



Business-to-Business Blogging: A New Way to Marketing Success?

A DJA Whitepaper

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Social media is all the rage, but is now the right time for your business-to-business company to jump on the bandwagon? Blogs can be essential for building buzz around the latest consumer electronic gadget, but will your customers make significant platform-defining buying decisions based on a blog? It's clear that blogs will have a role in B2B marketing in the future as many industry publications are adopting them as a way to expand their news delivery – but does that mean your company should have one as well? And if you don't have one does that mean your company won't be part of the blogosphere?

This whitepaper examines blogs and blogging and how and when business-to-business companies might use this tool. Blogs take time, resources and interesting information to share, but when developed and maintained correctly, they can offer businesses a powerful way to increase dialogue and build better relationships with customers and other important audiences.

History of Blogging

While the beginning of the weblog may be traced back to the 1990s, it wasn't until the 21st Century that the “blog” really took off. This rapid movement may be attributed to the 1999 launch of [Pitas](#), the first free blog creation Web site. Since then, blogs have continued to grow at a rapid pace. In October 2004, Technorati reported tracking 4,000 blogs, a number that has now ballooned to more than 133 million in its index as of 2008. The company reports that at the start of 2009, blogging has spread to 66 countries with entries written in 81 languages. There is no doubt that blogs have established a large presence in our society and are likely here to stay.

The profile of a blogger can vary significantly, with men and women of all ages and backgrounds adding their thoughts and opinions to the blogosphere. Writers use blogs to talk about any topic imaginable, from hobbies to news to food. Blogs today address a wide range of topics, and as such are now becoming an essential tool in the workforce as well. As illustrated in the image to the right by Technorati, professional bloggers account for 46% of all bloggers and corporate bloggers account for 12%. While professional bloggers simply blog about their industry and corporate bloggers blog about their specific company, it is clear that there is a market for blogs in the workforce.



Blogging can provide professionals with a simple way to disseminate their opinions and ideas, and businesses also can use these blogs as a way to reach out to other businesses. Although there is little substantial research on how many B2B blogs exist, Marketo's "[Big List of B2B Marketing Blogs](#)" reports 138 blogs that talk about B2B marketing. The market for B2B blogging is broad, but corporate bloggers will need to find a way to

connect to their audience.

According to Forrester Research’s report “[How to Derive Value From B2B Blogging](#),” corporate blogs have suffered in the past few years. The firm points to a struggle to sustain a conversation, and to dull, strictly business or technical blogs as reasons for the difficulty in corporate blogging. Although corporate blogs have suffered, Forrester notes that the value and measurement of these blogs has not yet been determined, so businesses should not give up.

Specific Benefits for a B2B Company

A business may decide to implement a blog for a number of different purposes, and depending on the reasons, they can benefit from the blog in different ways. For example, a blog can be used to build a community, evangelize a cause, to further a public relations strategy or to increase search engine optimization (SEO).

- **Building community**

Building a community through blogging can take time but can provide great benefits overall. Businesses can use this blog to communicate with others reciprocally in a way that would not be possible through traditional communication methods. Within this community, businesses can establish credibility and build lasting relationships. Businesses can then use the blog as an opportunity to enhance the relationship between business and customer.

- **Evangelizing a cause**

B2B blogging offers a unique way to communicate a new standard, a cause or industry trend. Once a blog has established a community of readers, the company can use this community as a tool for sharing news and opinion about that topic. Readers and blog writers serve as evangelists and create a growth and group effect. This can allow the company to quickly evangelize without spending an excessive amount of resources.

- **Blogging as a PR strategy**

Blogs are establishing in the online world much of the value public relations has brought traditionally. The blog can provide a company access to other public relations strategies that may be more difficult or time consuming to achieve by traditional methods.



Case Study: Fulcrum Microsystems, Inc.

