# Beginner's Guide to

# Business Blogging

A quick guide to understanding, launching and maintaining a blog as a business & marketing tool.

*continued* ▶

**SPECIAL**
re-released manifesto

by Debbie Weil

## Quickie Definition of a Blog

Here's the plain–language, quickie answer to the "Er, what is a blawg?" question:

» A Weblog or blog is an instant publishing tool anyone can use to add fresh content to a Web page. No tech expertise required.

» *Blog* is both a noun and a verb. When you blog (verb), you write. When you blog for business you should write coherently, purposefully and with the goal of establishing your company's credibility and expertise. No drivel allowed. But an authentic, informal *voice* is encouraged.

» A blog is a new way to market your services or products by positioning you and/or your company as thought leaders in highly competitive markets.

» A blog is the new cost–effective way to communicate quickly with — and get feedback from — your audience of readers, whether they are colleagues, competitors, the media, prospects or customers.

» A blog is just a tool, albeit a cool one. As with any tool, there is a right way and a wrong way to use it. There is proper blogging etiquette. (More about that below.)

## A Few Examples of (Well-Written) Business Blogs

Who is blogging for business? Lots of companies, often technology–oriented. And lots of sav–vy marketing types. Here are a few examples of well–written blogs. Note that they are written by one person and in a distinctive voice. Individuals (behind companies) blog. Corporations

communicate in marketing-speak, whether it's glossy collateral or their corporate home page. Which do you think is more persuasive to the reader? Who wants to be *marketed at* or *sold to*? Wouldn't you rather have an intelligent conversation and decide later whether to buy?

Air Conditioning Contractors of America's ACCABuzz
http://accabuzz.com/

BizNet Travel
http://biznettravel.blogs.com/travel_log/

B2B Lead Generation by Brian Carroll
http://blog.startwithalead.com/weblog/

Jupiter Media's Alan Meckler
http://weblogs.jupitermedia.com/meckler/

Micro Persuasion by Steve Rubel
http://www.micropersuasion.com/

Sun Microsystems' Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Schwartz
http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan

Seth Godin's blog
http://sethgodin.typepad.com/

## How Blog Software & Technology Work

While the technology behind blogs may sound intimidating, you don't need to know much about it in order to get started. To blog, you really just need to know how to type. Oh, and write. *Good blogging is good writing.*

Here's the skinny on blog technology:

Blogs offer an RSS feed. RSS is usually defined as "Really Simple Syndication." It's a way to publish and distribute content online instantly and effortlessly. An RSS feed can be read and viewed online, as on a Web page, or on your desktop via a newsreader (see next page).

You might wonder what the big deal is. How is a blog different from an HTML newsletter if you're using it as a channel to communicate with customers or prospects? Here's your answer: blog technology doesn't use email.  Therefore, blogs bypass spam filters and inbox clutter.

**MOST POPULAR BLOGGING SOFTWARE**

Blog software comes in two flavors: hosted and non–hosted. Costs tend to be minimal, even if you have to buy a license. To get a full–featured blog up and running quickly, we highly recommend TypePad.com.

**HOSTED**

TypePad (small monthly charge)
http://www.TypePad.com
Blogger (free)
http://www.Blogger.com

**NON-HOSTED (INSTALL ON YOUR OWN SERVER)**

MovableType (small licensing fee)
http://www.MovableType.org

WordPress (free — open source)
http://www.WordPress.com

# How to Get Started if
# You're New to the Blogosphere

The best way to dip your toes into the blogosphere is to start reading blogs on topics that interest you or are central to your business. **Chief Microsoft blogger Robert Scoble** recommends reading at least 50 blogs for several weeks. Oh, and add his *Scobleizer* to your list of must-read blogs: http://scobleizer.worldpress.com

**But first**…

You need an RSS newsreader. Not to worry. This is less techie than it sounds. Yes, you'll have to download a little applet. Or sign up for a Web-based newsreader. But it's easy and quick. (See short list below of recommended newsreaders.)

You can also read a blog by typing in the URL and going to visit the blog page on the Web. But why go to all that trouble when your newsreader will grab the newest entry for you? Your RSS reader displays the title, a brief summary and a link to the full posting. Read at your convenience. And best of all, NO EMAIL is involved.

**RSS NEWSREADERS**

**NewsGator**
http://www.NewsGator.com
(Highly recommended. Integrates seamlessly with Outlook — DW.)

**Bloglines (Web-based)**
http://www.bloglines.com

**FeedDemon**
http://www.feeddemon.com/feeddemon/index.asp

**Feedreader (free)**
http://www.feedreader.com

**Pluck (free)**
http://www.pluck.com

**NetNewsWire (for Mac)**
http://ranchero.com/netnewswire/

# What a Blog Looks Like

**BlogWriteForCEOs**, a blog I started recently using TypePad. The "blog" or dynamic content is in the center column (fig. 1). The left and right-hand columns are (generally) static. They can be configured and customized with links back to your main site. You can also customize the look and feel, colors, layout, etc. with TypePad's templates. www.BlogWriteForCEOs.com

*figure 1:*

BlogWrite for CEOs — a blog I started recently using TypePad.

