



ExecBlueprints™

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Action Points

I. Marketing Online Through Blogging

There are two ways to market online through blogging: start a corporate blog or connect with the existing blogging community.

II. The Bottom Line

The ultimate motive for blogging commercially should be to engage customers or potential customers, and to expand your sphere of influence.

III. Must-Have Components for Successful Blogging

The corporate culture, prospective audience, soft resources, and the product being marketed must all be aligned.

IV. Golden Rules for Focusing Online Marketing

Blogs cannot exist in a vacuum. Focus on the long tail. Maintain transparency.

V. Essential Take-Aways

Blogs are still a long way from being mainstream, but they offer a different set of opportunities. Blogging must always be a two-way exchange.

The leaders of cutting-edge PR firms Graham & Associates, Shotgun Concepts, and Trelino/Keller Communications share their expertise on:

Bloggging Strategies for PR and Marketing Professionals

Lydia Graham

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Chris Houchens

Owner, Shotgun Concepts

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Blogs and online social networking provide unique new opportunities for companies: new ways of pursuing new goals. They can be a phenomenally cost-effective way of reaching niche markets and building loyal communities around products. Marketers must know precisely how to handle them, however, because blogs can be exceptionally fickle. They cannot replace traditional channels, and they're not appropriate for every company or product. Nor can they be treated like one-way media: they are not a vehicle for messages, but rather a way of connecting personally to end-users and creating relationships. When used the right way for the right products, they can be tremendously powerful tools for driving customer loyalty, and can also point the way to the future of marketing. ■

About the Authors



Lydia Graham

President, Graham & Associates Inc.

Lydia Graham is president and founder of Graham & Associates Inc., a full-service public relations firm based in San Francisco with proven practice areas in technology, finance, consumer/lifestyle, hospitality, and environmental/social ventures. Founded in 1996, the agency has represented and launched many well-known brands. Graham & Associates is also a co-founder of Plexus, an exclusive network of eight international PR agencies.

The agency is an award-winning organization, having received 33 industry awards since 2002, among others, finalist recognition for *PRWeek's* 2005 "Public Sector of the Year Campaign," the 2004 "Special Creativity Award" from the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), a 2003 Silver Anvil from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and a 2004 Bronze Sabre in the Byline Article category.

In 2001, the agency was one of the *San Francisco Business Times'* "Top 40 Fastest Growing Private Companies in the Bay Area." The agency is also consistently recognized by the Holmes Report in its "Annual Agency Report Card" as one of the "World's Leading Public Relations Firms in North America."

[Read Lydia's insights on Page 3](#)



Chris Houchens

Owner, Shotgun Concepts

Chris Houchens is a marketing speaker, writer, blogger, and owner of Shotgun Concepts, a marketing firm he founded in 1997 to provide guidance on marketing strategy to today's forward thinking companies. Mr. Houchens has spent years working in both media and marketing, in the broadcasting, online, print, and health care fields.

Mr. Houchens, with his company, Shotgun Concepts, was recognized as one of the nation's most remarkable

marketing resources in Seth Godin's Bullmarket Directory. Mr. Houchens is a contributing writer and source for numerous online resources and print publications. Mr. Houchens was the reviewer and wrote the foreword for the 2006 book, *A Marketer's Guide to HIPAA: Resources for Creating Effective and Compliant Marketing*.

Mr. Houchens's blog, the Shotgun Marketing Blog, is ranked in the top 50 of the Power 150 Top Marketing Blogs

worldwide. His blog is read daily by hundreds of subscribers. Mr. Houchens is a well-known marketing speaker delivering marketing keynotes and other presentations worldwide to conferences, meetings, and private corporate events.

[Read Chris' insights on Page 6](#)



Dean Trevelino

Principal, Trevelino/Keller Communications Group

Dean Trevelino has served in executive positions with three of the largest global public relations firms, spanning 16 years. His decision to launch his own firm in 2003 was motivated by an eagerness to apply global agency experience in a boutique environment. While Mr. Trevelino's role is to manage jointly the direction and growth of the firm, he has always enjoyed being the architect of programs and having hands-on engagement throughout the execution.

In his five years with Ogilvy Public Relations, Mr. Trevelino was engaged at a strategic level across the firm's global technology practice that operated under Alexander Ogilvy as well as its Global Marketing Practice.

Prior to joining Ogilvy PR, Mr. Trevelino spent 11 years with

Interpublic's Shandwick and Golin/Harris brands, working primarily on national and international corporate initiatives, product rollouts, global sponsorships, rebranding efforts, crisis management, and internal communications for companies such as Starbucks, First Union, Chick-fil-A, Sara Lee Corporation, and Nike.

As a strategist, Mr. Trevelino is often brought in for company positioning, including executive communications, presentation, and media training. His experience has included preparing executives for acquisition announcements, divestiture announcements, management changes, new product introductions, national promotional programs, crisis management issues, and funding announcements.

Today he serves as principal of Trevelino/Keller Communications Group,

along with Genna Keller. Trevelino/Keller is a full-service public relations firm with four core practices: Technology, Vertical B2B, Consumer Lifestyle, and GreenWorks. It is headquartered in Atlanta with a presence in Charleston, SC.

