

Blogosphere or Blog with Fear

By **G.A. “Andy” Marken**
President
Marken Communications Inc.
andy@markencom.com

[See more at <http://www.markencom.com>]

Think of it.

A cheap, direct means of working one-on-one, one-to-many with customers, partners, prospects.

The ideal means of educating...informing...persuading.

That's what management sees when you mention one of the “hottest” communications tools available...blogging.

The Web 2.0 blogosphere is one of the fastest growing communities today.

New blogs are launched every second...120,000 every day.

Technorati, a research firm that tracks Internet and Web 2.0 activity, reports that they currently track 70 million blogs which is up from 35 million blogs less than a year ago. According to their research, 22 of the 100 most popular Web sites in Q4 of last year were blogs.

Valuable Resource

Technorati states that bloggers searching for company/product information rely on:

- 63% from other bloggers
- 26% from company web sites
- 6% from corporate blogs
- 5% from company press releases

Bloggng is an international phenomenon:

- 37% blogs are in Japanese
- 33% are in English
- 8% are in Chinese
- Farsi is the 10th most popular blogging language

Because of the global reach and the low cost of communicating 1:1, 1:many with your various stakeholders, it is little wonder that PR people are so enamored with promoting/recommending management blogs.

Heavy Internet users have a growing appreciation for blogs. Many don't even realize they are reading one person's views, presentations, ideas, perspective. They feel they are getting "news" from a Web site. These heavy users take an active role in blogging just as they do in social network sites.

US Heavy* Internet Users Experience with Blogs, by Age

	Ages 16-34	Ages 35-49	All respondents
Participate in blogging activity	71%	54%	62%
Heard of blogs, but have not visited one	21%	39%	31%
Never heard of blog/Weblog	8%	6%	7%

*Note: n=1,000; *users accessing the internet for something other than e-mail 11+ times in the last seven days
Source: Universal McCann*

Blogs have proven invaluable in generating word-of-mouth marketing for firms by reaching and informing satisfied customers. They have become an effective means of resolving customer problems, issues, questions before they become major problems.

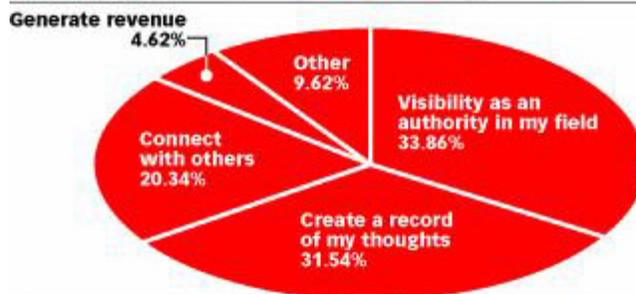
Large and small companies, organizations around the globe have official and unofficial blogs being developed, read every day. Sun, GM, Ford, IBM, Microsoft, Intel, GE and nearly every Fortune 500 firm has thousands of blogs that are being updated every day. Even employees in small firms have some type of blog being written/read.

Whether the individual blog has been officially sanctioned by management or is in fact written by management, blogs are appearing.

Reason to Blog

The primary reasons individual employees' blog is that they want to create a record of their thoughts or want to be seen as an authority in their field.

Primary Reason for Blogging according to Bloggers Worldwide



*Note: n=821; 54.8% of the respondents were from the US; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Technorati*

The major problem with blogs is that they are a new – albeit rapidly growing – Web 2.0 arena. As a result, it is still an uncharted arena with few official corporate policies/guidelines.

According to a recent Harris Interactive poll of Fortune 1000 executives:

- 77% believe they should have corporate policies addressing company-sanctioned blogs
- 40% believe they should have corporate policies regarding blogs unrelated to the company or its activities
- 30% really understand the term
- 21% actually read business-related blogs
- 15% believe someone in the company is currently writing a blog
- 12% have taken legal action in response to a blog
- 3% have changed product, service, policies because of a blog

Most of the insider blogs are published by employees who care about their company, their products, their work. They help humanize the firm more efficiently and more effectively than public relations practitioners can do officially.

The Mini-Microsoft unauthorized blog for example gives an inside look at and humanizes this monolith. The Mini-Microsoft posts are insightful and probably reflect the feelings of a wide range of employees more accurately than employee surveys would indicate.

The author seldom airs dirty laundry but he/she does highlight problems, issues and solutions in this global corporation. The ratio of praise to criticism at Mini-Microsoft seems to be a 1 to 2 ratio. While management and outside readers may not always agree with the author's statements, they are well thought out and persuasively presented.

The blogger presents actionable recommendations. He/she considers the implications of what is being criticized and the action items.

Unlike many internal blogs which are filled with mindless rants/raves, there is an understanding and commitment to the company.

Marketing Reaction

Communications folks knee jerk reaction to such “unauthorized” outside contact is to have the blog shut down and/or have the individual fired.

Wrong !

Having a person care enough about the company to actually put his/her job at risk is rare. If the individual has a better understanding of corporate issues, policies and efforts they might be able to better explain the company to their audience. That does not mean that marcom should control the information but rather monitor and provide the individual

with additional information.

Censure should only be done lightly.