# Why Blog? Isn't My e-Newsletter Enough?

Unless your e-newsletter or ezine has your customer's mortgage statement attached to it, you'll be lucky if your subscribers open it. Between the new federal CAN-Spam legislation, spam filters and actual spam, inbox noise has reached an all-time high.  Don't get me wrong — email is still a viable marketing tool. In fact, email is now in its mature phase as a killer app of online marketing.

But a blog may be the perfect complement to an e-newsletter. Here's why:

» Since blogs aren't email, inbox clutter and spam filters are a non-issue. But readers can still *subscribe* to blogs using an RSS newsreader.

» Blogs, through an easy interface, publish instantly. No formatting, no templates, no fancy coding.

» Search engines love blogs. Each entry on your blog is its own Web page (even if it's a one-liner). And search engines are drawn to fresh, updated pages. So by virtue of blogging, you can drive traffic to your company or business site — without hiring an expensive SEO (search engine optimization) service.

**SELECTED LIST OF BLOG SEARCH ENGINES**

Whether you're searching for blogs to read on a particular topic…or want to see where your own blog is being picked up, you'll find blog search engines and directories to be useful tools.

**BlogPulse**
http://www.blogpulse.com/index.html

**Technorati**
http://www.technorati.com

**Feedster**
http://www.feedster.com

# Basic Blogging Etiquette

## KEEP IT FRESH (AND SHORT)

As compelling as your blog may be, if you don't keep it fresh, your audience is going to lose interest. Update your blog several times a month at the minimum. Better yet, try to add to your blog weekly so your audience will know it hasn't been abandoned. And don't try to write an opus. A short entry is fine.

## LINK, LINK, LINK

No matter what site, article or other blog you refer to,  you should embed a link to your source. Not only is it polite, it's what makes the blogosphere tick — the cross-linking and cross-fertilization of hundreds and thousands of blogs. And of course it's what draws the search engines to your blog. Be sure to refer to the specific, permanent link — or perma-link — if you're referencing another blogger's post.

## STICK TO A NICHE TOPIC

While it's tempting to sound off on the topic du jour, don't. An effective business blog focuses on a subject that's useful to your audience.

## OH, AND HAVE FUN

It's hard not to, once you get into the swing of blogging. Imagine…a business communications vehicle where you can *tell it like it is*, avoid endless rounds of editing and approvals, develop a distinctive writing voice and style…and still generate leads, attract media attention and brand your company or organization as a thought leader.

# Articles

## TOP 20 DEFINITIONS OF BLOGGING
By Debbie Weil

What is a blog? Why blog? Who should blog (journalists, marketers, CEOs, techies, educators, scientists, hobbyists)? Should blogging be pure or can you make money with a blog? Will blogging change everything?

Picture several hundred intense writer/thinker/bloggers one year ago at **BlogCon** http://www.bloggercon.org/directory/15/archive in Cambridge, MA, one of the first serious blogging conferences, and you get the idea…a blogging conference is not for the faint-hearted. The metaphysics of blogging was a hot topic. The warmth of a virtual community enjoying face-to-face interaction was palpable.

As conference organizer (and veteran hackle-raiser) Dave Winer put it in his thank you message to attendees: "Did we figure out what weblogs are? Probably not — but we came closer."

## Well, I decided to take a crack at it.
## Here are my top 20 definitions of a blog.

Take them with a grain of salt. Take them as a starting point to think about how you might use a blog as part of your Web site or communications strategy.

But don't write Weblogs off as a passing fad, even if you're not blogging yet yourself.

## Blogging is…

**#1**  form of unedited, authentic self-expression

**#2**  An instant publishing tool

**#3**  An online journal with freshly updated content

**#4**  Amateur journalism

**#5**  Something that will revolutionize the Web (think RSS feeds)

**#6**  A way to create community with your voters, er…readers (think 2,200 comments posted to the Dean for America blog in one day)

**#7**  An alternative to mainstream media (think http://InstaPundit.com by Glenn Reynolds and http://TalkingPointsMemo.com by Joshua Micah Marshall)

**#8** A tool to teach students how to write (think Kaye Trammel at the University of Florida)

**#9** A new way to communicate with customers (think Ray Ozzie, CEO of Groove Networks)

**#10** A new form of knowledge management inside big companies

**#11** A way for a bunch of navel-gazers to communicate with one another

**#12** Something to keep you occupied when you're unemployed (more people than care to admit fit into this category; have you noticed?)