Mr. Trevelino has trained executives and middle management at companies including The Coca-Cola Company, MindSpring, EarthLink, Discovery Communications, Avado Brands, NOVA Corporation, Goody's Family Clothing, SITA, The STEP Company, iSong, Blue Circle America, as well as personalities such as Nadia Comaneci, Bart Conner, and Mean Joe Greene.

[Read Dean's insights on Page 9](#)

Lydia Graham

President, Graham & Associates Inc.

Understanding Blogging: To Blog or Not to Blog?

Blogs are not for everyone or every company — at the moment. This may soon change.

Currently, we use traditional PR tactics, such as press kits, for 100 percent of our marketing and PR campaigns; about 70 percent of the

In short, the ultimate motive for blogging commercially should be to engage customers or potential customers, and expand your sphere of influence.

Lydia Graham
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Graham & Associates Inc.

time, we consider using new media tools, such as blogs.

How do we determine when to use blogs? Corporate culture and the personality of the potential blogger are some of the most compelling factors in deciding whether to use blogging in a campaign. Is the corporate culture one of transparency? Is the potential blogger entertaining or interesting? Is the blogger or company committed to blogging for the long haul? These are important questions to ask.

Prospective audience is another consideration. Is the targeted audience one that will be moved favorably by blogging? For example, if you were targeting senior citizens, we probably would not choose blogging as a major strategy. For a younger audience, we would consider it.

Establishing a corporate blog with an expectation of generating media coverage is controversial. In a recent survey conducted by

TEKgroup, “60 percent of journalists say they rarely research company blogs” (March 7, 2007, TEKgroup 2007 survey released, press release). Instead, think of blogging as a way to connect with and garner the trust of your target audience and customers. Additional media coverage may be a bonus if your blog is really terrific.

Blogging Resources

Setting up a blog is relatively cheap and easy so the hard cost of blogging isn't a barrier. However, the soft costs must also be considered: is there someone who has expertise (and a personality that lends to blogging)? Who is available to blog in a timely manner? Does that person need an editor? Who is responsible for managing the big picture (multiple blogs if you are planning more than one) and who is the creator and keeper of the blogging policy? Every blog should have one.

Consider the type of product being marketed. Does the product lend itself to creating a larger and interesting conversation. Remember, blogging is not about advertising and self-promotion. That is a real turn-off to viewers and will do more damage to your reputation. The dialogue has to be interesting and constantly updated; comment on trends, things happening within the culture that will



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“The question is: does your blog add positive value to your organization’s marketing or PR mix? If the answer is yes, then blogging is a strategy that works for you.”

- Founded agency in 1996; has represented and launched many well-known brands
- Agency has received 33 industry awards since 2002
- Won 2004 “Special Creativity Award” from IPRA and 2003 Silver Anvil from PRSA

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not cause HR and legal to hit the roof or the SEC to open an investigation. General commentary on things happening in the bigger marketing and news universe of your product category are good subjects. Lastly, comment on other blogs, which will help build traffic to your blog. Linking to other blogs will generate traffic to yours

About 15 percent of our marketing and PR resources are currently devoted to developing blogs, and I expect that number to increase over the next year. What will drive this increase? Consumer generated media is on the rise. According to

an article recently published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about a series of stories by *PC Magazine*, “there is a blogging boom.” *PC Magazine* “estimates that there will be upwards of 100 million blogs by the end of 2007.” However, they also predict that this boom will be short-lived and that this figure will drop back to “30 million blogs in the near future.”

