OgilvyInsights

The Executive Blogger's Guide to Building a Nest of Blogs, Wikis & RSS.

"People build brands as birds build nests, from scraps and straws we chance upon… People come to conclusions about brands as the result of an accountable number of different stimuli: many of which are way outside the control or even influence of the products owner."

— Jeremy Bullmore, former chairman JWT London, and director of WPP

Welcome to the Blogosphere: The End of Top-Down Talk

Changes in online technology have taken what was already a revolution in communication and now morphed the internet into a real-time forum wherein for the first time, participants are as powerful as traditional controllers of media and public relations messages. Blogs are unmasking improprieties, ending careers, and damaging brands. Yet Blogs are also building and strengthening brands. Understanding Blogs and their unique culture and voice is imperative; trying to exploit this new format without that understanding will surely end in a vitriolic stoning of your brand. But choosing to ignore Blogs will leave you at the mercy of the stone throwers as well.

While the advent of the Web spawned millions of new communicators and content providers around the world, the Web page format still followed the old broadcast model of one source beaming out to many. Granted, chat groups allowed for more of a conversation, but nothing compared to the noise being generated via Weblogs ("Blogs"). The creation of Blogs and Wikis has enabled a very different approach: the real-time open forum. Blogs may have started as online journals for computer geeks or angst-ridden teens, but now they have become a force to be reckoned with in the corporate and political spheres, many times acting as gatekeepers or even overturning the mainstream media world, ending powerful careers or killing product lines. And yet, understanding and harnessing these new technologies can serve as both an early warning system for what is being said about your company, and as a way for your company to lead the conversation in a manner that positions it as a trusted leader.

What are Blogs?

The term "Weblog" was coined in 1997 by Jarn Barger whose site "Robot Wisdom" was an effort to log various sites he encountered on

the Web. But an accumulation of interesting links is only part of what a Blog has become. Dave Winer, creator of an early Blog called "Scripting News" said: "Weblogs are often-updated sites that point to articles elsewhere on the web, often with comments, and to on-site articles. A weblog is kind of a continual tour, with a human guide whom you get to know. There are many guides to choose from and each develops an audience."

So blogs are a sort of frequently updated, online journal that mixes personal opinion and daily life with observations and links to other sources and allow for readers to contribute their own thoughts and reactions.

Winer created software making it easy to create a Blog (Radio Userland). And others such as LiveJournal, Blogger.com and Xanga created Web-based blogging templates that allow anyone to start their own blog in minutes with no knowledge whatsoever of programming. The revolution was underway. Today there are between 10 million and 35 million blogs in the US and some countries, such as Korea, claim more than 10 million.

When it comes to business, blogs are being used to hold a conversation with customers, with employees, and with media. They can serve as effective vehicles for marketing, idea testing, knowledge management, crisis communication, and thought leadership.

How Powerful Have Blogs Become?

On September 12, 2004 someone posted on a blog that a disposable Bic pen could open the supposedly impenetrable Kryptonite bicycle locks. Word spread via blogs. Kryptonite issued a statement that

its locks still deterred theft. *The New York Times* published the story the next day. Then, according to blog monitoring company Technorati, nearly 2 million people visited blogs to read more about it. In the end, Kryptonite paid $10 million in replacement locks—that's out of $25 million in total revenues.
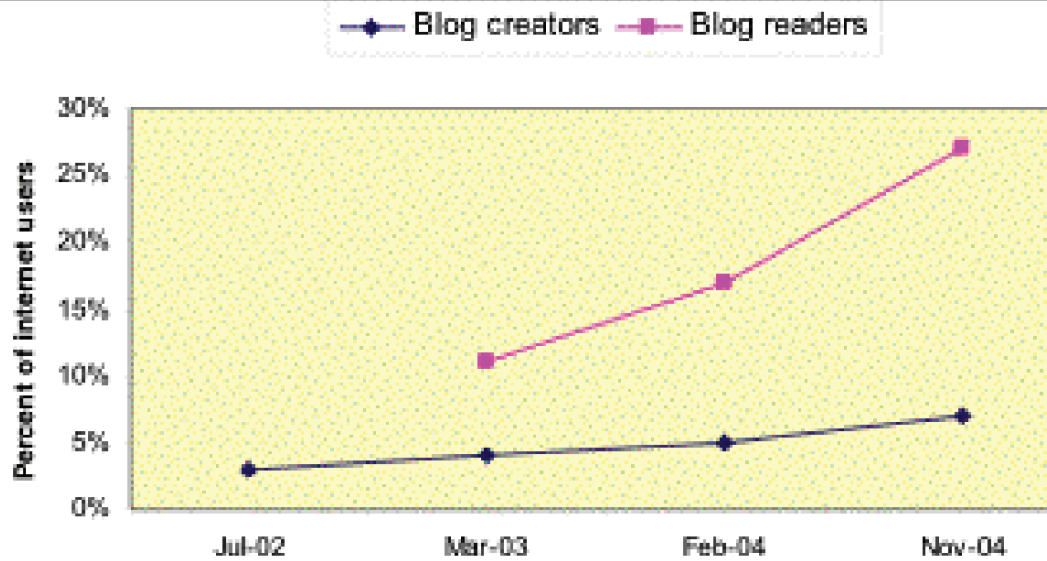
According to Technorati, 23,000 blogs are created every day—that's one every 3 seconds—and the number is accelerating. While the vast majority are diary-type blogs only of interest to a few family members or friends, some have gained large audiences.