**#13** A way to think and write in short paragraphs instead of a long essay (which no one has time to read anyway)

**#14** Your email to everyone, as A-list blogger Doc Searls puts it (i.e. a way to stay in touch with family and friends)

**#15** A silly word that's fun to say ("Gotta go blog now…")

**#16** A way of writing with a distinct voice and personality (think Halley Suitt)

**#17** Something to talk about at cocktail parties ("I blogged Seth Godin and he blogged me back…")

**#18** A URL to add to your resume (as in TokyoTim, my 23-year-old son who's living and working in Japan for a year)

**#19** Something else to do with your mobile phone…think audio blogging and moblogging

**#20** Something you don't want your mother to read (what my mother says about blogging)

**USEFUL LINKS**

MarketingTerms' definition of a blog

Blogger Classifications by Susan Mernit

Esther Dyson's Release 1.0 on Weblogs, RSS and the Rise of the Active Web

Traction Software (example of enterprise knowledge management)
http://www.tractionsoftware.com/

The dullest blog in the world Be sure to read the comments. You'll get the idea…

## WHAT IS RSS AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

By Debbie Weil

**RSS** You may be noticing more and more little orange RSS icons on Web sites and most blogs. Here's a quick primer to RSS: what it is and why you need to know about it.

### What RSS stands for

RSS variously stands for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary. The former is the more commonly accepted phrase. It also helps to explain what RSS is.

### What RSS does

RSS is a new way to both distribute and receive content online without using email. Publishers use RSS to distribute a "news feed" to readers. Readers subscribe to an RSS feed via a newsreader or news aggregator.

(If you want to get techie about it, RSS is based on XML, a standard for exchanging information between Internet applications.)

### Why you need a "newsreader"

A newsreader is a little piece of software (it can also be an online service) that is downloaded to your desktop. It delivers a headline, short summary and a link back to the full text every time an RSS news feed is updated.

News sites such as Yahoo! And CNET have been publishing RSS feeds for quite a while. More recently, the RSS buzz is about blogs.

Most blog software automatically includes an RSS feed. If you subscribe to a blog via RSS, you are alerted every time the blog is updated.

Note: you can also "subscribe" to a blog via a Bloglet.com (http://www.bloglet.com) email subscription if that feature has been added to the blog.

## Biggest plus: no email is involved

The beauty of the RSS format is that no email is involved as the delivery mechanism. So no overflowing inboxes or spam filters to block your e-newsletter if you're a publisher.

The downside for publishers, however, is that you don't know much if anything about subscribers to your news feed or blog. Your readers don't need to give you an email address in order to subscribe. That's a plus, of course, for those concerned about privacy.

(Caveat: http://www.feedburner.com is a Web-based service in beta that enables you to get stats about your blog traffic.)

In a nutshell, what the fuss is about…

So why the excitement? In a nutshell:

» RSS circumvents spam filters & email overload.

» You no longer have to actively visit a long list of Web sites (or blogs) for information on specific topics or  industry verticals. It comes to you automatically via the RSS feeds you've chosen.

» Publishers can be sure that their blog or news updates are being successfully "pushed" to interested subscribers without being siphoned off into email junk folders.

» Some advertisers are looking to RSS as a new way to push their messages to a targeted audience. It remains to be seen whether blog publishers will accept this. Blogging purists are already saying "no" to advertising within the editorial environment of a blog.

Bottom line…We're still in the early–adopter phase when it comes to syndicating content via RSS. But it's catching on faster and  faster — just as blogs are becoming more and more ac–cepted as an online communications tool. Stay tuned.

**USEFUL LINK**

About RSS  http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/aboutrss

## 5 KEY QUESTIONS (YOU'VE BEEN DYING) TO ASK ABOUT BUSINESS BLOGS
By Debbie Weil

By now you've heard about blogs or Weblogs. They're the next new thing. They're cool. The blogosphere (the community of active bloggers) has grown from a dozen or so Weblogs in 1999 to an estimated 4 million today.

And, just maybe, blogs are the next killer app of online marketing. Technology evangelists like Chris Pirillo are saying that "email marketing is dead." Killed by spam and clogged inboxes.

Will business blogs replace e-newsletters as the most powerful, cost-effective tool for communicating with customers? Should every company be adding a blog to its site — or replacing a static site with an ever changing Weblog?

Don't be shy. Let me pose five questions you may have been dying to ask. Then you decide whether business blogs are the new new thing.

## What is a blog?

It's a Web-based journal powered by a self-publishing tool that enables the author(s) to regularly and easily update the content. The log consists of commentary along with links to other blogs or online resources. Blog posts are always presented in reverse chronological order. Each entry is time and date-stamped. Wait...there's more.

