

Why Blog? The Quick View

By Mary Schmidt, Marketing Troubleshooter

Note: It's not for everyone. You have to be willing to be transparent, admit your mistakes, listen to people with whom you may not agree. It's *all* about effective two-way *conversation!*

Create a personal connection with people who:

- Buy from you (vote for you, vote to fund your department, etc.).
- Talk to others about your company/organization.
- Are affected by your actions (legislation, economic development, etc.).
- Can send you business.

So you:

- Can better understand what your customers/target audience want, need, will pay for (often three different things). Even if you don't write a blog - read others.
- Gauge how your constituents/stakeholders will react to a potential change.
- Improve *effective* communications of what/why/where/how/who.
- Enhance effectiveness of *other* communications tools (email, website, direct mail, etc.) Write once, use many; consistency in messages, reinforcement of key value points.
- Can dramatically shorten your sales cycle.
- Have prospective clients/customers self-qualify.
- Build your personal education and resources network.
- Build your referral network.
- Expand your market *very* cost-effectively.

And

- Improve your search engine rankings.

And

- You can read/hear what others are saying about you, your competition, and your industry.

How to Blog

Have a plan - just like any other marketing activity! Make sure it fits your business strategy. Who is your target? What do you want to accomplish? How will you measure progress and success?

- Try before you buy/make the big commitment. Free software at www.wordpress.com and www.blogger.com. (Takes minutes to set up, very user-friendly interface.)
- Read others (learn from their success and mistakes.)
- Comment on other blogs. (But, make it relevant. No blatant sales pitches.)
- Set aside time each week to read, research and write. (There is a learning curve.)
- Post frequently. (Store drafts when you've got time to write. You'll always have something ready to go.)
- Embed links to others' blogs and references in your post. (More value to your reader; builds relationships with other bloggers.)
- Use common sense. Don't write something you wouldn't say to their face, a judge, your Mother.

Read More:

Books:

Naked Conversations by Robert Scoble. Old, but still relevant if you're just starting out.

Blogwild! by Andy Wibbels (blog at www.goblogwild.com)

The Corporate Blogging Book by Debbie Weil (blog at www.blogwriteforceos.com)

Blogs:

Do a google search on blogs in your field, relevant topics

Mary's blog: www.maryschmidt.com (and, check out the blog roll on the right side, more bloggers.)

Build A Better Blog: www.buildabetterblog.com

Business Blogs Now: www.businessblogsnow.com

ConverStations: www.converstations.com

Bloggng - The Top Four Fear Points (adapted from Mary's Blog)

The following are the top four fear points with which I have to deal in client discussions.

1. But what if somebody posts a negative comment?

So? A negative comment can generate some great conversation. If you step up and respond. You can even pull up the comment and write another post around it. This is what I did with a response to one of my Comcast posts. Tom Peters (Technorati blog rank: 859, of 55 million; links for 1,339 blogs) did it once with one of my comments on his blog.

In any event, that commenter will very likely be posting about you on their own site and/or other blogs. So, it's your choice. Participate or hide and hope it goes away. Yep, that worked real well for Dell with Jeff Jarvis (2,489 blogs link to his Buzz Machine.) To Dell's credit, they did gird their loins and eventually respond, and apparently are making changes to their customer service. But, I seriously doubt they were happy about having to do so.

(You can also moderate all comments before you publish them. And, you can use very effective spam filters and blacklists.)

2. We could get sued!

Well, duh and yeah. We live in a society where a woman sued Mickey D's because her coffee was hot. And, big company attorneys are ever-vigilant. Cisco once sent a "cease and desist" letter to Cisco McSorley, a New Mexico legislator. Seems he could be "causing confusion in the marketplace." Right. Firstly, Cisco is the man's birth name. Secondly, Cisco, if people are that stupid, they're not allowed out of the house, let alone have the ability to buy your products.

3. But what if somebody on our blogroll says something with which we don't agree?

You can't control others and you shouldn't want to. Diversity and debate makes us all better. I have people on my blogroll with whom I (gasp) don't always agree. And, I'll sometimes post my points on their blog. (Example: Tom Peters) I also don't have the exact same world or business view as others on my list - but I do respect them and encourage my readers to check them out.

4. We can't have just any of our people posting; it should go through an approval committee.

If you're thinking this, you've totally missed the point and you've got a bigger issue than fear of blogging. It's likely that not all of your people should post - some won't be interested or qualified. (You do need some writing ability and a bit of chutzpah). As for the committee, bloggers will soon spot the "corporate control speak" and kill you. Or, they'll simply ignore you. Even if your committee manages to (finally) produce a good post (remember that old joke about the giraffe, a horse designed by committee) - frequency is critical to blog success. You've got to post often (at the very least weekly) to get and keep people's attention.

And, there is always that challenge of being personal, without getting *too* personal. There is no one "right" answer to this. If your target audience wants to hear about your kids, then tell them. Writing for a technical audience can still have a lot of humor and personality - but you also have to show you know your stuff. Your customers want to know different things than your investors. Giving marketing tips to a small biz is different than writing for your peers. Etc. etc. etc. You have to find *your* own voice, style and focus - and that takes a bit. What works for one blogger doesn't necessarily (probably won't) work for another.

Remember: The blog should be focused on the reader, not the writer!