According to the findings in the Pew Internet & American Life Project (November 2004):

- 27% of all internet users in the US now read blogs
- that equals 32 million Blog readers
- that's a 58% jump in just 9 months
- 7% or 8 million have created their own Blog
- 12% or 14 million have posted comments on a Blog
- and that is while still 62% do not even know what a Blog is

Clearly the tipping point has been reached and the numbers of Blog readers and creators will continue accelerating. And just who are these people? The Pew study reports that in the US they are:

- 57% male
- 48% are younger than 30
- 42% live in households earning more than $50,000
- 39% have college or graduate degrees

So they are a well-educated and affluent community. Yet Pew reports in this latest survey, "there has been greater-than-average growth in blog readership among women, minorities, those between the ages of 30 and 49."

Among the most popular blogs are those that look at politics, such as "Instapundit," and those that chronicle life in a gossip column ("Wonkette") or catalog the latest in gadgets and technology ("Gizmodo" and "BoingBoing"). But business blogs have amassed large audiences as well. Perhaps the most influential are those written by Microsoft's Robert Scoble ("Scobleizer") and Jonathan Schwartz (President of Sun Microsystems).

Scoble was formerly with NEC and a blogger who never held back in his criticism of Microsoft. In a gutsy move, Microsoft hired him and not only allowed him to continue blogging, it does not appear to censor him.

"Impressively, he has also succeeded where small armies of more conventional public-relations types have been failing abjectly for years: he has made Microsoft," writes the Economist, "with its history of monopolistic bullying, appear marginally but noticeably less evil to the outside world, and especially to the independent software developers that are his core audience. Bosses and PR people at other companies are taking note."

The Unique Characteristics of Blogs

Blogs are anti-establishment. They are personal, candid, irreverent, and informal. You will find a personal comment about last night's restaurant right in the middle of a serious analysis of software, a gossipy joke in the midst of an industry overview. Blogs are no place for so-called brochure ware or the official line. They are the insightful aside by Shakespeare's fool. The Blogger, while acerbic, is also humble in that he or she is quick to give credit to the writing and thinking of others by way of embedded links. Here's a checklist of Blog attributes:

Blog Attributes

- personal, candid, informal, transparent

- frequently updated

- journal entries in reverse order (most current on top)

- includes links to third parties

- includes reader comments

- includes "Trackback" function showing who is linking to it

- includes "Blogroll" of links to other Bloggers

- offers RSS feed (more on this later)

- includes archive of past entries

Sample Blogger Code Of Ethics from Forrester's Charlene Li:

1. I will tell the truth.

2. I will write deliberately and with accuracy.

3. I will acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly.

4. I will preserve the original post, using notations to show where I have made changes so as to maintain the integrity of my publishing.

5. I will never delete a post.

6. I will not delete comments unless they are spam or off-topic.

7. I will reply to emails and comments when appropriate, and do so promptly.

8. I will strive for high quality with every post – including basic spellchecking.

9. I will stay on topic.

10. I will disagree with other opinions respectfully.

11. I will link to online references and original source materials directly.

12. I will disclose conflicts of interest.

13. I will keep private issues and topics private, since discussing private issues would jeopardize my personal and work relationships

Business Blog Examples

While the earliest blogs may have been either tech or politics, they have taken root in many industries from autos to airplanes, from yogurt to appliances. Here's a look at several examples.

