

CORPORATE BLOGGING

HOW TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL
THROUGH BLOG TECHNOLOGY

BACKGROUND

Web Logs, better known as Blogs, are quickly becoming a potent force on the Internet. As Blog creation and readership go up, the opportunity for you to leverage a Blog for corporate communication is clear. Companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Monster.com are already doing so.

Corporate Blogs can be used to create an informal communication channel between companies and the general public, but if executed poorly, a corporate Blog can backfire. The Blog community demographic is highly educated and tech savvy, and will quickly sniff out Blogs being used as a veiled PR device.

This document outlines our recommended process for creating and managing a successful corporate Blog.

THE VALUE OF BLOGS

Blogs are gaining popularity at an explosive rate. The Pew Internet & American Life Project reports that Blog readership rose 58% from February 2004 to November 2004, totaling to nearly 32 million Blog readers in America alone. The same report states that 8 million Americans have created a Blog. When you factor in the international Blog population it is clear that Blogs are quickly becoming one of the most popular uses of the Internet.

Originally Blogs were little more than online diaries for individuals, but as the technology spread innovative uses for Blogs were developed. News was the first major commercial use of Blogs. Easy syndication via RSS and simple, intuitive web based updates made posting new stories a breeze. SlashDot.org is probably the best example of the power of Blogs. Its traffic levels rival CNN.com, Yahoo! News, and Google News, and it has become a qualified source for technology-related news.

Corporate Blogging is the latest development in the world of Blogs. By encouraging their employees to post on Blogs, companies have found a way to showcase their most important asset - their people. For the first time anyone can get a glimpse of a company's dynamic corporate culture. Even more compelling is the work of a superstar employee. By encouraging rising stars to Blog about their ideas, provide links to related web sites, and showcase their accomplishments, companies enhance the image of their employer brand.

The benefits are most felt in the area of recruitment, as candidates can now get a glimpse into the environment in which they will work. If a corporate Blog shows that a company is fun, challenging, and staffed with interesting and intelligent people, candidates are more likely to want to work there.

Other uses are in the area of Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B). An innovative use of Blog technology for these applications is that of the ongoing testimonial. For example, your company can have customers post their experiences with a product or service over the course of a year. With proper planning customers can post before, during, and after the product or service is delivered. Blog readers can easily see the benefits of your company's product or service over time, and will then be encouraged to purchase it for themselves.

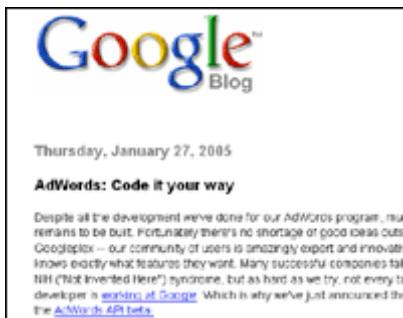
BLOG EXAMPLES



Monster.com, one of the world's leading employment sites, currently maintains a corporate Blog that features everything from interesting tidbits related to employment to individual work related stories. Find their Blog at <http://monster.typepad.com/monsterblog/>



Microsoft openly encourages its employees to Blog, and now hosts 1,315 employee Blogs as of Jan. 1, 2005. Many of these Blogs are simply personal diaries, but some stand out as recruitment tools and showcases for superstar employees. Find their Blogs at <http://blogs.msdn.com/>



Google has been hosting a corporate Blog for several years, and uses it primarily as a way to announce cutting edge company developments. Find their Blog at <http://www.google.com/googleblog/>

SETUP & ADMINISTRATION

Initial setup of a Blog requires that Blog software be installed on your web server, or you can choose to have an outside provider such as us host your Blog. There are many different Blog software packages available ranging from simple single author systems to more complex database driven systems. Some of the major packages you can use are Movable Type, Wordpress, and Nucleus CMS. For most clients, we recommend Movable Type. It is a Perl & MySQL driven Blog platform that offers competitive pricing for commercial licenses, and also offers an Enterprise edition with added features such as support for Oracle environments and moderator-level user accounts.

Configuration of the Movable Type software can be done by your own programming staff or by our agency. By using templates you can easily sync Movable Type to the look and feel of your own website. Because the Blog software resides on the web server, posting is done through a web browser. This allows you to post from any computing platform or location so long as you have Internet access.

We recommend creating an RSS feed from your Blog. RSS is an acronym for 'Really Simple Syndication,' and it is based on the XML markup language. Changes to your Blog will automatically be passed on to your RSS feed, and when your RSS feed is registered with a third party website, RSS updates will be automatically posted. This allows you to spread your content across the web with ease. If you decide to use a Blog package that does not have built in RSS generation, feeds can still be created but will require custom development.

WHO SHOULD BLOG?

Companies can choose their Blog authors (known as Bloggers) based on any number of criteria. Some companies will want to carefully select their Bloggers to ensure that a positive corporate image is portrayed to the public. Others may wish to allow their Bloggers a little more leeway. Whatever criterion is used in the selection process, please keep in mind that no one wants to read what essentially amounts to a press release.

Choose people who are fun, engaging, and are able to provide compelling content for readers. Even if your Bloggers post primarily on personal rather than work related experiences it will give the image of a company that is fun and dynamic - a place where people are interesting and enjoy their jobs. This type of content is far more compelling than corporate news.

The tenure of a Blogger can vary greatly. Some people take to Blogging very well, and will wish to continue to post indefinitely. If this is the case, by all means let them continue posting! Well-established Blogs written by experienced Bloggers will be the most compelling to a reader. If a Blogger isn't interested in Blogging long term, suggest a minimum three-month tenure.

If a Blogger is highly dissatisfied and views posting as 'work', it may be best to find a replacement. It is better to have interested, motivated Bloggers than an employee who is uninspired by the role.