## What's the definition of a good blog?

Blogs are usually written by one person and in a style that is candid, authentic, even raw. Miles from corporate marketing speak.

The voice of a blog is sometimes edgy; usually opinionated; often smart. Bloggers are not journalists but they comment, analyze and report in real-time on politics, culture and all things Internet. The coolness quotient of a blog is based on how many other Weblogs link to it. And what kind of buzz it stirs up in the blogosphere.

A-list bloggers (of which there are only several hundred) use tools like Blogrolling's Top 100 and Technorati's Link Cosmos to measure popularity.

By this definition, blogs don't sound like a natural business tool. "Coolness" is not a measure of success these days. Web traffic, clickthroughs and conversion are what count, along with open rates for an email newsletter.

## Why should businesses blog?

Simple. No one listens anymore to sanitized marketing messages. If you find the right person in your organization to "blog" about your products or services you'll brand your company as authentic and knowledgeable. Every company has a closet writer, whether or not that's part of his or her job title.

A business blog doesn't need to be "cool." As blogger and consultant Rick Bruner put it in his presentation at the ClickZ Weblog conference, "A blog doesn't have to be a ranting screed. Personality is important. But a blog can be utilitarian by contextualizing and aggregating information."

In addition, a number of companies (including Microsoft and Google) are using blogs as a content management tool for Web-based collaboration. Of course, these Weblogs are behind firewalls.

I predict that a new set of best practices for business blogs will evolve. A successful corporate blog may ape the "raw" and "unedited" style of a personal blog. But it will most likely be reviewed by a savvy in-house editor who knows what crosses the line into trade secrets and what doesn't. Just keep it out of the hands of your in-house corporate counsel if you want to preserve any semblance of "voice."

## Do I really need to know about RSS?

**XML** Yes, but it's pretty simple. Have you noticed those little orange RSS or XML tags on Weblog pages? They mean that the page is available in RSS. RSS is the "code" that underlies a blog. It includes a headline, a short summary and the URL of the page.

Just as a Web browser can "read" a page of HTML (hypertext markup language), a news reader or aggregator can "read" RSS.

RSS is a way of organizing and publishing the content on your Web pages.

The beauty of it is that no email delivery is required. No overflowing inboxes to contend with if you're a publisher. No spam filters that block your e–newsletter. When someone "sub–scribes" to your RSS feed the news aggregator automatically collects updates that include the URL of your page along with a summary description of the new content.

## Will blogs replace e-newsletters?

Too soon to tell. What's clear is that it's all about the content. Repeat, a blog is not a blog unless it's a great read. Good writing, useful references, interesting connections.

This is a tall order. If you're already publishing an e–newsletter as a marketing communications tool, you know how much work it is to consistently create good content.

Think of a blog as an *always-on* e–newsletter with more interactivity built into it. There is an immediacy and realness to the interaction between blog writer and blog reader that you don't get with an e–newsletter. Readers can add comments to any blog post for all to see. Doc

Searls ([http://doc.weblogs.com/](http://doc.weblogs.com/)) calls his Weblog his "email to everyone." Anyone who reads his blog can see what everyone else is commenting about it.

I predict that blogs will co-exist with e-newsletters and static sites. They'll feed off one another. The push of an e-newsletter is hard to beat. But the pull of a blog can be a lot more interesting.

Put it this way: scarcely ten years ago you might have asked, "Will email replace the phone, fax and postal mail as the preferred means of business communication?" Of course, we exclaim in hindsight.

So might it go with blogs.

## RSS VS. EMAIL DELIVERY: IS EMAIL DEAD?
By Debbie Weil

In simplest terms RSS (which stands for Really Simple Syndication) is a way to publish or receive news and content electronically — without using email.

Tech guru and publisher Chris Pirillo explains it this way:

"It enables headlines to be distributed online instantly…Instead of giving people a newsletter formatted to our tastes and delivered on our time schedule, we can provide them with a means to get the same content in text or HTML whenever they want it."

## The connection with email and e-newsletters is…

Some folks (including Pirillo) are saying that spam filters and flooded inboxes mean the death of email as an effective marketing and publishing channel. And that RSS is the new alternative.

That's one side of the argument. The other is that email marketing is doing just fine, thank you.

## Remind me again, what is RSS…?

Here's my quickie explanation: You don't receive an RSS feed through email or your Web browser. Instead you use a news reader or a news aggregator, a simple piece of software that you download and install on your computer.

Your news reader scrapes (yes, that's the "in" word) newly-posted headlines and summaries of RSS content you've subscribed to. It delivers those headlines instantly to your computer.

## And the connection with blogs is?

Almost all blogs offer an RSS feed. This makes it easy to distribute your blog content to anyone with a news reader like NewsGator.