GM Vice Chairman Bob Lutz writes "FastLane" while GM also produces the micro interest "Small Block Engine" blog.

To illustrate the power of blogs, let's look at Autoblog.com. While it is in a crowded field that includes stalwart print brands such as *Motor Trend* and *Popular Mechanics* and AutoWeek with their own Web sites,

using BlogPulse's trend tool we can see that Autoblog has nearly pulled even with the big players.

Boeing marketing chief Randy Baseler is connecting with media and customers via his blog at www.boeing.com/randy

Stonyfield Farms catapulted itself from a little town organic dairy products company to a global player through four blogs including one written by a farmer. But perhaps its greatest insight was that its organic products were the choice of independent-minded, educated women. So one of its more popular blogs is "Strong Women" featuring articles and info perhaps not directly related to yogurt but right on target for the yogurt buyers.

How To Use RSS Newsreaders

Blogs can be read like any other Web site by going to its URL (ex: www.autoblog.com). However, about all blogs offer another option via something called RSS.

RSS stands for "really simple syndication." It is a form of programming that allows users to shop for, or subscribe to content, and bundle it together into a custom kind of browser called a feed aggregator or Newsreader. RSS or another similar technology called Atom, pushes or feeds the updated content automatically so all the user need do is open their Newsreader and all the RSS feeds will deliver the absolute latest

Here are examples of aggregators and readers:

content from Web sites or blogs. This means the reader need never check back with or visit the original Web site where they found the content. And they need not register for an email newsletter, nor risk being spammed. Most RSS links look like this:

The signature orange rectangle contains the letters "XML" because that is the programming language used—a sort of Rosetta stone of Web languages. But now you may also see custom links
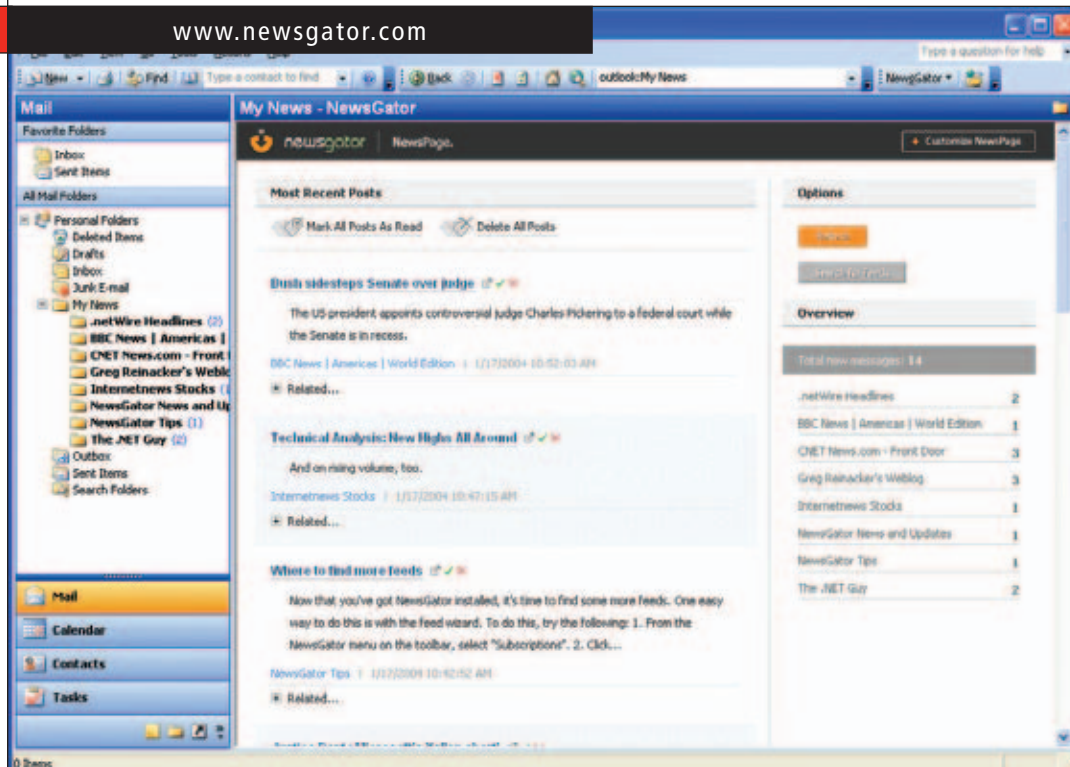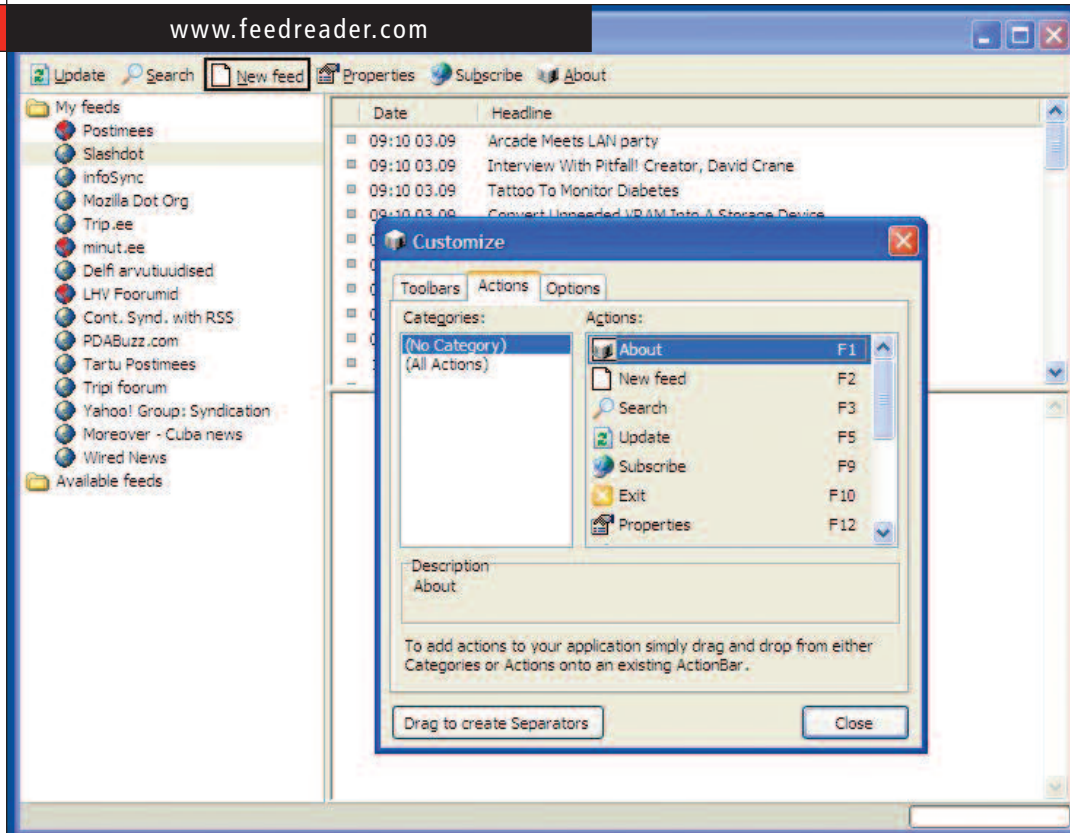
designed for specific Newsreaders such as these:

