



Incorporating Blogs
into the Marketing Mix

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Introduction

Blogs, it is very clear, are here to stay. Casting aside the flood of teenage journals, travel diaries, link farms and spam blogs created every hour, thousands of communities of interest are being fed hourly or daily by dedicated bloggers.

These interests stretch from knitting clubs to small block engine fanatics; there are niches for every occupation and preoccupation imaginable. Many bloggers draw upon a detailed (and often opinionated) knowledge of their interests or industry. Their readers are equally focused – and outspoken. In the lexicon of the public relations industry, they are influencers, thought leaders, early adopters.

Blogs, most everyone can agree, are part of a larger wave of social media that are disrupting the everyday business of traditional media – particularly newspapers. Specialist blogs are drawing readers from trade magazines, while online classifieds are draining revenue from weeklies, indies and dailies. Our marketing environment is changing dramatically.

Viewed single-mindedly, blogs are an entryway to an active conversation about your products, your pricing, your retail outlets, or your brand. Bloggers are dissecting your hiring policies, your new store placement, your holiday specials and the nutritional content of your new sandwich.

Bloggers'll turn on you like a hungry `gator

Marketers, however, have to approach this group carefully. Following in the path lit by the Cluetrain Manifesto,³ bloggers and their readers value transparency, honesty, two-way conversation and above-board behaviour. Any attempt to illicitly manufacture buzz, if discovered, can provoke a maelstrom of negative chatter – which can eventually generate enough interest to be picked up by more mainstream outlets. They aren't your usual consumer: they won't be herded, and they won't eat everything you feed them.

The market is growing

Opportunities abound for companies willing to invest some time and ingenuity in a creating a marketing campaign aimed at bloggers and their readers. One





Forrester Research analyst estimates U.S. businesses will spend between 50 and 100 million dollars on blog advertising and marketing this year. ⇨

Ready-made programs like AdWords, AdSense and BlogAds offer easy entry into this "space" for advertisers, but more adventuresome companies are developing marketing campaigns to capitalize on the inherent advantages of the blogging world: links, conversations and immediacy.

Target them incorrectly, and you will learn that bloggers are equally comfortable ripping your marketing efforts to shreds – from pitch to placement, from copywriting to on-site merchandising.

Do you crave Buzz or Sales?

When your marketing team settles down around the conference table, is it more important for you to score mentions in the trade mags, or to have a happy sales manager? Are your performance indicators based on web site hits and word-of-mouth? Is buzz a fundamental part of your marketing strategy?

10/7/05

Total blogs "measured" by Technorati = **18,900,000**

- > 450 blogs have >1000 other blogs linking to them = 0.002%
- > 15,000 blogs have >100 blogs linking to them = 0.08%
- > 180,000 blogs have >10 blogs linking to them = 1%
- > 800,000 blogs have at least 1 blog linking to them = 4%

Over 18,000,000 blogs have 0 blogs linking to them = 95%
http://www.secretdowndung.com/archives/2005/10/measuring_the_a.html

You'd better take a long hard look at the blogs you target, then. As this box shows, the total blogging community may be large, but the number of "influential" blogs is still relatively small. As I explain later, marketers who really want to have an impact on their sales must make a

concerted effort to identify those blogs with sufficient "google juice" ⇨ AND significant daily readership that is relevant to your market and your product.

Are you pushing Brands or Products?

The decision facing many marketers comes down to strategy: are bloggers and their readers one component of a larger brand management strategy, or are they the target of a shorter-term campaign?

The world of blogs has accelerated at such a pace in 2005 that there are plenty of examples for each strategy. In the tech world, it has become commonplace for





large and small software companies to open the doors for their employees and executives to blog – in the case of Sun, MSFT and IBM (among others), providing them with a common blogging platform as well.

In the world of consumer and industrial goods, large multinationals and regional manufacturers alike are exploring the world of blogging, using blogs to add character to otherwise bland corporate identities or to emphasize differentiation between similar commodity products like cheese and yogurt.

