

TO BLOG OR NOT TO BLOG

by LisaBeth Weber for PC Solutions, September 2009

These days, it's the norm. Blogs are everywhere. According to **BLOGGER**, one of the top three blogging platforms, every second of every day a new Blog is created around the world on Blogger alone. Every minute of every day 270,000 words per minute are written. In an average month, one in four people on the internet (over 300 million) visit a Blogger blog around the world.

So you might be thinking, don't they all get lost in the shuffle? The answers lie within the subject matter, motivation, dedication, marketing, and social networking skills of the bloggers themselves. The reasons behind why someone has or wants a blog provide the insight to its success. In this case, we focus on blogs of a more business like nature, however, most of these factors can apply to personal, more "diary-like" blogs.

TRUSTED SOURCES

Going right to the sources, this article is based on interviews with successful bloggers who have utilized their blogs to elevate the marketing potential in their chosen professions. The knowledge that is imparted in blogs is somewhat immeasurable, countered only by the inevitable, "Don't believe everything you read." As a blogger, be a trusted resource. This lends itself to your credibility, and to a successful blog.

HELPING OTHERS TO GROW

Derek Sivers knows what it takes to accomplish this. As founder of CDBaby, the largest seller of online independent music, he grew the company to \$100 million in sales. Sivers sold CDBaby in 2008, and now blogs through www.sivers.org, sharing his knowledge for free. His response to the question "To Blog or not to Blog" is simple. "Ask yourself why. If you're only doing it because you think you should, maybe you shouldn't." Sivers feels an obligation to share what he has learned with as many people as possible, knowing that "the best way to learn is to teach".

Derek posts once a day, about five days a week, and has enjoyed some amazing experiences through the blog, including some of his heroes finding him, and subsequently linking to his Website.

WITH THE GREATEST OF EASE

How easy is it to create a blog? Just ask Rick Klau, business product manager at **BLOGGER.COM**, (owned by Google). "First & foremost, Blogger is exceptionally simple and fast to start. Users can have their first post live in under a minute." This is no exaggeration, though optimizing a blog with ads and other features may take a bit longer. Klau adds that they try to make the product as simple to use as possible. "Our feedback shows that people who don't consider themselves tech experts are shocked at how fast they can be blogging." Bloggers have complete control over how their blog looks. They can customize the design with over 1000 free 3rd party templates, and Blogger.com is embarking on a number of new default templates. Seamless integration with Google AdSense is a one-click process, optimizing blogs with targeted revenue producing ads.

AdSense has potential for bloggers to make extra money, but Rick cautions that it doesn't happen overnight. As with readership, it takes time.

Though healthy competition is normal, Rick is clear to say that the major blogging platform companies have a very good interactive relationship. "I'm friends with the guys at Automattic and Six Apart (owners of WORDPRESS and TYPEPAD respectively). Google's slogan is 'Don't be evil,' which really means: the user comes first. For Blogger, that means that we make it easy for users to leave Blogger and convert their data to be imported by either WordPress or TypePad. On the flip side, it means that Google actively encourages developers to incorporate our tools into other services - there are literally hundreds of Google-specific WordPress plug-ins." According to Rick, it's about continuing to stay out of the way of people who want to tell their story. "It's not about the product, it's about the millions of people who rely on us to tell their story."

There are many ways to promote a blog. Rather than traditional SEO/SEM (Search Engine Optimization, and Search Engine Marketing), Rick veers toward putting your heart (and your links), into your blog, and the rest will follow. "As people link to you, you will rank for the terms that you write about. There is a lot of energy put into optimizing. If there were a lot of energy into quality content, it would be energy better spent." The support areas, (and coincidentally, BLOGS), at the various blog companies have mountains of information as to how best to promote your blog with free tools like FEEDBURNER and BUZZBOOST. Rick blogs at: www.buzz.blogger.com and <http://tins.rklau.com>

WHAT ABOUT FACEBOOK AND TWITTER?

These days, cross promoting your blog on Facebook and Twitter is a given; basically everything can be linked to everything else. "Badges" or "widgets" can be added to your blog from Twitter and Facebook. Here are two articles to further illustrate the "how to's", of this process.

<http://buzz.blogger.com/2009/06/tweet-your-blog.html>

<http://buzz.blogger.com/2009/02/facebook-your-blog.html>

WORDPRESS & TYPEPAD

As mentioned above, the other two top blogging platforms are WordPress and TypePad. WORDPRESS has a ".com", and a ".org" version; WordPress.com is the easier format, while WordPress.org is a complex and powerful publishing platform, requiring advanced technical skills to utilize it to its fullest. It also requires that you have your own web host, but other than that, it is free. You have more control, as the open source software is downloaded onto your own computer, but for novice users, WordPress.com is probably better. They also provide tracking statistics for free.

TYPEPAD charges for their blogs, offering a wide spectrum of services from \$4.95/month to \$89.95/month. Their comparison page states, "TypePad offers you more: professionally designed themes, control over your content, and ways to make money. Best of all, everything is included in one up-front fee. You really do get what you pay

for.” Those at Blogger and WordPress may beg to differ, but consumers are free to make their own choices with the information provided.

SO MANY PROFESSIONS, SO MANY BLOGS

Tammy Paolino is the features editor at the Courier Post newspaper, www.courierpostonline.com, of South Jersey, as well as www.SouthJersey.MomsLikeMe.com, where she is also the site manager. She is a mom of 2 boys, and has a parenting blog for Gen-X working parents called MamaDrama. <http://blogs.courierpostonline.com/mamadrama>.