Using RSS means a constant, automatic stream of headlines, updated blog entries, or press releases. Soon media will come to expect companies to provide all releases in this format.
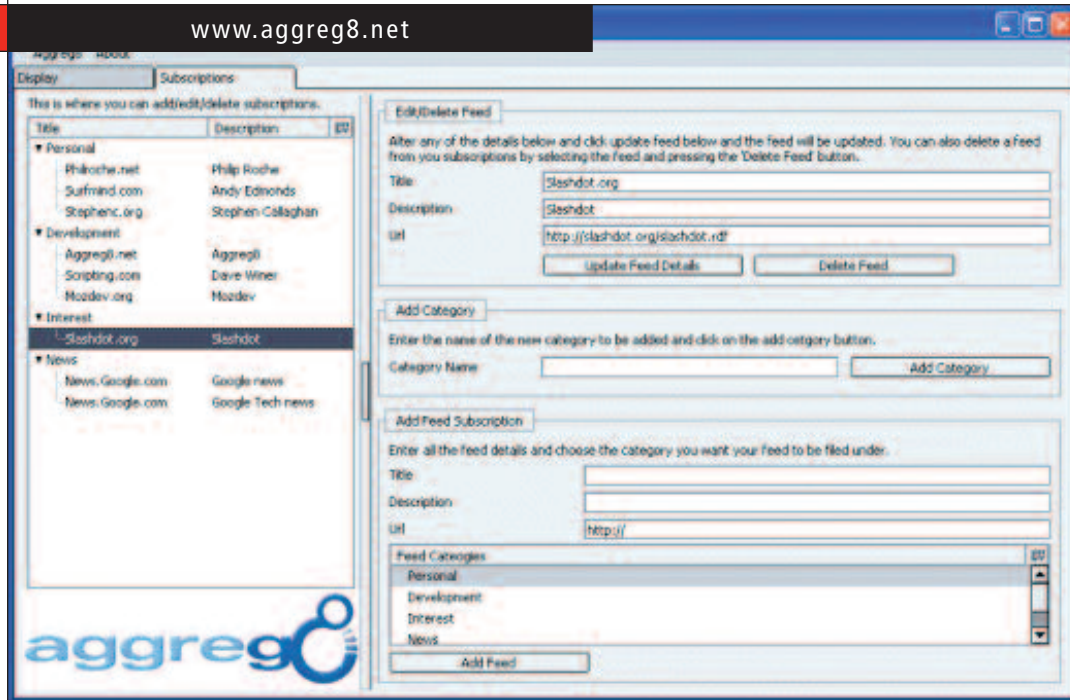
NewsGator www.newsgator.com

