

Blogs as your business marketing tool (PART 1)

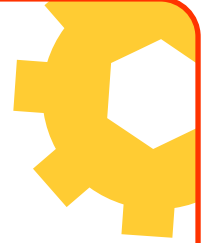
To blog or not to blog? That is the million dollar question. In this age of information overload, blogging can be the “high-tech, high touch” weapon of choice in your online marketing arsenal. But where and how should your business start?

We live in an era where transparency is expected from businesses. Customers relate with and stay loyal to companies they feel they can trust. To achieve this, companies need to share timely information with customers, provide them with the latest industry updates and answer any queries promptly. Admittedly, there are many ways to achieve this. And blogging is one method. So what is this beast called the “blog”?

Basically, a “web log” - blog for short- is an electronic journal or bulletin board where people who create them can record anything meaningful to them or their readers. For a company, the blog can be treated as a marketing tool.

To expound on this topic we will tackle it in 2 parts. In this month’s Interact, we examine the issues you should consider when creating a corporate blog. Our next issue of Interact! will tackle the different methodologies in setting up a blog and how to promote it.





Start by defining the intent of your blog

In our opinion, your first step in using a blog as part of your company's marketing mix is to define the intent of the blog. This can be:-

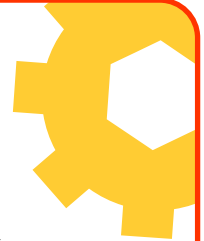
- ▶ To serve as an information source of the industry in which the company operates.
- ▶ To provide candid opinions of the products/services of the company.
- ▶ A forum to raise views/opinions of company products and services and then let the customers/interested parties pose questions or opinions.

A key difference between the blog and the forum is the issue of control. In a blog the author has control over the conversation by posting issues/articles. Hence he dictates the flow of the conversation and acts as a mediator. This is important in instances where parameters of a conversation are not defined and leaves the author or company open to negative publicity that cannot be monitored. There are positives to this form of marketing too, as it keeps the company "honest". However, a lot of companies like to have some control over public conversations about their products.

Issues you must consider when creating a blog

- **Identify your audience:** This is marketing 101. Define the audience you are targeting so that you can ensure that the topics in your blog capture their interest and create a stickiness factor.
- **Decide where your blog should reside:** Are you going to be hosting your blog internally or will you host it on a third party site, like blogspot or wordpress? In both cases it is easy to set up the blog, however, if it is hosted on your site, you will need to commit more resources and backend hosting capabilities, but we believe it enhances your branding.

- **Start talking:** To boost traffic to your blog, don't just speak about how great your business is, or place news and current events for which you offer no expertise or that don't pertain to your business. Your business blog certainly should not be the place you sell your products. Instead, aim for a fresh, interesting expertise spot with compelling insights. One way to improve your blog content is to read other blogs and, in turn, offer your own viewpoint on an industry or business topic for which you know something about.
- **Get into the practice of "blogrolling":** A unique, insightful commentary is not the only avenue to get regular visitors. In fact, building traffic between blogs, called "blogrolling", is another effective tool to draw repeat visitors. As its name suggests, this involves cross-linking your blog to a set of third-party websites, which provide synergies to your business, industry or expertise. Developed in conjunction with a fresh voice, blogrolling encourages a steady traffic stream between various sites, including other blogs. This is an effective way to get into the overall bloggers' pool.
- **Emphasize keywords:** Search engine hits are another tactic of generating traffic. One strategy to attract search engine referral is through cautious use of keywords in both your headlines and blog copy. For instance, if your topic focuses on selling digital toys, use of the words "selling" or "sales" and "digital toys" as often as possible and in varied permutations can help push your blog site towards the head of the search engine line.
- **Keep it fresh:** Stale and uninteresting content can mean your blog's quick demise. Keep topics on the cutting edge and present them in an exciting manner. Ensure that you post something daily. Otherwise, at least every other day. Appoint an employee responsible for the content. However, that doesn't necessarily mean regularly keeping your entries long. Indeed, many engaging blogs are built of short, concise messages.
- **Watch your traffic closely:** Track the hits on your blog keenly. It gives you feedback as to what is working and what is not. If things seem slow or inactive, don't try to change your themes or subjects with hopes that it will be closer to public interest. Firmly stay with your business content and expertise. You will soon boost your traffic when readers cannot easily find substitutes for the particular topics you cover. Investigating effectiveness of content and platform before creating a blog will save time and effort because not many publishing platforms can support advanced needs, like search visibility or Really Simple Syndication (RSS).



The Ethics & Language of blogging

Blog language: In our opinion, you should ensure that the tone of the content is formal. Even though blogs can have an informal tone, we suggest you leave this to the readers who are leaving comments. Also, it is important to ensure that your language is error-free.

Blog ethics: The blog is proxy of your professionalism. To leave a good impression, ensure you do not plagiarize and all references are accurately cited. Also, check to make sure any facts or figures provided are accurate. Your blog should be a reliable source of knowledge or news.

At an emotional level, you should be sensitive to the sources or topics you mention in your blog. For example, be thoughtful when talking about child pornography on the web, or seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy.

Lastly, be accountable for what you put on your blog. If someone finds your entries inaccurate, the best course of action is to admit the mistakes and correct them promptly.

Internal vs External blogs

Internal blogs sit on the intranet of a company and are useful for:

- ▶ Sharing and transferring knowledge in a company, especially if the company's offices are spread over different time zones and cultures.
- ▶ Enhancing the company's internal communication with employees on key issues.

External blogs are your company's communication channel with the general public. They are especially useful for:

- ▶ Informing the general public about your upcoming products, markets you plan on penetrating, honest analyses of your positive and negative attributes, change in management styles and reasons behind it.
- ▶ Interacting with your target market and audience at a personal level while building credibility.

To prove this point, big corporations are now jumping onto the blogging bandwagon. According to a report, forty (40) of the Fortune 500 companies maintain corporate blogs. (See [samples](#))

We hope that we have established the importance of blogging and how it can help your business internally, by being a conduit of knowledge management, and also by being a window to your company for your customers. Our next Interact! issue, will suggest different methods of creating and hosting your blog should you choose to have one. Make sure to catch our next issue.

PS: Found this newsletter informative and useful? Email us with your comments, questions or other topics you would like covered at info@8rewardsroad.com