Remember, there is a different perspective to something that is said in a blog if you are the senior executive or lowly worker bee.

Only rarely are the blogs done by employees who have the depth and breadth of knowledge of situations and activities so they can speak authoritatively.

This means that if an employee is publishing the blog, management should monitor them. When appropriate provide additional information and insights to make the 1:1, 1: many communications even more meaningful and more credible to readers.

Blogs from management or employees to the global community can be effective but they go beyond blogging-as-sales tool thinking. Most corporate blogs come up short because they are used as marketing rather than two-way communications tools. They should primarily be used as a means of acquiring and keeping customers. They shouldn't be initiated for lead generation and brand awareness.

Not Ad Vehicle

Keep in mind business blogs are not a new form of company advertising but a means of reaching your most important audiences – employees, partners, customers. If the blogs attract and persuade prospective customers that is an added bonus.

Executives who have embraced the blogosphere have found the effort has significantly enhanced the organization's and individual's credibility.

Fortune 1000 Senior Executives' Opinions Regarding the Credibility of Blogs, by Purpose of Blog

	Communi- cations medium	Brand- building technique	Sales/lead generation tool
Convinced to a "great extent" that blogging is growing in credibility	5%	3%	<1%
"Somewhat" or "not at all" convinced that blogging is gaining credibility	62%	74%	70%

*Note: n=150
Source: Harris Interactive*

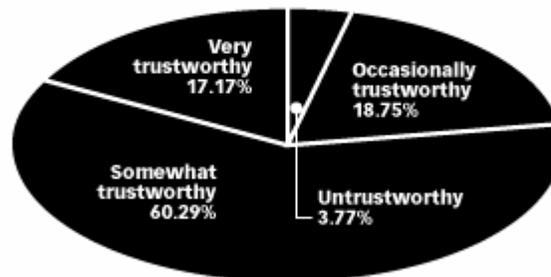
They also receive feedback they may not want to read.

In today's very open Internet and Web 2.0 world this communication is taking place...every minute of every day.

It is time for business to consider the question of blogging. But management has to be aware of the positive and negative aspects.

Marcom people are inclined to present only the positive aspects of blogging (or other forms of communication). Management has to understand that when they – or any employee – blogs there will be a certain degree of distrust.

Trustworthiness of a Blog Created by an Individual Employee according to Bloggers Worldwide



*Note: n=821; 54.8% of the respondents were from the US; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Technorati*

For most corporate blogs this may be the only problem that they encounter. However, the Web 2.0 frontier can be a wild, unruly, disruptive place.

Recent Encounters

Keep in mind...

- Mel Gibson's drunken remarks were widely disseminated over the Web in a few hours and later widely covered by the more formal press
- Imus' radio slurs were heard on the airwaves but the uproar that ultimately led to his being fired occurred on the Internet
- The Digg.com "revolt" of censorship of people's rights to violate and steal intellectual property and copyright materials was carried out solely on the Internet and subsequently covered by news media around the globe. This was more than an uprising. It represented a few outsiders taking corporate policy/control out of management's and investors' hands
- Slanderous, salacious, hateful blog responses have shut down postings at the Washington Post, LA Times and a number of business sites where vicious individuals have posted material civil people wouldn't say face to face

As one writer noted regarding these and other blog encounters, "the inmates have taken control of the asylum."

Investment and commitment to Web 2.0 activities such as blogs, wikis and other

collaborative technologies have to be entered into cautiously; with considerable thought and preparation.

Collective intelligence, which tries to tap into the wisdom of crowds to make decisions, can be immensely effective. But firms also have to consider the stakeholder return on these investments.

Today we exist in a knowledge economy and knowledge is power. Knowledge defines the company and the employees.

Blogging and technology adoption can no longer be dictated by management. It is dramatically decentralized. Tools like blogs and wikis will bubble up from departments as corporate strategy evolves.

Management increasingly understands that they must talk with customers, suppliers and business partners to achieve corporate goals. Web 2.0 tools can be used to streamline and expedite the design, development and adjustment of products and services.

Management will find that it requires work and patience to become comfortable in listening to this unvarnished feedback. At the same time, it can lead to positive results and support.

The best marketing, communications, policy consultants are available on Web 2.0. It does take time to weed through the disenfranchised to those who are constructive and valuable.

Competitive Advantage

Blogs – especially internal blogs – need to be viewed as a tool to enhance the organization's competitive advantage rather than a marcom device that they can/should manage and control.

Blogs provide an opportunity for organizations to talk directly to more than 180 connected individuals around the globe. They also open the door for these individuals to not only talk back in a positive manner but also strike back for the entire world to see.

Blogs travel at the speed of light to reach, inform people. At that speed, communications can encounter rough air. Policies and plans have to be in place to handle situations immediately.



Rough Air – Management and public relations must fully understand that blogs travel almost instantly 1:1 and 1:many. Internet and Web 2.0 messages and communications can not be managed and controlled as they did in the past. Problems and conflicts will be encountered. Understanding the dynamics and planning for worst case scenarios will ensure they survive.

Being right sometimes doesn't matter in the Web 2.0 world.

Monitoring blogs is mandatory...

Management blogs are optional!

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