FeedReader

Bloglines

Aggreg8

FeedDemon

Some of the readers are free, Web-based services while others require downloading software and may require a subscription fee. The best allow you to bundle like content into custom folders. Some will integrate directly into MS Outlook.

Searching and Monitoring Blogs

You can use Google to find blogs if you know what they are called. But specialized blog search engines can help you find blogs even when you don't know what they are called. For example, what if you want to find blogs on the topic of autos but have no idea who writes them or what they are called? Here are some blog search engines:

www.blogsearchengine.com

www.daypop.com

www.technorati.com

www.feedster.com

www.blogdigger.com

www.blogstreet.com

www.pubsub.com

Blog monitors will display a sort of top hits ranking for blogs. Some may look at traffic, which blogs the most influential bloggers link to, and complicated metrics tracking the pass along viral nature of given blogs.

www.blogdex.net
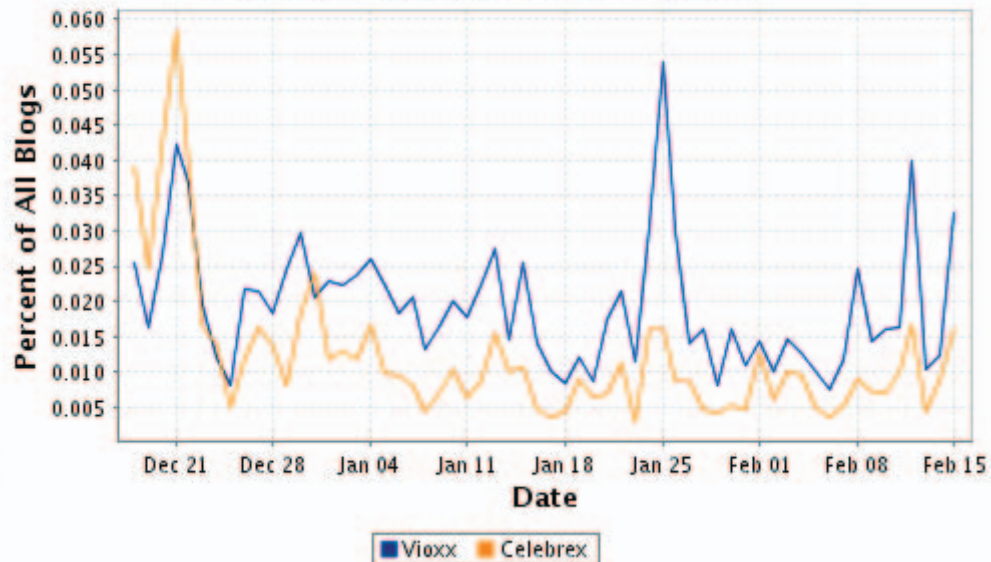
www.blogstreet.com

www.technorati.com

www.blogpulse.com

One particularly interesting blog monitor is Intelliseek's BlogPulse. BlogPulse not only gives a ranking, it uses a trend graphing tool to draw the buzz volume of topics or keywords over time. It will even allow you to input your own items to track. So imagine tracking your company against the competition as an early warning system. Here we have tracked the drugs Vioxx and Celebrex.

Launching Your Blog

There are three ways to start publishing your own blog.

- Use free Web-based commercial services
- Use subscription, hosted services
- Use software on your own company server

Each option has its merits and drawbacks. So here is a checklist.

