

The Corporate Blogging Book

Debbie Weil

The Big Idea

Imagine a focus group, a viral marketing campaign, and your own news station all rolled into one. Now combine that with a low-cost, easy-to-use, always-on Web site. That's what effective corporate blogging is all about.

Business blogging used to be ideal for free agents and entrepreneurs who needed a cheap way to get their message out. But now, even the big guys are tapping its amazing powers too.

The world is entering a new age of corporate communications, and blogs are a very effective and budget-friendly way of communicating with customers, employees, the media, and other key constituencies.

Why You Need This Book

This indispensable guide will provide you with a clear overview of what blogging is and how it can help you run your business more effectively. It provides tools, ideas, and a plan for understanding and getting involved with blogging.

Author Debbie Weil explains how to create a blog that's engaging, smart, and likely to grow an audience. She strips away the technical jargon and shows you exactly what your customer needs from your blog, and urges you to confront any fear of blogging that might be holding you back from exploiting it.

This book will teach you what works and what doesn't - as well as why creating and maintaining a good blog is worth the effort.

The Top Twenty Questions About Corporate Blogging

Let's begin with the facts and the FAQs. Here are some of the top twenty questions and answers regarding blogs and blogging:

WHAT IS CORPORATE BLOGGING?

A blog, short for "Web log", is an easy-to-publish web site that's written in an informal, conversational style. However, it can be pushed further than that and can be used as a marketing communications channel. Corporate blogging is the application of such a blog; it's a communications and marketing channel that connects its owner to a noisy, ragged, global conversation - the blogosphere.

Corporate blogs can be sanctioned, even encouraged, by bosses and contributed to by individual employees, or formally managed by the corporate communications department.

THE BLOGO-WHAT??

The *blogosphere*. It's a big, loud place that's the universe of blogs. It's "the virtual realm of blogdom as a whole," as the New York Times calls it. It's often called a collective conversation. Think of it as a community where information, links, opinions, videos, audio files, photos, and other forms of media are easily and frequently shared, where elaboration can be offered, disagreements aired, and comments posted.

WHY HAS BLOGGING ATTRACTED SO MUCH ATTENTION?

The media blitz is one reason. But the buzz is built around three things: scale, speed and impact.

SCALE. The explosion in the number of blogs is mind-boggling. When Technorati launched in November 2002, it counted just under 13,000 blogs. Exactly three years later, in November 2005, the online service was tracking over 20 million blogs.

SPEED. Blogs are instant and always-on, and are accessible anytime, anyplace, through any Internet-connected device. Someone is always 'listening'.

IMPACT. Blogging began a decade ago as an online outlet for personal musings. Now, everyone can be a journalist or a reporter. Citizen journalism, an emerging concept, has become a reality thanks to blogs.

HOW IS A BLOG DIFFERENT FROM A WEB SITE?

A blog is different from a conventional Web site because it's:

- Interactive.
- Written in a conversational voice.
- Created using instant publishing software; usually no tech expertise and no techies or IT staff are required.
- An efficient way to alert interested readers every time something new is added - without using email.
- Frequently updated, so that it almost always gets higher rankings in search engine results than a static site.
- A form of viral marketing.

QUICK! WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BLOGGING IN ORDER TO GET STARTED?

1. **Companies don't blog; individuals do.** That means a corporate blog needs to be written in a human voice.
2. **Savvy bloggers read other blogs.** Whether or not you choose to launch a blog, you need to be reading blogs. Track what's being said about your company in the blogosphere and you've just discovered next-generation focus groups.
3. **Blogging is not a replacement.** A blog doesn't replace other forms of on- or offline marketing.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD CORPORATE BLOG?

It's updated frequently (preferably a couple of times a week). The writing voice is authentic, friendly and conversational. You hear passion and authority.

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL RISKS OF BLOGGING?

There are two key legal risks of blogging:

- Stuff you don't want to reveal (trade secrets, financial information) can be revealed on blogs.
- Also watch out for stuff you can get sued for (copyright, libel, privacy issues).

WHAT IF MY EMPLOYEES ARE BLOGGING AND I DON'T KNOW ABOUT IT?

You can find out pretty quickly by searching for their names on Google or using Google Blog Search. Or just ask them if they're blogging. Don't panic if they are. A lot of people are blogging these days.

HOW DO I GET OVER MY FEAR OF BLOGGING?

Take proactive steps. Start reading a dozen or so blogs on topics you're interested in - either personally or professionally. Stay alert. Remember, a blog is nothing more than an interactive web site. Don't make this blogging thing more complicated than it needs to be.

WHAT KIND OF STUFF/ RESOURCES/ BUDGET WILL WE NEED TO KEEP A BLOG GOING?

It depends on what kind of blog you launch, how much traffic and interaction you get from readers, and what the blog's purpose is.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE TO WRITE AND MAINTAIN A BLOG?