Most Weblogs are available as RSS feeds by clicking on an orange RSS or XML button, like the one above. But so are an increasing number of e-newsletters, as well as new product announcements, eBay listings, etc.

If you have a news reader installed, you can "subscribe" to my blog by going to www.debbieweil.com. Right click on the RSS button at the top.

## Remind me what a blog is…

A Weblog or blog is a self-publishing tool that enables you to post new content to your site (specifically, your blog page) daily, hourly or as often as you wish. A number of companies and organizations are beginning to incorporate blogs into their sites in order to keep the content fresh and authentic.

In simplest terms, a blog is a content management tool that anyone can use to update a site (no technical expertise required).

## Good, clear explanations of RSS

Ralph Wilson's Web Marketing Today: Using RSS Feeds to Promote Your Website

Chris Pirillo's Lockergnome RSS 3-Step Quickstart Guide

The Jennings Report: Special Issue on RSS Jeanne S. Jennings

RSS Tutorial for Content Publishers by Mark Nottingham

Yahoo explains its RSS feeds

## Cons: email is doing just fine

A really simple content solution by Rebecca Lieb in ClickZ. Rebecca makes the point that RSS is still a little-known technology and that publishers can't track readers' response the way they can with an HTML newsletter.

DoubleClick's 2003 and 2004 Email Trend Reports
http://www.doubleclick.com/us/knowledge/documents/trend_reports/dc_q203emailtrends_0308.pdf

MarketingSherpa's revised Email Marketing Metrics Guide (all-new 2005 edition) Order this meaty guide for the latest stats on email marketing and e-newsletters.
http://www.sherpastore.com/store/page.cfm/p.cfm/1976?a=weil?1006

Email marketing still works (MediaPost)

## SEARCHING FOR BLOG TRAFFIC

By John Jantsch,
contributing writer, *WordBiz Report*

As more and more blogs go commercial, more and more folks want to know how and why they should blog for business. While there are any number of reasons, one of the most com–pelling is this: search engines seem to love blogs.

So what is it about blogs that those little spiders love so much?

Here's a little secret: search engines crave content.

Okay, so maybe that's not such a secret. But to look at many websites you would think it is. The fact is too many websites do nothing to attract search engines. Providing content, not to mention fresh content, is one of the toughest chores of anyone who maintains a website. But when it comes to generating traffic it is the most important job.

Blogs, by their very nature, are all about content. In a commercial environment every blog entry is fresh content. Get in the habit of making two, three, even four entries a week and you've got a content building bonanza on your hands. Everyone knows you need new content to give visitors a reason to come back; blogs just make the task so much easier.

## Lack of competition

Another advantage that blogs currently possess over traditional web pages and sites is lack of competition. While the number of bloggers grows daily, there are still relatively few com–mercial blog sites. When I created my blog I found that it showed up in the number three

spot in Google for the term "Marketing Weblog" within about three weeks of launch. Not bad considering I did nothing to make it happen.

There are a couple of other things you should do to make your weblog a traffic magnet. They aren't really that different than traditional search engine optimization (SEO) tactics but the names and faces are unique to the blogging world.

## Use targeted keywords in your entry titles

No rocket science here but this tip can't be stated enough. Forget cute. Go for titles that fit your targeted keywords and phrases even if they seem a bit awkward. (You do have targeted keywords and phrases, don't you?)

## Register with blog search engines

Search engines that specialize in blogs include:

http://www.daypop.com/

http://www.blogsearchengine.com/

## Register with tracking services

These services note when a blog has been updated and publish an ongoing list. They even keep track of the most updated and most visited weblogs. Plus you get to learn what pinging is.

Two tracking services are:

http://blo.gs/
http://www.pingomatic.com/

## Trade some links

You don't need to get out of control on this one but a few "relevant" swapped links to related blogs can boost your traffic.

## Syndicate your content

This tactic is way too technical to cover here but do some research on the term RSS and you may discover ways to have your content and entries fed to sites that are hungry for the type of stuff you write. Many of the popular weblog software packages have this capability built right in.

http://www.feedster.com/

John Jantsch is a small business marketing coach based in Kansas City, Mo. He writes frequently on real world small business marketing tactics and is the creator of "Duct Tape Marketing" a turn–key small business marketing system. Check out his blog at http://www.DuctTapeMarketing.com/weblog.php.

## 5 TIPS FOR A "USEFUL RESOURCE" BLOG
By Debbie Weil

If the "coolness" factor (i.e., how to sound smart and plugged-in day after day) is holding you back from blogging, consider these five down-to-earth tips from Rick Bruner, president of Executive Summary Consulting.

First, be clear on the purpose of your blog. As Rick puts it: "Is it to establish thought leadership or to offer useful, timely information to your customers and prospects?"