If you want to dabble with non-professional blogging:

Choose free, advertising supported blog services such as:

Xanga
www.xanga.com (free with ads, premium service available)

LiveJournal
www.livejournal.com (free and paid versions)

MSN Spaces
http://spaces.msn.com/ (free)

Pros: free, simple to use

Cons: communities of kids with ads on the blogs; lacks professional tools; you won't own your content

If you want a more professional look that you can slightly customize:

Choose hosted services such as:

TypePad
www.typepad.com

Blogger
www.blogger.com

Pros: good enough quality for professional blogging; hosted online so no need for an IT department

Cons: modest subscription fee, limited customization, must use provider's domain name

If you want a very professional service combined with powerful tools:

Choose so-called "server side" software to be installed in your company such as:

Word Press
http://wordpress.org/
(free download)

Radio Userland
http://radio.userland.com/

Moveable Type
http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/

Pros: total control, good metrics and tools, your company domain name

Cons: need IT department to manage it on your company server

Corporate Policies and Blogging

Deciding whether or not to allow employees to blog is worth some careful thinking. There have been many cases of embarrassment or even firing bloggers.

Here is a set of guidelines offered by Gartner's blogger Charlene Li:

1. Make it clear that the views expressed in the blog are yours alone and do not necessarily represent the views of your employer.

2. Respect the company's confidentiality and proprietary information.

3. Ask your manager if you have any questions about what is appropriate to include in your blog.

4. Be respectful to the company, employees, customers, partners, and competitors.

5. Understand when the company asks that topics not be discussed for confidentiality or legal compliance reasons.

6. Ensure that your blogging activity does not interfere with your work commitments.

The goal is to try to allow for the candor required of bloggers while not compromising the company. Here are some other examples of corporate blogging policies:

- Sun Microsystems policy: http://www.tbray.org/ongoing/When/200x/2004/05/02/Policy

- Groove Net (Lotus Notes inventor Ray Ozzie): http://www.ozzie.net/blog/2002/08/24.html

- Harvard Law School: http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/terms

While some are a bit laid back and conversational, asking employees to use common sense (Sun, Groove), others are more button-down and legalistic (Harvard Law). It is particularly important that company bloggers understand they may need to comply with such sensitive matters as IPO quiet periods.

"Talking about revenue, future product ship dates, roadmaps, or our share price is apt to get you, or the company, or both, into legal trouble."
— from the Sun blogging policy

Blog Backfires

"If you fudge or lie on a blog, you are biting the karmic weenie. The negative reaction will be so great that, whatever your intention was, it will be overwhelmed and crushed like a bug."

— Steve Hayden, Vice Chairman, Ogilvy & Mather

Seeing how influential blogs are becoming, it can be tempting to try to co-opt them as part of a public relations effort. Given the somewhat skeptical, anti-establishment tone of blogs, attempts to make them part of the plan can backfire. Here are a couple of examples.

Mazda's Crash

First, Mazda created a blog called HalloweenM3 via a 23-year-old code-named "Kid Halloween" who listed his movie interests as all car chase movies. He linked to what he said were cool videos a friend of his recorded off local public access cable TV (which carries no ads). The videos were of Mazda cars break dancing, imitating skate boarders, and driving on Halloween night. Bloggers unmasked Kid Halloween as part of a corporate PR effort when they noticed the production values and the same videos posted on the Website of the agency that produced them. The response was an angry Blogosphere and thousands of pick-ups and links to the story. Mazda pulled the site.

The Mazda M3 skateboarding video

Dr. Pepper's Raging Cow Turns Blogosphere Sour

Cadbury's Dr. Pepper division created a new milk beverage called Raging Cow with hip, youth-oriented, edgy flavors such as "chocolate insanity" and an angry cow icon. Dr. Pepper hired Richards Interactive to create an obviously mock blog written by the cow. So far so good. Then Richards recruited six bloggers in the target demographic (18 to 24), flew them to Dallas to brief them and work with them and give them product samples. This was the part that angered the blogger world to such a degree that there was even a call for a boycott of the product with a boycott viral graphic that spread through blogs. They see the blogosphere as strictly a bottom-up grass roots world and react badly to any top-down marketing efforts.

Moblogs & Vblogs

Now blogs have moved on beyond text and graphics. **Moblogs** are blogs created by contributions from mobile devices. Some feature photos taken from mobile phones with cameras. The most popular such site is called "textamerica" (www.textamerica.com).

