



Top 5 Misconceptions About Corporate Blogging

A Conversation with Debbie Weil and Chris Baggott

*Takeaways from a pivotal meeting of the
minds between Debbie Weil and Chris Baggott*

Once upon a webinar, two blogging gurus met to tackle the myths surrounding the topic of corporate blogging. The result? A juicy dialog, rife with both differing points of view and absolute agreement. What follows is a recap of that conversation with key takeaways highlighted, as the discussions of misconceptions often turned into lessons in best practices.

Misconception 1

Corporate blogging is out, social media is in.

According to Debbie, this is the biggest misconception. Looking back on the changing attitudes towards corporate blogging since the release of Debbie's book *The Corporate Blogging Book* in 2006, it seems that corporate blogging now gets lost in the conversation about what to do online, as the focus has shifted to Facebook and Twitter.

Was it a fad? Do we need to move on?

“The answer is a resounding ‘no,’” said Debbie. “In fact, corporate blogging really is the hub of your social media marketing.” Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter are the outposts. But your blogs are the hub because you own, manage and control your blogs’ content. It’s your sandbox. You make the rules. You control everything that comes in and goes out. As fun as the social networking sites are, they are not in our control.

“That’s exactly right, but I’d also add that not everything is Twitter worthy,” said Chris. “Not everything is Facebook worthy. But everything is blog worthy.” A Twitter audience wants something different from a Facebook audience, Chris explained, but everything is appropriate content for your blogs: customer stories, case studies, coupons and more. Build your blogs. Then you can look at that bucket of content and decide which content would work well for Twitter, which would work well for Facebook, and disseminate it from there.

Debbie reminded the audience that we’re in business “to achieve business objectives.” Where does business happen? On your website. You can’t conduct business on Twitter or Facebook. Twitter has obvious space limitations. Facebook is more about buzz and the conversation back and forth.

You need to be able to send them somewhere, Chris agreed. For example, a grocer can tweet about green beans being on sale, but

that tweet must drive people to the website or blog to learn more.

“Ultimately you have to have a goal and everything should tie together,” said Chris.

Takeaway:

Not only is corporate blogging still “in,” it’s the hub of your social media marketing. You can’t effectively leverage other social media like Facebook and Twitter without it.

Misconception 2

Content should be written for repeat visitors.

Debbie and Chris worked together on a study to discover what kind of traffic comes to corporate blogs. It turns out that as much as 80 percent of traffic comes from first-time visitors, which shocked Debbie, who asked herself, “Wait a second, what about all this thought leadership and engaged readership that we’ve all been talking about?”

Don’t let this statistic make you lazy about content, however. Instead, let this statistic shape the way you develop great content for your visitors. Your content needs to be congruent with what your audience needs or wants at that moment, Debbie advised. If they’re getting to your blogs through keywords and phrases typed in a search engine, the content better be “damn good” when they get there, she said.

“I think you’re exactly right,” agreed Chris. Most bloggers consider themselves to be like radio personalities, he explained, who are broadcasting out to the same loyal listeners every day. The opposite is true with blogging. Your audience doesn’t know you, and they didn’t set out to find you.

In business, there are two kinds of people in the universe, Chris pointed out: There are people we know, and people we don’t know. There are lots of ways to engage the people we already

know. We can take them to lunch, send them email, or ask them to be fans and followers...all of the ways we reach out to our known customers and prospects. But the challenge is exposing yourself to people who don't yet know you, he said. It's called prospecting, or acquisition marketing, and it's something every business must do.

Don't ignore the most valuable audience you have and that's the people you don't yet know, cautioned Chris. The Compendium study simply shows that blogging is a great tool to engage these people. And when 80% of the people have never met you before and don't know you, consider how you might talk differently to these people.

Debbie pointed out that just because a visitor to your blog is there for the first time doesn't mean you can't pull them in by engaging them and getting them to take some kind of step. "They get there, they read it, and then they do what?" she asked. They'll click to download a whitepaper or take some other action and you'll probably get their email address when they do, which means you can communicate with them again in the future.

Debbie said that traffic to her blog from first-time visitors was a little bit under 80%, a number that shocked her. "I admit, I was appalled and astonished when you had me go look at it," she told Chris. "But in fact, it's true."