Brand identity as the overarching message

At General Motors, for instance, Vice Chairman Bob Lutz and other senior executives have blogged[⇒] about trade shows, product developments and pricing strategies. For a multi-billion dollar old-line manufacturing company, this is quite a surprising development.



Lately, GM has been getting grief from some bloggers[⇒] for not being as forthright about the management shockwaves running through GM's Renaissance Center headquarters in downtown Detroit.

Stonyfield Farms, on the other hand, is becoming comfortable with being held up as an example for corporate bloggers.[⇒]



The New Hampshire company – now majority owned by Groupe Danone but still run by its long-standing management team, prides itself on the all-natural and organic ingredients in its dairy and yogurt products. Stonyfield has maintained a

portfolio of blogs on the corporate website, one each aimed at babies, children, women and farm fanciers.[⇒]





Vespa, the Italian scooter manufacturer still trying to break into the US (and Canadian) markets, launched this summer. Their was launched with a relations push, and blog interest as



two blogs⇨ earlier marketing effort traditional public generating media part of a wide-

spread search for dedicated Vespa owners and scooter enthusiasts to work as bloggers.

Meant to promote the "urban mobile lifestyle," Vespa's blogs use personal experience and observations to highlight product attributes like design and performance while also touching on brand and lifestyle experiences. Rudimentary research by the company's PR agency also reveals that potential customers are happening upon the blogs while searching for specific Vespa models.

Over at the OPEN for Business division of American Express, marketers took a different tack this past October. Amex's mainstream advertising programs emphasize the company's focus on helping small business: a deal struck with three well-known business bloggers paid them to reference an Amex-sponsored speech by Sir Richard Branson as well as produce several follow-up posts on similar themes.⇨

Why American Express "Gets" Blogging

Dane, Anita, Clay and I are being paid by American Express to blog about this Richard Branson speech tonight, and continue this conversation about small business and entrepreneurship over the next few days. It's an interesting deal, and not something that has been done before, to my knowledge. The most interesting thing is that there are no parameters.

What am I supposed to blog about? Whatever I think. Whatever I find interesting. Answers to questions that are asked. How can they be so... non-controlling? Because they get it. They understand blogging. They want to see what happens. They want people to comment. They don't want to tell everyone what to say, because that's inauthentic. Press releases already fill that role.

<http://www.businesspundit.com/archives/002330.html>

Both the bloggers and the company have been quite straightforward about their arrangement, one that appears to benefit a common shared audience: small and medium-sized businesses.

That said, you may have noticed that each of these four examples uses a very different model to produce content and provide each blog with its "voice." Marketers, when considering the use of blogs in their campaign, must consider how their blog will appear to the public. They must take into account how their messages will resonate, and be received, when transmitted through a blog or network of blogs.





Instead of simply pushing corporate branding and messaging, blogs can also be used to encourage a more personal relationship with the consumer. Using relatively simple blogging technology – and maybe some of the free search, directory and analysis services like Technorati, PubSub, Blogpulse and Google Analytics – brand managers can test the strength (or weakness) of their brands and messaging among bloggers. They can even launch small campaigns to test alternative keywords, promotions and channels of communication.

Moving the Merchandise

Tesco, the dominant grocery chain in Britain, has leaped beyond blogging with its move to send details of its “Deal of the Day” to customers by RSS feed. RSS is the technology that underlies blogging, allowing readers to subscribe to specific feeds they find interesting and read them at their leisure.

The chain already sends 16-20 million emails a month to a variety of targeted lists, promoting different aspects of its business.↗ With RSS, it has opened another channel to communicate with its customers – a channel that benefits from customer buy-in and permission. As one blogger pointed out, all Tesco needs to do now is realize it should create an RSS feed for its most natural user -- all those customers who shop online.

A blogger from Manhattan had a different consumer experience: he had blogged about how hard it was to find his favourite deodorant – a Unilever product – in his local drugstores.↗ In short time, the blogger received an email from a Unilever marketing guy – who not only told him how to find stores stocking the product through the company website, but sent him a free case in appreciation for his support.

A word of warning: a blogger, much like the old ladies that spend Wednesday afternoon slowly cruising the sample tables at the grocery store, will take anything you offer them. Anything.