Vblogs add video to the format.

Podcasting is a form of audio blogging. Content creators make radio-style shows or interviews and feed them via RSS. Then you download them on your iPod or other MP3 player.

Wikis

Another emerging, collaborative online platform useful for business is the Wiki. It is named after the Hawaiian word for "quick" and perhaps even the Honolulu airport buses known as "Wiki Wikis."

Wikis are Websites that can easily be edited by anyone visiting it. The best example is a giant online encyclopedia (Wikipedia) growing every day through contributors.

Now the Wiki format is being used by corporations for internal project collaboration, information sharing and knowledge management.

Conclusion: Your Game Plan

Here's how the Asia Pacific President of Ogilvy Public Relations, Christopher Graves, suggests companies approach the Blogosphere.

1. Start reading business blogs to get a sense of tone, voice and content. Familiarize yourself with blog search engines and monitors. Check out the blogrolls and trackbacks.

2. Plan with your communications counsel to decide whether you are looking for a blog to: raise company profile through positioning you as a thought leader; create buzz to raise company and brand awareness; be a sales tool talking to prospects and existing customers; communicate internally for project collaboration; use as an internal knowledge management tool.

3. Be comfortable in your own skin. "Do not try to be funny or wisecracking if that's not you," advises Graves, "since blogs are about being candid and ringing true." It is better to be informal and personal, he says, but remain true to your own voice. Update frequently, even if briefly, and do not use a ghost blogger. Use loads of links to relevant information; remember — as a blogger you are the tour guide.

4. Write a company blogging policy (use the models in this paper).

5. Choose a publishing platform. While using a community, commercial and Web-based service such as LiveJournal or Xanga or MSN Spaces, "it's not appropriate for a corporate blog," suggests Graves. He advises using either a hosted professional service such as Typepad or even better, if your IT department is up to it, use software on your own server such as Moveable Type or Word Press or Radio Userland.

6. Make sure your trusted communications counselor holds a briefing session with your team so everyone understands the key points, the goals, the ground rules and the risks.

7. Make sure the blog is promoted via search engines and other blogs. Mutual links, or blogrolls, are the way to network in the blogosphere.

8. While influencing key bloggers may be a sound strategy, approach this with extreme caution and transparency. The blog world punishes top-down tactics or undisclosed co-opting of bloggers.

Glossary

Atom: A form of programming for Websites or blogs that will feed the content to end users rather than require them to return to the site for updates.

Blog: An online journal that mixes candor, informality, opinion and links third-party information. It is easy to update with no programming needed and allows readers to add their own comments.

Blogroll: A link within a blog, usually in a vertical menu along the side, to other blogs.

Moblog: A blog created through the input from mobile devices such as PDAs or phones. They may also include photos from mobile camera phones.

Newsreader: Browser-like window that allows readers to shop for and subscribe to different content providers (using RSS) and then aggregate all the feeds into the browser.

Podcasting: Audio content similar to blogs that can be downloaded to iPods or other MP3 players.

RSS: Really Simple Syndication. A form of programming code that allows Website or blog readers to subscribe to them in order to automatically get updates fed to them in a Newsreader. The content can be anything from thin slices to whole blogs or press releases.

Trackback: A piece of programming that shows a blogger who is linking to their blog and delivers the snippets of what they said.

Vblog: Video blog.

Wiki: From the Hawaiian term for "quick," this is a form of Website that allows readers to edit and contribute to the Wiki. It is an open, collaborative site on the Web.

The Corporate Weblog Manifesto (by Robert Scoble)

1. **Tell the truth.** The whole truth. Nothing but the truth. If your competitor has a product that's better than yours, link to it. You might as well. We'll find it anyway.

2. **Post fast on good news or bad.** Someone say something bad about your product? Link to it — before the second or third site does — and answer its claims as best you can. Same if something good comes out about you. It's all about building long-term trust. The trick to building trust is to show up! If people are saying things about your product and you don't answer them, that distrust builds. Plus, if people are saying good things about your product, why not help Google find those pages as well?

3. **Use a human voice.** Don't get corporate lawyers and PR professionals to cleanse your speech. We can tell, believe me. Plus, you'll be too slow. If you're the last one to post, the joke is on you!

4. **Make sure you support the latest software/web/human standards.** If you don't know what the W3C is, find out. If you don't know what RSS feeds are, find out. If you don't know what weblogs.com is, find out. If you don't know how Google works, find out.