Chris reassured the audience that we shouldn't be surprised by these numbers. "We're businesses," he said. "People who use business are people trying to solve problems." If people go to your blog, why are they there in the first place? They are probably there to solve a problem. If you're a plumber, and someone did a search for "leaky pipe Cincinnati," they might find your blog... and your advice on fixing the leaky pipe, or they might hire you. But they're not going to join your club or "like" you (although they might later). They want to solve their plumbing problem and get on with their lives. That's why they're probably going to be a first-time and maybe even a one-time visitor.

Takeaway:

Content should be written for first-time visitors because they make up 80% of your audience. Consider how and why they are your blog and meet their needs with your content.

Misconception 3

No selling allowed.

Debbie admitted she has said in the past that you can't sell in a blog post. Now she realizes that's too much of a blanket statement. Ecommerce blogs selling clothes or jewelry, for example, can write about their products and link to their ecommerce store, she said. So in that sense, it's not true.

But the way to do it, Debbie suggested, is with complementary content. Once someone lands at your blog after doing a search, there should be something on that page that prompts them to take a next step, whether it's a link to your website or a demo or something else. Selling doesn't happen in the blog, but through the combination of the post content and the call to action in an attractive, appropriate way.

Chris disagreed. "The beauty of the web is that there's no ambiguity," he said. Look at the keywords driving traffic to your blogs and you'll learn exactly what people are searching for. Someone searching for "camera Columbus," for example, is probably trying to buy a camera in Columbus. But someone searching for "best camera" is probably researching camera types. When your keywords drive your content, you're going to write for both of those searchers. One blog is going to have a link to an education site or a place where they can learn more. The other might link them directly to where they can buy that camera in Columbus.

"And if you don't give them the links, they're going to back out of your site and go someplace else," he added.

Debbie agreed, saying "it's not a blog post unless it has links in it. Links are the currency of the web." Links in your blog make you look credible, she said. They make your blog look like a place somebody wants to go because you're aggregating information for them.

"Credible, Debbie, is the magic word," said Chris. "Ultimately that's what it's about."

Chris reiterated that 80% of our audience didn't set out to find a blog. And they don't even care that they're on a blog. They've landed there and they're looking around asking themselves, "Can this person solve my digital camera problem?" You have to convince them that yes, you're a credible expert, and then tell them what they're supposed to do next.

Debbie pointed out that Chris is focused on a particular kind of corporate blog: retail. However, there are other kinds of corporate blogs. For example, small business blogs want to do more in thought leadership because they have some other goals. These blogs might not be selling, but can still be used to achieve business goals. For example, if one of your goals is more press, she explained, you can blog about a story you read in the newspaper, include the exact title of the article and the reporter's name, and embed all that in your blog as links. Almost every reporter has a Google alert out on their name. They may see your blog, land on it and call you, which might lead to more coverage.

Chris took a different approach, pointing out that "the greatest selling tactic in the history of mankind is the similar situation sale." When you can tell a prospect a story about how you have solved a problem like theirs in the past for someone like them, they're going to trust that you can solve their problem too, he said.

Debbie agreed that that's selling through showing benefits, but also pointed out that you can only sell in incremental steps. You don't go from meeting someone in the park to getting married the next day, she said. These steps have to move a prospect from one stage to the next by including appealing and relevant calls to action next to your blog post, asking visitors to watch a demo or download a paper, for example. Even if only a small percentage of people click on a call to action, it's still lead generation. It's still filling the funnel. Even if it's not a sale.

Chris pointed out that it's not a small percentage, that blogs convert at a much higher rate than web pages because of the human element. People buy from people, he said. All of these

tools--the blogging and the social networking sites--give you the ability to humanize your organization. People like that and will respond to it. And they reward you if you give them good calls to action.

Takeaway:

It's okay to use your corporate blogs to sell because the majority of your blog visitors will come from search. Your blogs must provide a solution to what the visitor is searching for. Nine times out of ten that solution is going to be what your company sells or provides.

Misconception 4

Corporate blogging should be measured by community and subscribers.

Debbie has updated this section of her corporate blogging book quite considerably for her new edition. She calls it ROB, or Return on Blogging. You can look at how many subscribers or followers you have, she said, but there's a business reason for having the blogs. It's not just having the blogs. It's click-throughs, conversions and traceable metrics. What's really important isn't the size of your "community" or how many followers you have on Twitter. What matters is what's happening as a result of your blogs. How are you meeting your business objectives with the blogs?