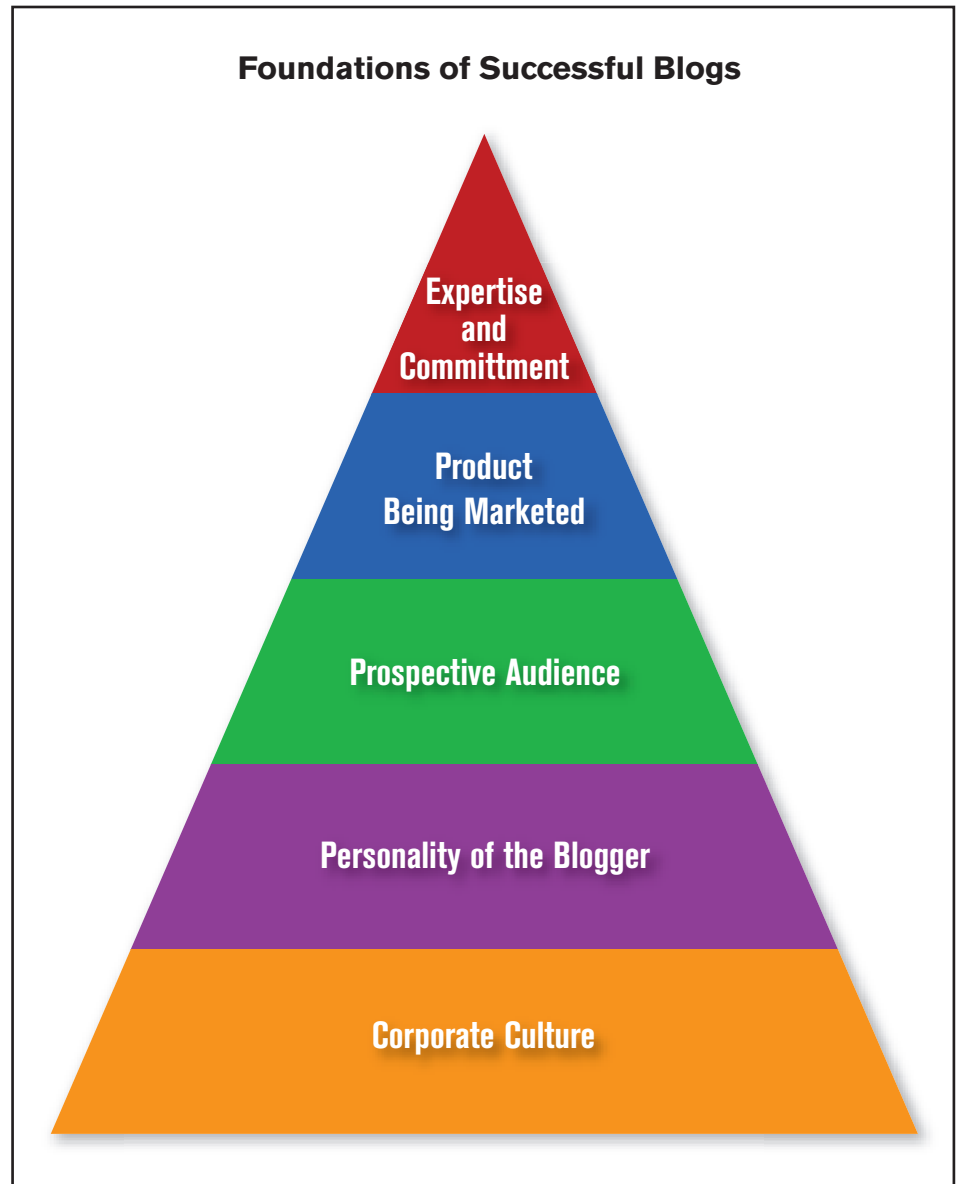
Some more stats:

- “175,000 new blogs are started each day” (*Technorati and SF Chronicle*);
- “The number of active blogs grew from 56 million to 62.3 million between October and January 07” (*Gartner/SF Chronicle*);
- “The total number of dead abandoned blogs out there has exceeded 200 million” (*Gartner/ SF Chronicle*), (*SF Chronicle, Tech Chronicles*, Tuesday, March 6th, 2007); “Half of all new bloggers abandon ship within three months” (*PC Magazine*, Bloggers All Typed out, 2.14.07).

Clearly, starting a blog is a commitment that many do not keep. Think seriously about whether blogging is right for your company before you begin.

Identity and Honesty

Integrity and transparency (of identity) are critical in using blogs for PR and marketing. This is inherent to the medium. We did not originate these best practices. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) has an Ethics Code of Honesty ROI — Honesty of



Relationship, Opinion, and Identity. Also, there is a great Blogger’s Code of Ethics at CyberJournalist.net. This code is derivative. It has its roots in traditional journalism, but has been updated and modified for the new Web. Our standards and

practices are not unique to us, but rather reflect state of the art information that we have gathered from: bloggers themselves, scanned news coverage, Web searches, and peer companies.

Expert Advice

Remember, blogs should not be used as pure advertisement or sales promotion. That is what advertising is for. Create something that is authentic and brings interesting information about your “universe” to your current and prospective target audience(s).

Who should write the blog? The best person to write blog content within a company is the person best suited (the authority) for the conversation you have identified as your blog's premise or framework. In other words, you first have to decide what conversation you are having. What is the tone of the blog? What are the filters?

While there are CEOs who are blogging, keep in mind that blogging takes a lot of time and focus. CEOs must be careful in an environment carefully regulated by the SEC for public companies and HR for all companies. The informal nature of the blog can easily be a minefield. The entertainment factor must also be there, so the marketer must ask, "Is my CEO an entertaining person/writer?" Two well-known CEOs who are not shy about blogging are Bob Lutz, Vice Chairman of General Motors, and J Willard Marriott, CEO of Marriott Intl.

With the clarity that comes from having an outside perspective, consultants can help frame the blogging strategy for a company; identify the conversation that best suits the company or product and help identify who might be the best messenger within that organization to deliver that conversation. Also, practically, a consultant can help with setting up the blog and creating the blog policy.

A New Means to a New End

Blogs are a powerful new forum for marketers and PR pros. They are a new means to a new end, providing the opportunity to have direct, real-time conversations with

customers and stakeholders. However, blogs are not for every company as they are demanding, must remain current with frequent updates to be viable, and have to be used carefully — always in a transparent manner. Otherwise blogs can do more damage than good — as one local politician learned when his press secretary posted spin-oriented comments on several blogs under the aliases of ordinary citizens.

