively-new Internet technology which allows you not just to link to a Web page, but to **subscribe** to it — you can be automatically notified every time that Web page (or certain parts of it) change. The notification is not by email, but you use a “feed reader” to see what’s new. Because this is becoming so important, the new Internet Explorer 7 has a built-in feed reader which we discussed on July 20, 2006 in *The Internet Examiner*, our own blog.

The evolution of accessing information on the Web has so far had three stages:

- Surfing (1994)
- Searching (1998)
- Subscribing (21st Century)

Podcasting is audio content that is delivered via an RSS feed presenting a downloadable or streaming file (often mp3). It’s similar to RSS.

Like RSS, podcasting means that the user has immediate access to syndicated Web site content. But podcasting means that the content is an audio file instead of something you can read on your computer monitor.

Allied Internet helps businesses get started blogging, sets up and manages business blogs, and offers writing, research, editing, and creative coaching services.

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