As a busy journalist and working mom, Tammy has found an amazing forum through the blog, allowing her to write everyday without the pressures of deadlines. The popular blog chronicles the early days of her parenting experience while driving traffic to the company Websites. Tammy’s blog is published by a major media company – Gannett (GCI), which is quite different from an independent blogger. She uses WordPress, and finds it extremely intuitive and easy to use. She is very prolific and tries to blog three times a day Monday to Friday, and over the weekend when the mood strikes.

For those contemplating a blog, Tammy notes: “The best blogs are not hyper-personal. No one cares if my coffee was cold or if my new shoes hurt. They care that something I am struggling with or laughing about intersects with something they have struggled with or laughed about.” She knows the importance of momentum. “It’s easy to hit roadblocks and neglect your blog, but if you blog often, new ideas start to hit you more frequently. It’s sort of like biking. If you keep your speed up, it’s easier to keep going. If you slow down, it’s hard to get back up to speed.” Tammy strives to celebrate the imperfections of everyday life, from the sticky Cheerios to the frantic search for the keys, within an engaging and well written format. She sees the trends heading toward niche blogging across platforms, more interactivity, and “blog-to-print”.

THE PROOF IS IN THE BLOG

Speaking of “blog-to-print”, Leah Ingram knows first hand what can transpire from blogging. A lifestyle expert/author, Leah has been a guest on CNN, Good Morning America, and MSNBC. Her blog, *Suddenly Frugal* (www.suddenlyfrugal.com) was picked up by Adams Media Publishing, and she got a book deal! For Leah, blogging is like having a daily column. “The more you write, the better you write.” Leah uses WordPress.com and blogs five days a week, sometimes writing weeks worth in advance, while other times at the last minute. To those contemplating a blog, Leah says, “I know it's cliché, but just do it! Just start writing. The hardest part is coming up with a name that isn’t already taken.” In her recipe for success, she recommends being present on a regular basis and making your blog buzzy. “Once a week blogging just doesn’t cut it.”

CROSS PROMOTION: SOME OF THE BEST MARKETING MONEY CAN’T BUY

When it comes to cross promotion and the marketing potential through blogging, Gina Rubel has this one hands down. Furia-Rubel is an award-winning public relations and marketing agency, providing strategic services that help raise brand awareness about their clients. Public relations guru, lawyer, and respected blogger, Gina combines forces in her

blog, www.ThePRLawyer.com and truly lives the “write what you know” credo. She enjoys writing, and it establishes her as a public relations expert, while sharing knowledge and insight with readers. “Blogging provides great exposure, is a low cost vehicle to communicate a targeted message, and it differentiates me from others in the industry.”

Gina has been using Blogger.com since 2002, and created a customized template complementing her company brand. With frequent updates, she tracks the statistics with Google Analytics and Google Feedburner. There are no ads, but the blog is great at driving leads to the door of Furia-Rubel, many of which have converted to become clients. Lead generation and being quoted by major news media are examples of the blog’s success, and it’s hard to put a price on that. Gina knows that blogging is a huge commitment. “If you’re going to do it, you have to do it right for it to matter.” Updating regularly, being unique in your content, providing relevant and resourceful information, while not being self serving are all aspects to a successful blog according to Rubel.

ABOUT(.com) BLOGS

Kim Ruehl is a music writer on about.com (www.folkmusic.about.com). Blogging is part of her job, and she has used several platforms, including Blogger, WordPress, Tumblr, and Ning. Blogging somewhere every day, Kim thinks it’s amazing that she can make at least part of her living as a blogger. She also tweets at least once an hour, referring to them as “micro-blogs” (see sidebar).

The more the merrier is Kim’s opinion about whether someone should jump into the blogosphere or not. “The beauty of blogging is that there’s room for everyone. Figure out what your blogging voice is and just go for it. Be consistent and blog frequently if you want to grow your readership. Get on Twitter, too. There’s no longer any excuse to not be on Twitter if you’re a writer/blogger.”

Kim sees the trend heading more toward micro-blogging (Twitter), and thinks it will clear out some of the ‘matter’ in the blogosphere. “People who aren’t dedicated blogger/writers will get tired of blogging when they can share their every thought via tweets.” About standing out in the crowd, studies have shown that people rely more on their peers than critics when they’re looking for consumer advice, entertainment reviews, etc. Kim’s advice? “Talk about what you know and readers will find you. The internet is like word of mouth, but with a megaphone.”

COMMON DENOMINATORS

Hopefully by now, you’ve figured out whether blogging is for you. To sum up, it takes passion, consistency, commitment, dedication, and patience, not unlike human relationships. Cross promoting and writing well doesn’t hurt either. As Rick Klau says, “It doesn’t happen overnight.” All in all, if blogging is for you, you’ll probably know it, once you get going. HAPPY BLOGGING!

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SIDEBARS

WHAT IS TWITTORATI, WHAT IS TECHNORATI?

The dictionary editors must be working 24/7 to make sure all the newfangled words are included. These two strange sounding words are examples of the latest 21st century lingo. Twittorati (www.twittorati.com) is “where the blogosphere and twittersphere meet”. They track tweets from the Technorati top 100 blogs, along with top photos, links, and chatter all around the sphere. Technorati (www.technorati.com) is basically a search engine for blogs. Want to find a blog? Go to Technorati. They track over 80 million blogs in real time.

MICRO BLOGS and TWITTER

Essentially, the name is self-explanatory; a “micro blog” is a shortened version of a blog. Twitter is hands down the biggest network for microblogging, and is challenging users to tell their story, or at least whatever they feel like saying at the moment, in 140 characters or less. First popularized at the 2007 South by Southwest conference in Austin, Texas, it has become a phenomenon, with users “tweeting” from virtually everywhere. Recently, there were challenges like describing the entire Beatles White Album in one tweet, to tweeting as if you were Shakespeare. Once you are registered at www.twitter.com, the question simply is, “What are you doing?”