

Why Advertising, Marketing and PR Pros Should Blog

Most advertising, marketing and public relations professionals know a blog when they see one, but when it comes to actually using this relatively new, self-publishing platform, there are still many skeptics and naysayers among us. This time next year, however, those people will likely have come to their senses. In 2005, I dare say you would have to be either misinformed or just plain obstinate to not at least consider adding a blog to your business plan. Here are ten reasons why:

1. **Blogs are Interactive.** In many cases, marketing is a monologue, a well-choreographed sales pitch to an audience of passive prospects. But one of the key attributes of a blog is that it allows readers to provide honest, public feedback that is posted below the author's spiel. It involves your audience. By granting the opportunity to respond almost instantly to any and all posts, a blogger is building a mutually-beneficial relationship with his or her constituency. As the level of confidence grows between a blog and its readers, so does the potential for lucrative, new business activity.

2. **Blogs are Humanizing.** A blog may be dependent on cold, Web-based technology for hosting and distribution, but its success depends on the ability of its author to come across as honest, credible and down-to-earth. There is no spinning of the truth in the blogosphere. The idea is to break through the corporate-speak and to put a fresh, trustworthy face on your organization. Like a good newspaper column or editorial, most blogs are written in one strong, opinionated voice and don't shy away from controversy and difficult subjects. Some of the best business blogs in existence are some of the most candid.

3. **Blogs are Inexpensive.** In most cases, the only cost to the author of a blog is the value of the time and talent required to create and maintain it. Sure, some hosted services, like Typepad, charge a modest monthly fee. But there are plenty of free, ad-supported blogging services and tools available. My blog, *A Fine Kettle of Fish* (written under the aegis of Yellowfin Direct Marketing) uses perhaps the most popular one of them all, Blogger. It doesn't matter which service and tools you use to publish yours, however – the financial barriers to entry are so few and far between, you almost can't afford *not* to establish a presence in the blogosphere.

4. **Blogs are Immediate.** A blog makes it possible for the everyday communications professional to distribute newsworthy, thematic content to a large, like-minded audience – without many, if any, layers of approval – almost instantaneously. If timeliness is a critical element of your publishing plan, it's an irresistible platform. A blog allows you to draw out invaluable feedback, too, without having to lollygag through the traditional rites of business courtship. Comments from readers are akin to free market research. If your goal is to establish an open, online dialogue with prospects and influential people who might otherwise not give you the time of day, a blog just may be your entrée – it certainly is a unique ice-breaker.

5. **Blogs are Infectious.** Like any good viral marketing campaign, the content of the best

blogs is passed from reader to reader, extending the author's reach – and influence – exponentially. Bloggers are notorious for linking to other blogs that they recommend and respect. And other related sources of news, information and opinion – even offline, traditional publications – won't hesitate to pick up an interesting post and republish it. So, in effect, a blog gives you the power of a syndicated columnist. What's more, search engines such as Google are all over blogs, especially when they're updated regularly. Blogging results in more top placements than you ever could have imagined for you and your organization.

6. Blogs are Empowering. Today's consumers and business prospects are desensitized to the sales pitch. They've seen and heard it all. Such rampant skepticism reared its ugly head in a recent Gallup survey, which ranked people in advertising very low for their honesty and ethics. Ouch! At the very least, we may as well accept this much: we have lost more than a modicum of control. However, because a blog is such an open, grassroots medium, unadorned and unplugged, its trust factor is high from the get-go. The format alone is engaging and empowering. With RSS (Really Simple Syndication), the audience decides what they want and when they want it. They have the upper hand. And by giving recipients the authority to post their own comments, it's easy for the public – and fellow bloggers – to hold advertising, marketing and PR pros accountable for their claims. Think *quid pro quo*.

7. Blogs are Enjoyable. There are many sound business reasons to blog, but let's not forget how much of a pleasure they are for both author and audience. Seriously, the fun factor should not be underestimated. Most blogs are quick and easy to absorb, and a refreshing change of pace from typical marketing riffs and age-old corporate-speak. Bloggers aren't just writers, they're also publishers, opinion-leaders, risk-takers and entrepreneurs. They're people who are inclined to live by the mantra, *carpe diem*. They're passionate about their craft and evangelical about their content. And in many cases, their readers are just as fanatical.

8. Blogs are Authoritative. We're not talking about those cathartic, diary-like blogs kept by moody, meandering teenagers. We're talking about the most sophisticated among the blogosphere, the ones owned and operated by today's savviest business people. Written by the heaviest hitters in their fields, these blogs go a long way toward formalizing their authors' knowledge, insight and overall sphere of influence. Ideally, your blog will provide readers with plenty of fresh, premium content they can't find anywhere else. But you had better think twice before posting. If you haven't done your homework, your readers won't hesitate to call you out. On the other hand, if your commentaries are consistently on the mark, your blog may soon become a frequently visited destination and raise your industry profile to unprecedented, new heights.

9. Blogs are Valuable. A blog is tailor-made for storing and managing your intellectual capital. It's a centralized repository for experience and expertise, an incredibly easy way to disseminate key, timely information to an audience of readers who are already interested in what you have to offer. The cost to set up and maintain a blog is practically nil. And the dividends – for those on either side of the equation – can be priceless. As

Jeremy Wright, author of the business and technology blog, Ensign, says: “Anything which can get the right info to the right people at the right time, empower your company to become a thought leader and let you know what your customers and the industry are thinking about you in real time is something that has massive value.”

10. **Blogs are Popular.** As recently as five years ago, there really weren't that many blogs in existence, but today the blogosphere is growing so rapidly that it's only a matter of time before this revolutionary, new medium reaches the tipping point. If you use press releases, newsletters and bylined articles to promote your products and people, blogs are the next *better* thing – now. In 2004, the word, blog, topped Merriam-Webster's list of the ten most looked-up words. And blogs received wide acclaim in The New York Times Magazine's recent Year in Ideas issue. Blogs are here, there and everywhere to stay.

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