Also, it is important that marketers monitor the bigger conversation that is happening online about their organization in the blog community. A blog strategy should fit into the company's larger overall traditional PR and marketing program. It should be in synchronicity, and provide seamless integration with other online and off-line activities.

The Impact of Blogging

Blogs were not created to be commercial vehicles — they are about exchanging information, building community, and engaging members of that community in conversation. In many ways, the "free-flowing" nature of blogging is exactly the opposite of strategic marketing and PR communication. Blogging can be viewed as risky and come with liability for departments like HR and legal, as blogs offer little or no control over content.

Think about it: that's just as scary to marketing and PR departments as well! The goal of message control is definitely challenged by the new blogging medium, and some experts argue that message control is really a thing of the past. Perhaps it is, but our role as PR and

marketing professionals is still important and may evolve more to one of message creation, management, and containment.

In short, the ultimate motive for blogging commercially should be to engage customers or potential customers, and to expand your sphere of influence. It's a great opportunity to solicit direct feedback and opinions from these groups. In that vein, it is critical that customers are heard and acknowledged, resulting in a favorable impact, rather than being ignored, which usually results in a negative impact for your organization.

Measuring ROI

How do you measure your blogging effort? When it comes to accurately measuring ROI for blogging, Technorati can provide a lot of free information both about your blog and also about who is blogging about you. Search by key words, company and product names and brand. What Technorati will tell you is the influence of your blog; i.e., the number of links to your blog. There are also paid services that can help with measurement such as Cymfony, BuzzMetrics, and Biz360. Also, check your blog rolls: who is linking in and out of the blog?

When considering measurement, the key really is to ask the most critical and important age-old marketing questions. Are you reaching the target audience that you hoped to reach? Are you impacting your brand favorably or unfavorably? What are other bloggers saying about your blogger and your blog? ■

Chris Houchens

Owner, Shotgun Concepts

Perception of Blogging

Many marketing professionals are completely turned off by the concept of blogs as a marketing and information tool. And a large percentage of the general population still does not understand the concept of blogging or social media. They do not view blogs as a “real Web site.” They just think all blogs are either some whacko ranting his opinion or a teenage girl talking about her boyfriend on MySpace.

Currently, blogging has a reputation similar to infomercials and telemarketing. Whereas marketers know the value of these applications when they are done correctly, the masses see them as ways to sell Ginsu Knives and interrupt your dinner. And now it is the same with blogs. The term “blog” to John Q. Public means “my-space-political-rant-here’s-what’s-happening-with-my-cats-unibomber-manifesto.”

What is the cause? Well, there *are* a lot of weird hacks in the blogosphere who are ranting about an obscure opinion and/or telling three people what they just had for lunch. These people are loud and their version of “blog” has become the public perception.

But, in reality, blogs are a way to connect with a niche community. There are lots of bloggers who have built dedicated, focused communities. They are the new town square where everyone has a voice. If you want to reach a narrowly defined market that can communicate with

you on a two-way street about their needs, a blog is one answer (but not the only answer).

Blogging and the Mainstream

If you are a blogger who is *inside* the blogosphere, you would have to wonder who *does not* get all this? Obviously, the inmates have taken over the prison. Bloggers and open source marketing are exerting control over corporations. All the information is there, why not just shut down all other marketing projects and other media exposures and go whole-hog online?

Because while blogs and bloggers are getting a lot of attention, they are not mainstream yet. Not even close. Don’t believe me?

In almost every news story about the influence of blogs, you will see a sentence similar to this: “Blogs, short for Web logs, are easy-to-publish Web sites where...”

How often do you see a sentence like this? “TV, short for television, is a medium where programming is broadcast for...” Or one like this? “Newspapers, which are printed periodicals...”

When the “blogs, short for Web logs” phrase is eliminated from news stories, we will have just started to climb the steep part of the adoption curve.

Blogs are not mainstream and are still a long way from being mainstream. And maybe that is where



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- Founded firm in 1997
- Blog is ranked in the top 50 of the Power 150 Top Marketing Blogs worldwide
- Company recognized among the nation’s most remarkable marketing resources in the Bullmarket Directory

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they need to be. But as “social media” grows (not just blogging), we will see people gathering information from all these Web communities and using it. Instead of one mass media message being sent out from one source, people will pick and choose the information that matters to them from hundreds of sources.

And to marketers and advertisers who are despondent about the fact they are losing the ability to reach an audience through media, the reality is the exact opposite. There is a better opportunity. Instead of wasting dollars sending a message to a mass

Expert Advice

Blogs and other social media are in their infancy and may never make it to adolescence before the game changes again. The key to success for online marketing is to stay with the early adopters and change strategy as needed.

audience that consists of 99 percent of people who are not interested and do not care, just to reach the 1 percent that do, social media offers the ultimate in pinpointing a targeted market and being able to deliver information that consumers are willing to receive.

The Long Tail

A core concept of marketing through blogging is “the long tail,” the name of an idea coined by Chris Anderson in *Wired* magazine. He later wrote a book about it by the same name.