If thought leadership is your aim, you've got a more difficult task. Rick maintains a blog at ExecutiveSummary.com whose purpose is to promote his services as an analyst and consultant.

He posts less often to that blog because "I need to sound smart and analytical and insightful which is harder to do. I have to write commentary which means I have to think a lot more."

By contrast, he creates regular content for the blog on Biznettravel's site (http://biznettravel.com). The travel agency has outsourced maintenance of their "travel log" to Rick.

"It doesn't need to be original writing," Rick emphasizes. "The purpose of this blog is to be a useful resource. We're identifying useful articles on other sites, providing a sentence or two of context and then linking to them."

## Rick's 5 tips to maintain a useful blog

**TIP #1:** Make it a discipline to post to your blog at least once a week. Try to do it 3 or 4 times.

**TIP #2:** Make each post short and digestible.

**TIP #3:** Make it easy on yourself by consulting a list of resource links.

Add to your blog a list of links pointing to sites relevant to your business or industry niche. When it comes time to post, "troll your resource list yourself." This is a quick way to do research and come up with new articles to link to. In other words, "don't wait for inspiration to strike."

**TIP #4:** Don't worry about a distinctive voice.

Although a distinctive, edgy voice is often a part of personal blogs, it's not necessary for a "useful resources" blog. Rick recruited a freelancer to help him with Biznettravel's blog. They both post regularly and between the two of them produce more than enough content.

Rick says he may add a personal comment such as, "I lost my luggage recently and you know how aggravating that can be…" Then he'll link to a "top 10 tips" article on what to do when you lose your bags.

**TIP #5:** Write relevant, specific titles for each separate blog posting.

The search engines love blogs and will index individual entries (no matter how short) if you've got your blogging software configured to create a separate page for each post.

In other words, think of each blog post as a Web page with its own title.

**BONUS TIP:** "Your blog may end up looking smarter than you intended just by virtue of frequent, short, useful postings," says Rick.

## USEFUL LINKS

Rick's blog at Executive Summary Consulting

The BUZZ Continues: RSS & Newsletters by Kathleen Goodwin in ClickZ (Feb. 4, 2004)

## THREE REASONS TO PUBLISH AN E-NEWSLETTER <u>AND</u> A BLOG

By Debbie Weil

With spam filters on high alert, delivering a newsletter by email is not as easy as it was even one year ago. Should it reach your subscriber's inbox (without getting siphoned into a junk folder), it still has to vie for attention amongst dozens — or even hundreds — of new messages.

### 1. A blog is not "email"

A Weblog or blog, on the other hand, is a page on your site that can be updated several times a week with fresh content. If a reader has "subscribed" to your blog, he or she gets an alert (consisting of the headline and brief summary) every time you post new information. Er, much the same way you may offer a teaser paragraph in your newsletter with a link back to the full article on your site.

It's just not true that e-newsletters "come" to subscribers while readers have to "go" to blogs! One subscribes to a blog using downloadable software called a newsreader. No email is involved. So, no filters and no delivery problems.

## 2. A blog is an easy content managment tool

A blog is an easy-to-use content management tool, a way for the non-technical to update Web content. And a blog doesn't have to be "cool." A steady stream of short tips with links to other sites or articles can be extremely useful. In fact, this is the same kind of useful infor-mation you may be cramming into each issue of your newsletter. With a blog, you can parcel it out in digestible bits — with more impact.

## 3. A blog makes your site search engine friendly

Search engines love blogs. By incorporating a blog into your site and naming each new posting with keyword phrases relevant to your business, you can raise your search engine rankings.

Of course, don't forget to link back to your blog through each issue of your newsletter. You'll probably need to explain to your newsletter readers what your blog is, where to find it and how to subscribe it.

OK, but are blogs a fad or a trend?

I love this question. Here's my answer:

Newsletters or ezines are still the e-vehicle of choice for most marketers. Two things are slowing the adoption of blogs as a channel for business communication:

1. They're associated with highly personal, often unedited musings

2. Most folks don't know what a news reader is and why you need one to subscribe to a blog or any kind of RSS feed. (Again, see box at right.)

## Use a blog to extend the reach of your e-newsletter

My advice for now is to continue publishing an e-newsletter. If you're sending it in HTML, trim your design down to the bare minimum and make the file size as small as possible. This will give you a better chance of getting past the spam filters and other blocking tools being used by major ISPs like AOL.

At the same time, consider adding a blog to your site for two reasons: as a content management tool and as an adjunct to your email marketing efforts. You may find you can use a blog to trim down the extraneous information that's clogging the regular issues of your newsletter and making it less effective.

## CASE STUDY: WHY THE AIR CONDITIONING CONTRACTORS OF AMERICA'S BLOG IS NOT, ER, COOL
By Debbie Weil

It's tempting to say the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA) has a cool blog. But it wouldn't be true.