Blogs at the retail level

Finally, there is some evidence that blogs provide an opportunity for smaller businesses and individuals to market at little expense and with virtually no cost of entry.





For example, Blogger sites, combined with a free service like Flickr and a free classified service like Craigslist or something similar in Google Base, can help house sellers add one more item to their complement of marketing materials.

As many of the communications professionals attending this conference likely know, this technology naturally lends itself to marketing (or promoting, to be more blunt) information and analysis.

Professional services, whether in business consulting, financial planning, florists or even blog design and coding, can be refreshed with a simple and well-designed blog.

In fact, just in our area of specialization, there are dozens of high-profile blogs on advertising, marketing, communications and public relations.

The Take-Away?

Incorporating blogs and bloggers into your marketing campaign may prove challenging, if only because very few attempt it today. In a world dominated by management by comparison (what are the other guys doing?), it may still be difficult to win support for a stand-alone blog marketing campaign.

Advertising networks like BlogAds exist, however, to make targeted placement easier for you and your media planners.

The secret is to evaluate the environment before diving in. If you know your customer well, you'll likely be able to identify what blogs they may visit, or at least find copacetic and informative.

With enough preparation, you will reach your target audiences without spending money on unnecessary clicks and targeting irrelevant blogs.





Budget Rent-a-Car: a case study

During October and November 2005, Budget Rent-a-Car launched a blog-only promotional campaign to give away \$160,000 in prizes, particularly to a young, tech-savvy audience.

The Up Your Budget contest used blog postings and video clues to prompt contestants in 16 cities to hunt for cash rewards. Potential winners had to post to the contest blog (as well as leave a voice mail), and it is evident from reviewing the contest blog that a circle of feedback developed as complications and questions arose during the race.

Budget's contest was supported by approximately \$20,000 in ad buys on a network of 177 targeted blogs. Included were Gizmodo (electronics blog), Largehearted Boy (mp3 blog), Gothamist (city blog), Overheard in New York (city/satire blog) and Buzzmachine (media criticism blog).⇒

A series of ads were tested, composed of fairly simple pictures or Hugh Macleod cartoons⇒ supported by hypertext links to blogs and articles which referred to the contest. The ad campaign built upon the real strength of blogs – conversation – to identify real-time references from other bloggers to help build buzz and generate enthusiasm for the contest.


I can't outspend Hertz, but I can outsmart them"

Scott Deaver, EVP for marketing, Cendant Car Rental Group

Together, the ads buy produced approximately 60,000 click-throughs, almost half the blog's traffic as of late November.

Comparatively, the complete collection of 177 blogs did record 19.9 million impressions over the stretch of time when the ads were shown.⇒

**Winner! Red Square...
Dorkbot!!!!!**



"But come on, it's \$10,000.
Screw work." -- [Travel Post](#)
"the final clue -- a sticker in a public place..." -- [Just Jared](#)
"We are literally **watching the evolution...**" -- [beyond madison avenue](#)
[LIPYOURBUDGET.COM](#)

#2: 0.11% ctr





The total cost per click? About \$0.25.

Still, despite these measurements, doubt still lingers about the true impact of the Up Your Budget campaign. Scott Deaver, the EVP for marketing at the Cendant Car Rental Group, again: "The jury's still out on the metrics. I'd be lying if I said I know what to measure to determine success."





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→ <http://www.cluetrain.com/>

→ Charlene Li, quoted in *As Corporate Ad Money Flows Their Way, Bloggers Risk Their Rebel Reputation*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/26/technology/26blog.html>

→ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_juice

→ <http://fastlane.gmblogs.com/>

→ http://www.intuitive.com/blog/gm_fastlane_blog_gets_defensive_as_company_withers_away.html

→ <http://www.stonyfield.com/weblog/>

→ <http://www.stonyfield.com/weblog/BovineBugle/index.html>

→ <http://www.vespausa.com/VespaBlogs/>

→ <http://www133.americanexpress.com/osbn/landing/openadventures/index.asp>

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