The long tail prescribes that ideas/products, etc., that have low demand or low sales volume can collectively make up a market share that rivals or exceeds the few market leaders. For example, the number of people collectively watching all the cable channels equals, or is greater than, the number of people watching the big four networks.

Remember that online social media is not a one-way street.

Chris Houchens
Owner
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It’s all about niche markets. If you want the mass market, then blogs and social media probably will not work for you. You cannot sell the idea of niche markets to mass media. They do not match up. It is not about grabbing every customer you can. It is about finding the *few* people who are searching for something to be a dedicated fan of. These core fans can help you realize a larger market.

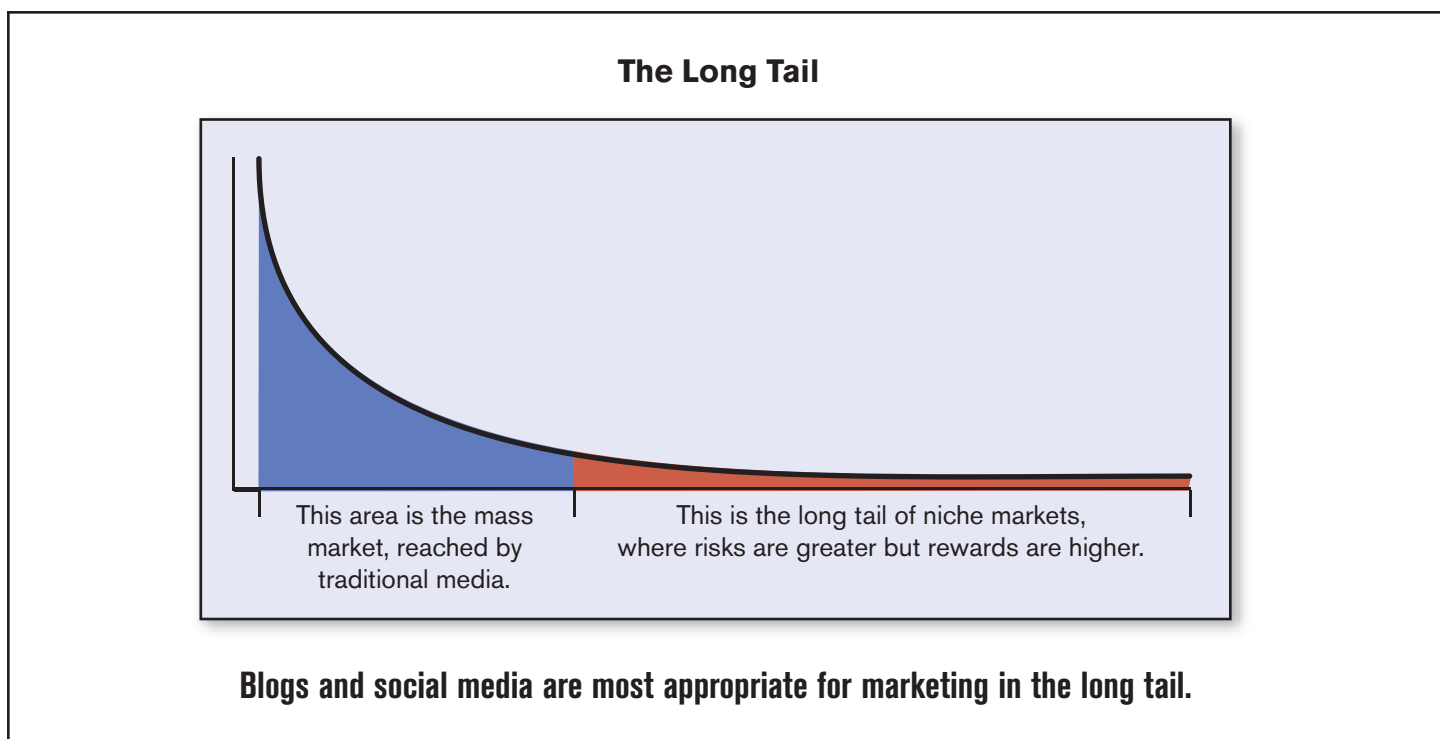
The long tail is a great place to find customers, but you have to sell more than vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry. You cannot be the place where “everyone is going to find something they like.” You have

to be the place where people search you out because you are the only place that sells what they are passionate about.

And that takes courage for a business to do. It is much safer in the meaty left side of the tail. It is a little riskier over in the sparse right-hand side, but the reward potential is much higher.

Marketing Through Blogging

I think there are two ways to market online through blogging. The first is to actually start a corporate blog. Lots of corporations are scared to do this because they do not understand how it works. There have been many examples of a new corporate blog rising up, attempting to contribute, and immediately being seen as an imposter or wannabe by the residents of the blogosphere. The company cannot figure out why they have been



rejected. It is because they do not understand the blog culture that is based upon transparency and authenticity.