We recommend that at least three Bloggers are chosen to post. If you rely on a single Blogger and that person becomes ill or leaves the company, then no new posts will be made until a new Blogger is found. Because the Blog world values freshness over all else, it is in your best interests to ensure that your Blog is regularly updated.

POSTING

Because corporate Blogs have the potential to leak sensitive information, we recommend a system of guidelines and review for Blog postings, using the following workflow:

1. Management defines guidelines as to what is and is not appropriate content for Blog postings and distributes these guidelines to Bloggers.
2. A Blogger creates a post and submits it to a reviewer. This reviewer should be a high level employee who can appropriately judge whether the post contains sensitive information.
3. If the reviewer deems the post appropriate, the post is approved. The Blogger can now make the posting live on the company Blog.
4. If the reviewer deems the post inappropriate, changes will be suggested to the Blogger. Once the changes are made the post is made live.

If you feel that your chosen Bloggers have the right sensitivity to issues around content, this review process can be omitted, or perhaps after a 'probation period' Bloggers can be exempt from review. The specifics of the review process are open to modification. Remember - you can always edit or delete postings made to the Blog, so if accidents do happen, they can be cleaned up later.

You should not mistake this process for censorship.

If a company allows only 'polished' material to be posted, readers will likely view the Blog as a corporate soapbox. In order to attract a loyal following allow Bloggers to have a unique voice, express opinions, and share news about their day. In other words, let them be themselves. Only sensitive corporate information or clearly inappropriate content should be removed.

FREQUENCY

The frequency with which Bloggers post is important. As mentioned above, freshness is valued above all else in the Blog world. We recommend daily postings Monday through Friday. This is yet another reason to select at least three Bloggers, as a single Blogger would likely be hard pressed to post daily. With multiple Bloggers, each will only have to create two posts per week. Postings can then be staggered to ensure that at least one is made live each day, as opposed to all going live on Monday with no updates for the rest of the week.

PROMOTION

Blogs are nothing if they aren't read. Registering your Blog on directories, Blog search engines, and aggregators is essential. Perhaps even more important than registering the Blog is registering the RSS feed generated from the Blog. RSS feeds can be submitted to aggregators who will then fetch your feed periodically.

As one updates the Blog the RSS feed is automatically updated, and as the aggregators periodically fetch the feed, they will automatically display your updated content. It is clear that this automatic syndication of your content is beneficial, and, if necessary, we can provide this service for you.

TRACKING & REPORTING

Although some Bloggers will very much enjoy posting, most corporate Blogs are not created just for fun. In order to measure success, you must first define the goal of the Blog.

Is it to encourage job candidates to apply? Will it be used as a way to shed a stodgy corporate image? Will it be used as an ongoing testimonial to generate sales of a product or service?

Once the goal is defined we can help track the success of the Blog through various methods. If, for example, you want to encourage candidates to apply, we can help create a custom application page for the Blog.

Candidates who follow an 'Apply Here' link from the Blog can be tracked, and those who submit their resume can be considered a conversion. Over the course of a year, the cost of the Blog can be divided by the number of resumes received to determine the Cost per Lead, or CPL. The CPL can then be compared against other recruitment methods to determine success. More sophisticated tracking methods can also be utilized.

HOW DO I START?

If you are interested in learning about how corporate Blogs can benefit your business, please contact us for a free consultation. We will evaluate the goals of your Blog as well as the technical aspects of installing a Blog on your website.

For more information, please contact Marc Eberhart at 310.309.8257, or e-mail marc.eberhart@jwt.com.

ABOUT US

JWT INSIDE has been developing online employment communications solutions since the Internet became a viable recruiting vehicle in 1994. Our vision is about communications, experience and the ability to build and manage relationships with prospects and candidates. Our staff of employment marketers and communications experts includes interactive designers, developers and database experts. We understand central database management and maintenance, content management systems, integration with legacy databases and applications, and the development of outbound candidate relationship tactics.

Our interactive services include everything from Web site development (and the back-end systems that interface with your resume management software) to creative assets (banners, rich media, email newsletters, e-cards), relationship management programs, data mining, online transactions/e-commerce, site use tracking models, push technology, chat, virtual interview formats on client sites, and job candidate matching options.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Blog - A condensed version of the original term 'web log'.

Blogger - A person who writes and posts on a Blog is known as a Blogger

Bloggging - The act of posting and maintaining a Blog

Blog Directory - Like a web directory such as Yahoo, Blog Directories organize submitted Blogs by subject. Some Blog directories are Blogwise.com and Bloglines.com.

Blog Search Engine - A search engine that limits its searches to Blogs. Some Blog search engines are Daypop.com and Technorati.com.

Content Aggregator - Content aggregators gather content from across the web, usually from RSS sources, and aggregate them in an organized fashion. The most widely used aggregators are news sites such as Yahoo! News and Google News.

MySQL - A very popular open source database system used primarily for web applications. Often times MySQL is used with PHP to create dynamic websites.

Offline Aggregators - Similar to Content Aggregator web sites, offline aggregators are pieces of software you install on your computer. This software then goes online, gathers the specified RSS feeds, and organizes them for you to view.

PHP - PHP Hypertext Processor is a web programming language that fills variables within HTML template files with content from a database (often times a MySQL database).

RSS - Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is a defined subset of the XML language. It is used to syndicate content from your website. RSS feeds are picked up by various sources such as online content aggregators, offline personal aggregators, or news sites.

XML - Extensible Markup Language (XML) is similar to HTML, Hyper Text Markup Language, but is optimized for database-like functionality. Data is defined between tags and is readable with any text reader including Notepad.