5. **Have a thick skin.** Even if you have Bill Gates' favorite product people will say bad things about it. That's part of the process. Don't try to write a corporate weblog unless you can answer all questions — good and bad — professionally, quickly, and nicely.

6. **Don't ignore Slashdot.**

7. **Talk to the grassroots first.** Why? Because the main-stream press is cruising weblogs looking for stories and looking for people to use in quotes. If a mainstream reporter can't find anyone who knows anything about a story, he/she will write a story that looks like a press release instead of something trustworthy. People trust stories that have quotes from many sources. They don't trust press releases.

8. **If you screw up, acknowledge it.** Fast. And give us a plan for how you'll unscrew things. Then deliver on your promises.

9. **Underpromise and over deliver.** If you're going to ship on March 1, say you won't ship until March 15. Folks will start to trust you if you behave this way. Look at Disneyland. When you're standing in line you trust their signs. Why? Because the line always goes faster than its says it will (their signs are engineered to say that a line will take about 15% longer than it really will).

10. **If Doc Searls says it or writes it, believe it.** Live it. Enough said. (Note: Searls is author of "Cluetrain Manifesto").

11. **Know the information gate-keepers.** If you don't realize that Sue Mosher reaches more Outlook users than nearly everyone else, you shouldn't be on the PR team for Outlook. If you don't know all of her phone numbers and IM addresses, you should be fired. If you can't call on the gatekeepers during a crisis, you shouldn't try to keep a corporate weblog (oh, and they better know how to get ahold of you since they know when you're under attack before you do — for instance, why hasn't anyone from the Hotmail team called me yet to tell me what's going on with Hotmail and why it's unreachable as I write this?).

12. **Never change the URL of your weblog.** I've done it once and I lost much of my readership and it took several months to build up the same reader patterns and trust.

13. **If your life is in turmoil and/or you're unhappy, don't write.** When I was going through my divorce, it affected my writing in subtle ways. Lately I've been feeling a lot better, and I notice my writing and readership quality has been going up too.

14. **If you don't have the answers, say so.** Not having the answers is human. But, get them and exceed expectations. If you say you'll know by tomorrow afternoon, make sure you know in the morning.

15. **Never lie.** You'll get caught and you'll lose credibility that you'll never get back.

16. **Never hide information.** Just like the space shuttle engineers, your information will get out and then you'll lose credibility.

17. **If you have information that might get you in a lawsuit, see a lawyer before posting, but do it fast.** Speed is key here. If it takes you two weeks to answer what's going on in the market-place because you're scared of what your legal hit will be, then you're screwed anyway. Your competitors will figure it out and outmaneuver you.

18. **Link to your competitors and say nice things about them.** Remember, you're part of an industry and if the entire industry gets bigger, you'll probably win more than your fair share of business and you'll get bigger too. Be better than your competitors — people remember that. I remember sending lots of customers over to the camera shop that competed with me and many of those folks came back to me and said "I'd rather buy it from you, can you get me that?" Remember how Bill Gates got DOS? He sent IBM to get it from DRI Research. They weren't all that helpful, so IBM said "hey, why don't you get us an OS?"

19. **BOGU.** This means "Bend Over and Grease Up." I believe the term originated at Microsoft. It means that when a big fish comes over (like IBM, or Bill Gates) you do whatever you have to do to keep him happy. Personally, I believe in BOGU'ing for EVERYONE, not just the big fish. You never know when the janitor will go to school, get an MBA, and start a company. I've seen it happen. Translation for weblog world: treat Gnome-Girl as good as you'd treat Dave Winer or Glenn Reynolds. You never know who'll get promoted. I've learned this lesson the hard way over the years.

20. **Be the authority on your product/company.** You should know more about your product than anyone else alive, if you're writing a weblog about it. If there's someone alive who knows more, you damn well better have links to them (and you should send some goodies to them to thank them for being such great advocates).

21. **Know who is talking about you.**

Christopher Graves, President, Asia Pacific, Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide.

Chris joined Ogilvy PR in early 2005 after 23 years in business news. He spent the last 18 years with Dow Jones on both the editorial and business sides. He was one of the founders of Wall Street Journal Television, Managing Editor of *Asia Business News* (ABN), Vice President of News and Programming for CNBC Asia, Vice President of News and Programming for CNBC Europe, Managing Director of Business Development (EMEA & Asia) for Dow Jones Consumer Electronic Publishing (WSJ.com), and *Managing Director of Far Eastern Economic Review.*

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