- Less time than it takes to put together professionally designed HTML
- About as much time as it takes you to skim through your favorite industry news sources
- Fewer hours than it takes you or someone in your organization to write a carefully crafted op-ed piece
- The equivalent of half a day a week to write posts for the blog
- The same amount of time it takes to write emails to multiple colleagues

HOW DO I CONVINCe SENIOR MANAGEMENT - OR MY BOSS - THAT OUR COMPANY SHOULD BE BLOGGING?

In broad brushstrokes, blogs offer an organization a way to:

- Communicate with customers in real-time
- Get positive and negative feedback from key constituencies
- Achieve high search engine rankings without spending a fortune on search engine optimization

WHAT WRITING STYLE WORKS FOR A CORPORATE BLOG?

A human voice. A good company blog sounds like it's written by one person (or a small group with each blogger being identified by name).

SO REALLY, WHAT'S THE POINT?

Here's a three-part answer:

BLOG OR BE BLOGGED. Either you join the conversation in the blogosphere or you're deaf to it. If you choose the former, you can shape what's being said about your company even if you can't entirely control it.

THINK OF BLOGGING AS A THREE-LEGGED STOOL. The legs are the search engines, your customers and the media. Be the first in your niche and you'll be noticed.

BLOGS ARE PART OF NEXT-GENERATION WEB SITES. Online search is driving business results these days, whether you're a local business or a mega corporation. You want to be found. You want your online presence to be memorable. Don't get left behind.

A Quick Romp through the Corporate Blogosphere

In August 1999, along came Blogger.com, a free blogging service. Anyone who wanted to could start a blog in minutes. Between 2002 and 2005, the number of blogs skyrocketed from thousands to millions. The idea of an online journal was intoxicating.

So how did this phenomenon cross over to the business world? With the thousands of techies and entrepreneurs immersed in the dot-com boom back then, the line between "personal" and "professional" was blurred. In addition, the Internet itself has become increasingly accessible since then, through cellphones, Wi-Fi and other technologies. Also, mainstream media began treating corporate blogging as a news source in itself.

Corporate blogs are divided into two main categories:

1. INTERNAL BLOGS: THE FIRST SILENT WAVE

They're behind a firewall, sometimes built into a company's intranet and not accessible through a public URL. They're authored by employees and/or managers. They may also be written by the CEO or a senior executive to communicate with the troops.

The early pioneers of internal blogging have used blogs for project management, efficient communications, and knowledge sharing.

2. EXTERNAL BLOGS: THE SECOND WAVE

External blogs are:

- An informal way to publish company news.
- A place to solicit feedback from customers and prospects about a new product or service.
- A channel to build up the expertise and "thought leadership" of your company.
- Another place to publish bits and pieces of useful information that don't make it into your e-newsletter or print publications.
- A new breed of marketing collateral, much like a downloadable white paper, which you can use as one hook in your sales process.

But before you get into coming up with a blog, you must first...

Confront the Fear of Blogging

You have to be willing to try something new and be an innovator, in a word. Blogging is part of the new wave of technologies that is transforming the Internet into a more user-friendly place.

Here's a chart showing the major fears that hold people back from taking advantage of blogs, as well as facts to counter each of these fears.

Studying what other companies are doing with public-facing blogs may be the best way to combat your fears and learn how to use the speed and reach of blogging to your advantage.

A Baker's Dozen: 12 Plus 1 ways to Use a Corporate Blog

Here are some creative ways you can use a blog as a marketing strategy, as a communications tool and as a way to connect with your customers.

1. **The Big Idea: Blogs as a Marketing Strategy.** What blogs do is complement existing channels. They offer you a new opportunity to create buzz, loyal customers, a stronger brand - and possibly increase your revenues.
2. **Thought Leadership.** One of the most established ways to use a blog, especially for consultants and entrepreneurs, is to become a thought leader - an acknowledged expert - on a narrowly focused topic in your industry niche.
3. **Community Building .** Technology companies typically use blogs to engage customers, who are often developers themselves, in an ongoing conversation about the features and functionality of their products.
4. **Customer Relations.** This is an especially good use for a blog if your customers are online when they're using your service or software.
5. **Status Alerts.** Blogs are tailor-made for any kind of Web-based product or service. Just be sure you meet your customers' expectations for instant updates.
6. **Conferences and Events.** The blog fires up the buzz ahead of time, before the event begins. A conference blog creates a record of the high points of the sessions and functions as a permanent, searchable resource to market your next event.
7. **Advocacy.** The writers can share their experiences - often emotional and difficult with a one-time story - in an ongoing blog.
8. **Adjunct to PR.** To use a corporate blog as a PR tool is to offer the informal - or some might say, backstory - version of an official announcement.
9. **Branding.** Your blog could extend your company's mission and could be the next new thing to add to your progressive company's site.
10. **E-Commerce.** According to online market research firm comScore Networks, blog readers are 30 percent more likely to buy products or services online. And shoppers who visit blogs spend 6 percent more than the average customer.
11. **Customer Evangelists.** These are people who are so enthusiastic about certain products that they blog about them for free just for the thrill of being associated with the brand.
12. **Viral Marketing.** The "newest new thing" may be a blog-based marketing campaign.
13. **Blogs as the new Web Sites.** There are lots of good reasons to replace web sites with blogs, including improved search engine rankings, a simple content management system that enables non-technical employees to instantly update your site, and the ability of a blog format to more effectively transmit the knowledge inside your company to your customers.