Because of super segmentation, targeting of markets, and the rise of a million niches in the long tail, marketing blunders such as these will happen more often unless companies understand *how* to use a blog. Right now, most companies have no idea why their blog marketing is not working.

Remember that online social media is not a one-way street. The goal of blogging is to create a community around a topic and/or product.

The other way to use blogs to market is to monitor and offer information to the blogging community. Establish connections with bloggers who might be interested in the things your company offers. Keep them in the loop about things that are happening in the company and occasionally offer them a “scoop” for their readers. Give them the angle to write about something.

The one thing that will *not* work is to fire off a generic press release to a blogger and expect that they will post it. It is about the relationship. Remember, the blogger has an audience with which he or she has built a reputation. Sending out a corporate press release ruins the relationship.

Two-Way Communication

It is not just about sending out information. It is also monitoring and reacting to content posted on blogs about your company. Instead of a negative issue being blown up on a blog, when someone from the company steps in and comments or offers solution, the situation is diffused and positive connections are built.

There is a huge opportunity in blogs right now, as bloggers are much more accessible than traditional journalists. There are more blogs than traditional news outlets, and they are niched to the target market you are looking for. Find bloggers, contact them, and pitch them. It is that easy.

I would also say that there may be too much emphasis on “blogs” as the answer to online marketing. As I have outlined them here, they can be used to connect to a community. Advertisers and marketers need to be concerned with their “online social media strategy,” not their “blogging strategy.” Companies can find ways to use several of the social networking sites such as Flickr, YouTube, Second Life, MySpace, and others to spread the word about their products.

The danger is coming in and just starting to market, rather than becoming a part of the community. It is akin to having someone show up at a social party, open their briefcase full of display samples, and start selling. The proper course (in this example) would be to go to the party, and as you are making casual conversation with a partygoer, mention that you sell X. When they express interest, give them a short synopsis, and direct them out of the party for “the sale.” ■

Dean Trelvelino

Principal, Trelvelino/Keller Communications Group

The Future of Social Media

Today, we would estimate that 90 percent of our business, much like many public relations firms, revolves around more traditional tools while 10 percent is tied to some form of social media. In 12 to 24 months however, we anticipate social media will capture 25 percent or more of our business and serve as one of the

the business mainstream, which is weighing in on its validity. Some will come on board early as an extension of their Web sites, and others will take longer particularly those mid-size companies over \$100 million to \$1 billion who are just large enough to not want to risk it and just small enough to not feel they need to do it.

Divide and conquer with your organization so that all bases of what exists today are covered because every day is a potential day for new environments.

Dean Trelvelino
Principal

Trelvelino/Keller Communications Group

dominant catalysts for our own growth. Agencies who don't see it coming, who don't prepare internally with extensive training, will find themselves competing more aggressively for a smaller segment of the market. Eventually, without a forward thinking eye to the future, they run the risk of losing position in the marketplace.

In 2006, we recommended some sort of blogging engagement to all of our clients. That recommendation may be in the form of monitoring blogs initially. It may be in the form of identifying key staff (subject matter experts) who will respond to daily or weekly monitoring of blogs to share their opinions. Or it may be tied to the development of a client or third party-hosted blog.

We expect blogging will increase consistently, but will not have exceedingly high spikes in the marketplace. We are well beyond early adopters and have moved into

Other social media environments such as Second Life and Kaneva are challenging individuals and marketers on where to spend their mindshare, and that in itself appears to have slowed down the growth of blogging.

Developing the Blog as a Tool

The audience, the product, and the cost all have a deciding vote in the role of a blog as a tool. Most important, it should be a supporting tool, though not the driving tool, not yet at least. Certainly more consumer-friendly products can be better served by a blog or b2b products that have an established infrastructure — associations, regular trade shows, Web sites, etc., where the community talks consistently. A blog makes for a perfect environment to host a more dynamic dialogue.



Dean Trelvelino

Principal

Trelvelino/Keller Communications Group

"I believe the market will come to rely more and more on blog experts, whether they are in-house at an agency or independent consultants."

- 16 years of PR experience; launched his own firm in 2003
- Has served in executive positions with three of the largest global public relations firms
- Has trained executives and management at Coca-Cola, MindSpring, and EarthLink

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Within our organization approximately five percent of our resources are devoted to developing blogs. However, as stated earlier, we believe that over the next 12 to 24 months, as much as 25 percent of our business will revolve around some form of social media, be it blogs, 3D virtual worlds, online gaming, or user-generated content. The primary drivers are the radically elevating numbers tied to these emerging environments where companies want a presence and a voice.

In our organization, it is a senior-level responsibility to write the content for the blog, if it is in fact on the agency's behalf. If it is

content for a client, it is the agency's responsibility to source those blog writers who are either within the client organization or third party, impartial bloggers. Most important, it must be clear to the public at large who is writing the blog; if it is a paid consultant, that must be disclosed.

Future of Blogging

Last year, we hosted a seminar called SpeakingBlog, under the guise of it really being a new form of communication, a new language that all of us have to learn, have to teach ourselves, have to follow the rules of engagement. From our point of view, understanding this medium as a mainstream form of communication is not something that we would hand off to a consultant. It is something that we, as a forward-thinking agency, must become immersed in and establish our own credibility.