[Fulcrum Microsystems](#), headquartered in Calabasas, Calif., is a provider of high-performance Ethernet switching silicon for the Data Center, Enterprise and Service Provider markets. In order to maintain market momentum between product announcements, Fulcrum Microsystems implemented its [Lossless Fabrics](#) blog. The blog provides a cost effective way for the company to communicate market advances and news. To optimize its blog performance, Fulcrum Microsystems implemented tags (keywords) that allow readers to locate postings on specific topics such as cloud networking or efficiency. Additionally, the blog provides commenting capability and an email address for users to send feedback. With RSS capability, readers can subscribe to the blog feed to receive timely post updates.

Corporate blogging can prove beneficial for businesses by opening the door to additional media and networking opportunities.

- **SEO**

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an important tool for all companies, as it is a way to improve the amount of traffic that the company website receives. According to [Francis SEO](#), 64% of respondents use a search engine as the first online destination for business purchase research. For this reason, it is necessary for a company to increase its SEO in order to reach the buyer in the early stages of a purchasing decision. With the use of a blog, a company can include links and keywords that will help to enhance its SEO.

Who should blog?

When creating a blog, a company must decide who will author the entries. In choosing an author, companies can decide among the CEO, an employee, an outside resource, such as a freelancer or a public relations agency, or the company can employ a combination of multiple authors. According to the 2007 [Edelman](#) Trust Barometer, the CEO is the least trusted spokesperson and a “person like you” is whom the audience would like to read.

One important factor to keep in mind when making this decision is the amount of time spent in writing the blog entries. According to Technorati, one in four bloggers spend ten hours or more blogging each week, and about half spend more than five hours weekly on their blogs.

Whoever the company chooses to author the blog, it is important that the blog offers a level of transparency and authenticity to its readers. To be transparent, the author needs to deliver an honest tone, allowing readers to feel like they’ve been let in on important company information. According to Technorati, one in three bloggers are concerned about readers learning their identity. The company will need to decide whether to protect the blogger’s identity or to provide readers with a more open blog.



Case Study: Eltek Valere

[Eltek Valere](#), headquartered in Richardson, TX, is a provider of DC power systems to telecommunications and industrial markets worldwide. In an industry where energy efficiency and “green” power have become extremely important issues, Eltek Valere has worked to develop a green campaign by introducing a number of high-efficiency product lines. To increase awareness of its green messaging, Eltek Valere implemented a blog, “[Inside the Telecom Industry](#),” where the company can discuss the efforts of industry peers toward energy efficiency. The blog allows for Eltek Valere to include links to multiple news stories and websites, which can provide enhanced SEO for the company. Additionally, the blog allows Eltek Valere to communicate the company’s initiatives and how customers can use Eltek Valere to implement green initiatives of their own.

Downside to Blogging

As with all business ventures, there is the possibility for a downside to corporate blogging. It is possible that a corporate blog can generate bad buzz or reveal too much information or company secrets. Additionally, corporate blogs sometimes have difficulty finding an audience and maintaining relevance among readers. According to Forrester Research, “74% of B2B blogs receive a minimum of commentary or trackbacks because readers fail to find conversations worthy of their involvement.”



Case Study: Sun Microsystems, Inc.

[Sun Microsystems](#), headquartered in Santa Clara, Calif., is a provider of software, systems, services and microelectronics that power everything from consumer electronics, to developer tools and the world's most powerful datacenters. In an effort to better communicate with the public about the company's products, President and then COO, Jonathan Schwartz, chose to implement a blog at a time when corporate blogging was still a very new concept. Now, in 2009 Schwartz is the company's CEO and continues to post entries on his blog. [Jonathan's Blog](#) has become a highly publicized example of how companies can use corporate blogging to better develop relationships with the public and achieve a greater level of credibility. It is considered by some to be one of the most popular corporate blogs today.

Measurement

Due to the relative newness of blogging, it is somewhat difficult to determine an exact measurement of success for the corporate blog. There certainly isn't a standard for measuring blogs, however there are ways to evaluate the blog. According to a report by the [Institute for Public Relations](#), it is important to measure the financial and relationship outcomes of the blog. The report also recommends evaluating the responses received by customers and community members on the blog. Finally, the report suggests measuring your ranking in the blogosphere, which can be achieved by using [Technorati](#) or [Google Analytics](#). The ways of measuring the success of a blog will vary for each company, depending on the goals of the blog. The Institute for Public Relations suggests that blog measurement does not stop at your own blog. The firm's report proposes that companies measure their presence on other blogs as well.