The New ROI Is ROB (Return on Blog)

What's in instead of ROI (Return on Investment) is ROB (Return on Blog). It's all about connections, conversations, discovery, information, leverage, amplification, and efficiencies. If you move fast, you'll reap first-mover advantage.

Yes, there is an ROB that is measurable. The obvious metric of success for corporate blogs is search engine results. Another is WOMM (Word-of-Mouth Marketing). This is a popular new marketing metric that's getting more and more attention. As Pete Blackshaw, chief marketing officer of market research from Nielsen BuzzMetrics put it: "Blogging is putting WOMM on steroids."

Ultimately, the satisfaction of the person writing the blog, whether he or she's a CEO or a small businessperson, is what determines the success - and staying power - of a blog.

Blogging Tools and Technology

These tools and technologies range from specialized blog search engines to information gathering and filtering capability of RSS (also known as web feeds), to becoming familiar with blogging's close cousins: tagging, podcasting and wikis.

RSS. This is a means to publish and/or receive online news and information without using email.

Tagging. This is an easy way of assigning keywords to your blog entries as well as to useful articles and resources you find online.

Wikis. Collaborative wikis are editable web sites, which means that anyone with access to an Internet-connected computer and the wiki itself can edit, correct, or improve information.

Podcasting. A podcast is a series of digital-media files which are distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds for playback on portable media players and computers.

Check in with your geek friends on what the latest cool online tools are and ask your techie colleagues to explain all the details you need to know.

Top Ten Tips to Write an Effective Business Blog

The use of a blog as part of your communications strategy will enable you to create a new form of marketing collateral. Here's a quick guide about effective blog writing and maintenance for those companies who are not primarily in the publishing business.

1. **Choose the right topic (be sure it's specific).** The best-read blogs are narrow in focus and often about hot-button issues. You've got to be passionate about the topic of your blog. Your blog has to inspire your readers.
2. **Find your voice.** When it comes to writing, it's hard to get the right blend of personal and professional, of opinion and passion mixed with facts and research. It's best for you to write your blog as if you're writing an email.
3. **Invite a conversation.** Enable the comments function on your blog so that you can allow readers to click and type in a comment. Thus, you create a blog that's a conversation rather than a one-way publishing platform.
4. **Package what you write (ten Tips, five Rules, seven Ways).** People love to read them. Other bloggers will link to them. Lists divide your blog entries into manageable sections.
5. **Always, always link.** Always include links in your blog entries. The more links to your blog from other blogs, the higher your ranking.
6. **Write for Web readers.** To write a blog is to write for the Web. Observe the following basic conventions and you'll develop more loyal readers: *lots of white space, snappy subheads, bullets, short paragraphs, illustrations - whether photos or graphic charts, or even video.*
7. **Write for Google searchers (Search Engine Optimization, or SEO).** Write with an ear tuned to the search engines. Be sure to include the kinds of keyword phrases in your entry that searchers might enter into Google.
8. **Publish consistently.** Don't let your latest month-old post sit there without an explanation. Don't make it seem like you've abandoned your blog, which defeats the purpose of creating a lively ongoing relationship with your audience.
9. **Take risks.** Your blog will get a lot of publicity if you're deliberately controversial. Your readers will be impressed if you allow contrarian views to remain part of your blog.
10. **Have fun!** If you value cogent writing - and the passion and clear thinking behind it - and you embrace blogging as a new and sometimes unpredictable way to market, you're bound to have fun.

Anatomy of a Blog

Here are two charts that display blogs' components - basic features, or their bare bones, and some additional features, the addition of which depends entirely on the desire and/or discretion of the blogger.

What's Next?

So what does the future hold for corporate blogging?

Corporate blogs will stake out their own corner of blogdom. They will define a slice of the blogosphere where the rules are perhaps a bit more forgiving and where edginess isn't the most important feature.

The blogosphere that counts - the one you need to concern yourself with as a businessperson - is the collection of influential blogs that talk back and forth to one another, creating the biggest global echo chamber people have ever known.

The echo effect is the key. The instant amplification of the blogosphere - which happens when the influential bloggers are listening and their ears prick up - can't be stressed enough. Use it to your advantage. Get inside this global echo chamber.

It's Not About Being Cool

Lastly, blogging isn't about being cool. It's about where everyone is going - online. This is where your customers will be soon, if they're not there already. The story of corporate blogging is still unfolding.

Go make it happen. Have fun. Life is short. It's also messy and wonderful. Like blogging itself!

Corporate blogging serves multiple potential marketing goals. Driving awareness. Providing the information “prospective” buyers need across their journey. Leaving the corporate blahblah behind and having people share their content in a personal way and being much less formal than this text is. It’s about people! Making it easy for bloggers, training them, empowering them and looking at their needs as well.