What ACCA, the trade association for 4,000 heating, ventilating and air conditioning companies, has created is a highly efficient way of communicating with its members.

Since VP for Member Services & Communications Kevin Holland launched ACCA's blog, dubbed ACCAbuzz, in January 2004, he and his staff have posted hundreds of entries to the Weblog or blog page on ACCA's site.

The postings range from quick notices about local chapters' annual golf outings, barbecues and horse races to dozens of entries about ACCA's annual blow–out conference & expo in New Orleans in February, 2004.

The conference entries include photos and a cleverly written "conference journal" by a first–time attendee. Using the Web–based interface behind the blog, Kevin and his communications staff easily "post" this information to ACCAbuzz in minutes. No tech staff or Web designers are involved.

And in the case of this year's annual expo, the new entries were posted from whatever computer Kevin had access to at their hotel. Real–time reporting, as it were.

## Why a blog?

ACCA, an active national trade association, runs a content–rich Web site and publishes two weekly e–newsletters (one public and one for members only) as well as a quarterly print magazine.

But there was no venue to distribute the many snippets of news about the 60 state and local chapter members of ACCA. Kevin considered a daily e–newsletter but felt it would be too much trouble to produce. He decided to launch a blog "as an experiment" and "a place to distribute content we weren't getting across to our readership."

To create the blog, he used TypePad (see useful links below), a popular and inexpensive

blog–hosting service. By tweaking one of TypePad's templates and putting links in the left and right–hand columns leading back to ACCA's main site, he made ACCAbuzz look like just another page on the association's site.

(Yes, Kevin is a bit of a techie in addition to being a marketer. He says it took him a couple of hours to set up and customize the blog.)

## How Kevin introduced it to his readers

Many of them are not particularly Web savvy. They don't know what a blog is and probably don't care. So Kevin initially described it to members as a "daily newsletter on steroids."

He posted the following to the ACCA site to introduce ACCAbuzz:

> **ACCAbuzz is a new way we will be communicating with our members and the entire HVACR industry. It gives us an easy way to post quick news items, commentary, and links to articles of interest. As time  goes on, ACCAbuzz will become the real nerve center of our website, because it's here that our staff and members can keep everyone in the loop, ask questions, and get real-time feedback. In announcing this new site to our members, we called it a "daily newsletter on steroids," because it just keeps growing, all day long!**

Where ACCA gets ideas for content

In addition to using the blog as the "hub of communications" for ACCA's annual conference and posting news submitted by local chapters, Kevin reads Google's "HVAC" news every morning. He passes on industry articles and links to staff member Lucia Lodata. She types up a brief synopsis (what Kevin calls "a bite") with a link to the full article. She hits "publish" and the blog is instantly updated. The most recent post is always at the top.

He has also encouraged other staff members to post occasionally (see the category called "From the desk of…" with a nifty accompanying graphic). He plans to invite industry experts, on sales and marketing, for example, to contribute as guest bloggers. "The informal com–mentary is what makes a blog work," Kevin says. "That's the difference between a blog and regular Web site content."

## Importance of "categories"

One of the neat things about most blogging software is that it enables you to create categories of information and assign each post you make to a "category." ACCA's blog has over a dozen categories (see useful links below). This way, Kevin says, members can visit the blog anytime and search for information useful to them.

## Comments policy

Most blogs allow readers to post "comments" to any given entry. In theory this makes for a wonderfully interactive communications vehicle. In practice, spammers have discovered the "comments" function…and are adding "unrelated" or self–promotional commentary.

Kevin ran the potential problem of allowing comments by ACCA's lawyers and came up with the following policy, posted to his site:

> **ACCA allows for the posting of comments on news items to foster communication between HVACR community members. We reserve the right to delete comments at any time and ask that comments be constructive and civil. Advertisements are prohibited and will be deleted. In addition, ACCA operates in strict compliance with federal antitrust laws. To start, enter or view a discussion, just click on the "Comments" link below each news item.**

He finds that most ACCA members don't post comments to the blog; instead they email him individually.

## How he's measuring the effectiveness of ACCA's blog

Kevin describes ACCAbuzz as "not a primary communications vehicle yet. It's more of a secondary channel." But it's a key part of his overall marketing and communications strategy. 15% of the 40,000 visitors per month to ACCA's site click through to the blog page.

He's taking development of the blog step by step. In addition to guest bloggers, he will eventually explain to his members how to subscribe to the blog via an RSS feed. For now, "they understand the writing and the usefulness of the blog. But I don't want to bother them with the technology."

His goal: to cross promote and re-purpose all the content he's creating for the site, for his e-newsletters and for the quarterly print magazine.