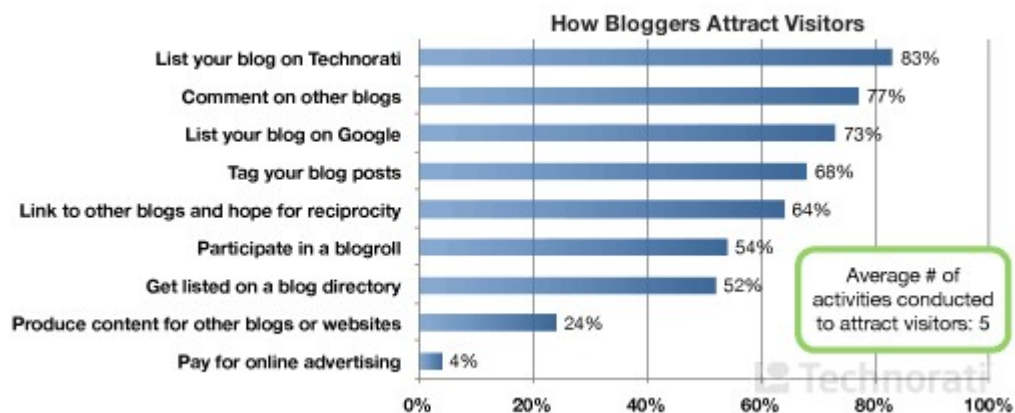
How to Make Your Blog Relevant

With millions of bloggers in the blogosphere and corporate blogs often failing to succeed, it is important to implement ways to keep your blog relevant among the competition. Earlier, this paper discussed the issue of transparency and how this can help generate and maintain interest in the blog.

Forrester Research suggests a number of ways that businesses can increase interest in their B2B blogs. Forrester suggests that, “in order to make a blog lively, a business has to offer visitors something more – musings from an executive, insight into how a product decision was made, something funny.” Companies that blog on topics with broad appeal open the opportunity for a larger audience, while companies that blog on a specific industry or topic may find a smaller, yet loyal group of readers.

Best Practices in Blogging

Although companies may look at a blogging as a way to sound off on issues that are important for business, the most important part of developing a corporate blog is to think about what customers want and how it will be beneficial for them. Companies should blog about customer problems and issues that matter to the community of readers. Additionally, it is important to maintain and update the blog on a regular basis, so that readers will remain interested and return often. Looking at the graph below by Technorati, there are many strategies that bloggers can use to drive traffic to their blog. The top three strategies include listing your blog on Technorati, commenting on other blogs and listing your blog on Google.



What if you don't want to Blog?

While reading this paper, companies may be concerned that a blog will not fit in the budget or is not something that they are interested in doing yet. Although there are many benefits to blogging, there are other strategies that a company can implement instead. One strategy is for the company to monitor other blogs and provide commentary on postings about the company or relevant topics. This can spread your company name and allow for links back to your corporate Web page. Another strategy is to utilize social networking sites and develop a page where customers can come together to talk about important issues. Some companies like [Dell](#) have turned to services like [Twitter](#) to quickly reach out to customers. Twitter, a social network “microblogging” site, allows for short message postings that can have links back to the company webpage.

How to get started

After reading this whitepaper, your company may be considering how to implement a blog into its overall corporate communications strategy. To do this, the first step is to decide what type of blog you would like to develop and what your focus will be. Next, you will need to decide who will author the blog and how often entries will be developed for posting. Utilizing a public relations agency to develop blog postings may provide a cost effective and less stressful alternative to developing entries in house. Once you are ready to implement a blog, talk to your Web site developer to find out how to incorporate the blog and an RSS feed into your company website.

For more information on how The David James Agency can help with your company blog, please call or email.

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