Expert Advice

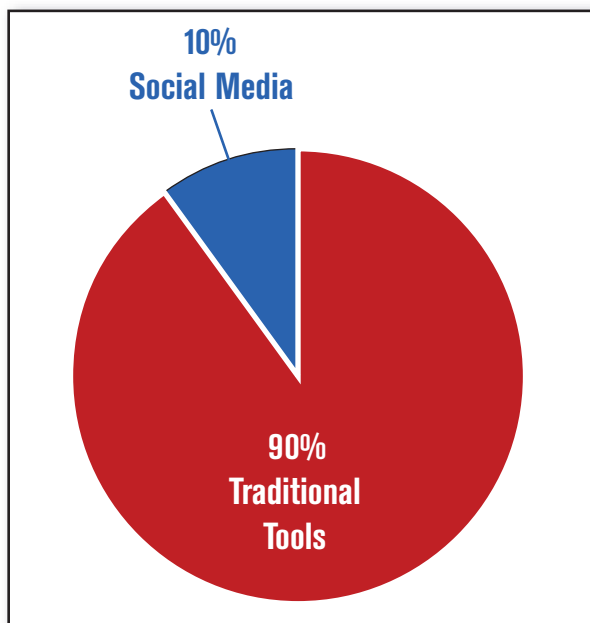
One major challenge in using blogs for marketing and PR purposes is sifting through the massive amount of searchable material that you pull from the various blog search engines. We have looked aggressively at technologies that will deposit the results we want on our desktop without the laborious searching. We continue to look for a better solution in the marketplace. We know it is a matter of time.

We believe that blogs are a powerful, yet supplemental tool today. That will likely change over time, and yet, there are instances of very influential blogs that can command mindshare, move product, and influence decision-making. Those are few and far between, and so we believe that a blog's place is as a powerful, supplemental vehicle.

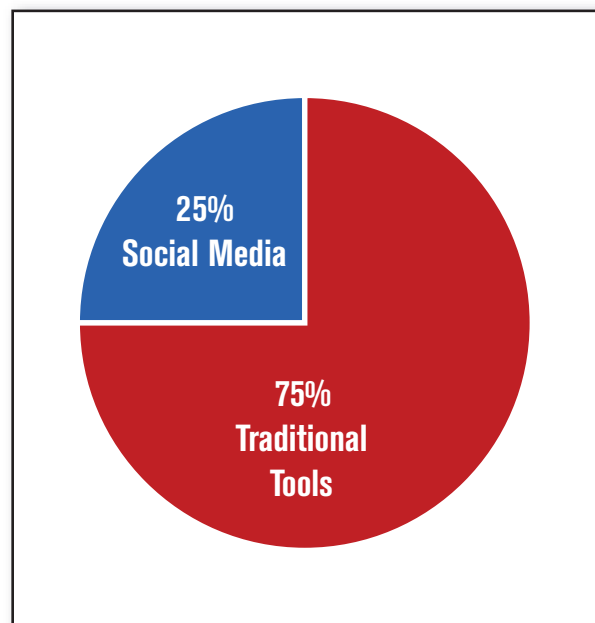
In 2006, we met with each of our clients and presented SpeakingBlog as an introduction to blogging. It received one of the most positive responses I have ever seen in 20 years as a communications

professional. Some felt a sense of anxiety over not knowing what was being said about their company. Others saw it as an incredibly affordable means of building community. Getting them past the idea and into execution is a longer road though, unless they are surrounded by controversy and their brand is in jeopardy via social communities. That is a catalyst to blogging. Without that sense of urgency, for some it becomes a wish list vehicle. For the very aggressive and savvy, it becomes a priority.

Our Business Today



Our Business in 18 Months



Where Do You Start?

Education is important, both for our own company as well as our clients. First, we developed our own content, SpeakingBlog, and took our staff through an orientation before we took that content to market. We also engaged staff in the content development as a means of building their own base of education. Today, staff take the lead in hosting a Social Media 101 program several times a month, taking a different aspect of social media which we see as the larger universe, versus simply thinking in terms of blogs.

We did our research and developed a methodology that is built around three stages of entry into the blogosphere.

- *Stage I:* Monitor the blog community.
- *Stage II:* Engage in blogging as a conditioning mechanism to understand how it works, how often you need to respond, how to search, track, and link, when you place your self and your organization at risk.
- *Stage III:* Host your own blog, but one that is dynamic and serves multiple purposes, not simply your own agenda.

Since we entered the blogging space, we were always very careful to use two filters — authenticity and passion — when providing the written word. There have been a number of incidents in the marketplace where those two principles were compromised. The public relations industry has a shining example of the marketplace's lack of tolerance for agency staff using a blog to represent the voices of its client. The good news is that because it was one of the largest public relations firms in the world partnered with one of the largest retailers in the world, it serves as a reminder for all businesses and agencies to remain authentic with your blog voice. In many ways, it's no different than a writer attempting to pass off fiction as non-fiction that also doesn't sit well with afternoon talk show hosts, publishers and consumers at large.