Chris agreed: "Everything just needs to be kept in perspective."

For example, Chris explained, Levi's might have 30,000 Facebook fans. Yet there are millions of searches every month for jeans of all kinds that combined average about 250 million searches per month. Levi's might be popping champagne corks over all their Facebook fans, but "in the grand scheme of things, it's meaningless."

Debbie disagreed. "I'm not sure that it's meaningless," she said. If you accept brand awareness or brand presence as a metric, then Levi's is doing well, she pointed out.

Chris countered that it's 30,000 fans in a potential market of 250 million searches. Not that it's not important, he said, but it's a question of how much energy and focus you're going to spend on the social networking side of it. And Levi's already wins most of their searches, he admitted. They took care of that end before working on social media. They didn't put the cart before the horse.

Debbie concurred, reminding the audience that we can get carried away and ego-driven wanting more fans and followers. But we have to stop and ask ourselves, what is the business reason?

Takeaway:

Corporate blogging should be measured by the same metrics as your demand generation or ecommerce website: traffic, click-throughs, leads, conversions and sales.

Misconception 5

Only your CEOs and thought influencers should blog.

Debbie said the answer was--and is--yes and no. There are so many reasons why CEOs can't blog, for one thing: lack of time, legal regulations and so on. The answer is not only the CEO should blog. Others should blog too...or instead. Plus relying on your CEO to blog won't work if you need lots of blog content, but even then, it doesn't have to be a C-level employee. "Does it need to be the VP of marketing? No," said Debbie. "Does it need to be a top executive? No."

For Debbie, the quality of the writing is more important than who writes it. And that means you need a good editor if you're going to have bloggers who aren't necessarily good at it. The challenge becomes, how do you edit blog entries from all the way down to the just-hired customer service rep? There's some kind of middle ground here. Yes, anybody can blog, said Debbie, but they'd better be a pretty good writer and have something to say.

At Compendium, “our general premise is if you give someone a telephone, if you allow them to send their own email, if you give them a business card, they should have access to a blog,” said Chris. But yes, he agreed, someone should see that post before it goes live. He also warned that if you don’t empower these people, they will find another way to blog that won’t be under your control.

Chris stressed that bloggers are born, not made, and you won’t know who’s going to be a good blogger until they do it. If you free it up to everyone, he said, the good bloggers are going to rise to the surface. You want to be able to capture this passionate, human voice, he said. Most organizations hire smart people who care about their jobs. They want to feel empowered. Blogging can empower them.

Takeaway:

People search to find honest dialogue about products and services. They want to hear from people like them. Therefore lots of different voices should be represented in your corporate blogging content. Whether or not that includes your CEO’s voice is up to you.

To hear the conversation between Debbie and Chris with your own ears, and the informative audience Q&A that followed, go to <http://www.compendium.com/resources/webinars.html>

[About Our Participants]



Debbie Weil

Named one of the Most Influential Women in Technology in 2010 by Fast Company, Debbie Weil is the

author of the original and definitive book on corporate blogging, *The Corporate Blogging Book* (available in a 2010 updated e-book edition). She is a DC-based corporate social media consultant and speaker who has advised clients such as GlaxoSmithKline and the American College of Radiology on how to embrace and execute social media marketing. She has been blogging since 2003 and was named by Washingtonian Magazine as a DC Top 100 Tech Titan. She is a Top Twitterer in DC @debbieweil with over 9,000 followers. She has been quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Fortune*, *BusinessWeek*, *CNN.com*, *The Guardian* and numerous other publications.

Be a first-time visitor to Debbie's blog at <http://debbieweil.com/blog/>



Chris Baggott

Compendium co-founder Chris Baggott was a religious blogger, but a frustrated one. Sure, his email

marketing best practices blog had won some notable awards, but the road there was long and painful due to serious usability issues. From his own personal experiences, Chris saw the opportunity to create a user-friendly blogging tool. And better yet, to create it in the mindset of an organization that wants to use blogs in order to accomplish real goals such as higher lead generation and revenues. Prior to co-founding Compendium, Chris was co-founder and CMO of ExactTarget, a leading on-demand email marketing company.

Be a first-time visitor to Chris' blog at <http://blogging.compendiumblog.com/blog.php/blogging-best-practices>

For more information about our solutions, please contact us at www.compendium.com