Blogging and Beyond

Regardless of whether you are manufacturing running shoes for retail distribution, broadcasting the weather to the world at large, providing working capital to small businesses, or selling security software to Fortune 1000 companies, the future of communications is well

beyond traditional print media, advertising, and Web sites. All audiences continue to reinvent their lifestyles and the way they digest information, holding onto a piece of traditional mediums and layering in new forms of communication.

Companies must continue to maintain those traditional environments as long as consumers and businesses continue such practices as frequenting coffee shops (last time I checked, those are still proliferating) for long reads of the newspaper or launching new magazines, which we have seen most recently from Forbes and Conde Nast. Public relations professionals, now more than ever, must seek ongoing education about new environments with practical experience — avatars on Second Life, presence on MySpace, a recruiting blog. Divide and conquer with your organization so that all bases of what exists today are covered because every day is a potential day for new environments. ■

Ideas to Build Upon & Action Points

I. Marketing Online Through Blogging

There are two ways to market online through blogging:

- Start a corporate blog
- Connect with the existing blogging community

Corporate blog

- Online social media is not a one-way street.
- The goal of blogging is to create a community around a topic and/or product.
- The biggest mistake that companies make when starting to blog is treating the blog like a regular Web site or a conduit for press releases.

Engaging the blogging community

- Establish connections with bloggers who might be interested in the things your company offers.
- Keep them in the loop and occasionally offer them a “scoop” for their readers.
- It is about the relationship: between you and the blogger, and between the blogger and his/her audience.

II. The Bottom Line

Blogs are a new means to a new end, providing the opportunity for direct, real-time conversations with customers and stakeholders. With this ability comes a responsibility to be transparent and to follow through on the conversations — otherwise, the blog can do more harm than good.

The ultimate motive for blogging commercially should be to engage customers or potential customers, and to expand your sphere of influence.

- Blogs should not be used as pure advertisement or sales promotion.
- Create something that is authentic and brings interesting information about your “universe” to your current and prospective target audience/s.

III. Must-Have Components for Successful Blogging

Corporate culture

- Is the corporate culture one of transparency? Is the potential blogger entertaining or interesting?
- Is the company committed to blogging for the long haul?

Prospective audience Is the targeted audience one that will be moved favorably by blogging?

Dedicated soft resources

- Is there someone who has expertise and a personality that lends itself to blogging?
- Who is available to blog in a timely manner?
- Does that person need an editor?
- Who is the creator and keeper of the blogging policy?

The product being marketed

Does the product lend itself to creating a larger and interesting conversation?

IV. Golden Rules for Focusing Online Marketing

Blogs cannot exist in a vacuum

- Use blogs for their specific strengths; they are not a cure-all.
- Each form of marketing has its own role, and online marketing alone is not appropriate for most products.

Focus on the long tail

- Products that have low demand or low sales volume can collectively make up a market share that rivals or exceeds the few market leaders.
- Blogging can tap into these niche markets.

Maintain transparency

- Integrity and transparency (of identity) are critical in using blogs for PR and marketing.
- Nothing alienates an online community more than dishonesty, or even perceived dishonesty.

V. Essential Take-Aways

Blogs are still a long way from being mainstream, but they offer a different set of opportunities. Social media offers the ultimate in pinpointing a target market and delivering information that consumers are willing to receive.

Bloggging must always be a two-way exchange.

- Approaching them like traditional media will alienate audiences.
- The key to success for online marketing is to stay with the early adopters and change strategy as needed. ■



10 KEY QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS

- 1 Currently, how often do you use blogging for marketing and PR purposes? Do you expect the amount that blogging is used to increase or decrease over the next 12 months? Why?
- 2 When you have used blogging for marketing and PR, could you describe customers' reactions? Did you change anything about the blog based on customer feedback?
- 3 How have managers around the company responded to the use of blogging for marketing and PR? Have you changed the use of blogging for PR and marketing based on managers' feedback? Please explain.
- 4 What percentage of your marketing and PR resources is devoted to developing blogs? Do you expect this percentage to increase or decrease over the next 12 months? What is driving this increase or decrease?
- 5 Could you give a breakdown of your marketing and PR efforts? For what percentage of marketing and PR do you use traditional tools such as print advertising or press kits? For what percentage of marketing and PR do you use newer tools such as blogs?
- 6 What factors are typically most compelling in deciding whether to use a blog as a tool in a new marketing or PR campaign? Prospective audience? Cost? Type of product being marketed?
- 7 In your company, typically who writes the content for the blog? What is the involvement of senior management?
- 8 What role can consultants play in developing blogs for use in PR or marketing? How often do you hire a consultant when developing blogs?
- 9 What best practices do you utilize in using blogs for PR and marketing? How were these best practices identified? Did all of them originate internally, or did you identify them from peer companies?
- 10 What is your vision for the use of blogs in PR and marketing? Do you believe blogs are a powerful new tool, or that blogs are only a supplement to traditional PR and marketing?