## Advice if you're launching a business blog

Ask yourself what you're trying to achieve, Kevin advises. "If you're looking for a way to provide regularly updated information to your membership there's no easier way to do it," he says.

"In a minimal amount of time you can create a very simple Web publishing system that non-techies can use."

But, he cautions, don't start a blog "if you're going to leave it up there festering. You have to have a plan to keep it going. You have to know what you're going to use it for."

**USEFUL LINKS**

ACCA's main site: http://www.accabuzz.com/
ACCAbuzz: http://acca.blogs.com/

**OTHER ASSOCIATION-RELATED BLOGS ACCA'S KEVIN HOLLAND RECOMMENDS**

http://associationforum.org
http://associationinnovation.com
http://highcontext.com
http://technoprophet.org

# Q & A on Content
# Appropriate for Blogs vs. e-Newsletters

The litmus test for "what to blog" is…
be succinct, useful & include a link

**Question:** I have an e-mail newsletter and I'm considering starting a blog. What content is appropriate for each?

**Answer (from Debbie Weil):** The first thing you should know is that a blog does not have to be "cool." The second thing is that a blog, or Weblog, can be the perfect complement to your e-mail and e-newsletter marketing.

Content that works best in a blog is short and links to other resources. In fact, you can use a blog to quickly summarize and point to other articles you find on the Web that are relevant to your audience. You might also offer a quick synopsis and link to a full-length article in the previous or current issue of your e-newsletter. (This is one way a blog and an e-newsletter can work together.)

A blog post can be as short as one sentence or as long as several Web pages. But a short paragraph with one or more links works best; it's easier and quicker to write and will help you sidestep the procrastination that often accompanies publishing an e-newsletter. It's also easier to read and digest.

The litmus test for "what to blog" is that it be useful in some way to your readers. It can be a snippet of news from a trade publication, a link to a blog post on a related topic, a pointer to a free downloadable white paper or a quick observation about an industry trend. You get the idea.

As for writing style, your blog doesn't have to be informal or edgy if that doesn't mesh with your company's culture. A business blog doesn't need to be clever. Concentrate instead on being authentic and avoiding corporate-speak. Your voice will develop over time.

In summary, be succinct and follow blog etiquette by always linking to the sources of your information.

Remember, the objective of a business blog is similar to that of an e-newsletter: to build credibility and an ongoing relationship with your customers and prospects so that your product or service is top of mind when they're ready to buy. A blog filled with short, useful pointers will do just that.

**Q & A column by Debbie Weil in BtoB E-Mail Marketer Insight**
http://www.btobonline.com/article.cms?articleId=13381#ask

But newsletters are still the vehicle of choice for most marketers. Two things are slowing the adoption of blogs for business communication. First, they're associated with highly personal, often unedited musings. Second, most folks don't know what a news reader is and why they need one to subscribe to a blog or any kind of RSS feed.

My advice for now is to continue publishing an e-newsletter. If you're sending it in HTML, trim your design down to the bare minimum and make the file size as small as possible. This will give you a better chance of getting past the spam filters and other blocking tools used by major ISPs such as AOL.

At the same time, consider adding a blog to your site. A blog is an easy-to-use content management tool — a way for the non-technical person to update Web content. And, a steady stream of short tips with links to other sites or articles can be extremely useful for readers. In fact, this is the same kind of information you may be cramming into each issue of your newsletter. Using a blog, you can parcel it out in digestible bits with more impact.

Also, a blog makes your site search engine friendly; search engines love blogs. By incorporating a blog into your site and naming each new posting with keyword phrases relevant to your business, you can raise your search engine rankings.

Of course, don't forget to link back to your blog through each issue of your newsletter. You'll probably need to explain to your newsletter readers what your blog is, where to find it and how to subscribe it.

**Q & A column by Debbie Weil in BtoB E-Mail Marketer Insight**
http://www.btobonline.com/article.cms?articleId=13344#ask

# info

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Debbie Weil is a speaker, consultant and author of the newly–published The Corporate Blogging Book (Penguin Portfolio August 2006). She's also publisher of award–winning WordBiz Report, her e–newsletter delivered to close to 20,000 subscribers in 87 countries. She has a unique background as a journalist and an MBA with corporate marketing experience.

As a consultant and trainer, she shows senior executives and large companies how to brand themselves as customer– and employee–friendly—as well as media–savvy—by using blogs, RSS, podcasts, wikis and other social media. She works with CEOs and other top–level execs who want to quickly and easily position themselves—and their companies—as thought leaders in highly competitive markets. Read her Technorati Top 5,000 blog at: www.BlogWriteForCEOs.com (OK, that's a joke. But it's pretty impressive. There are now 50 million blogs.) Visit her site at www.debbieweil.com.

Reach her direct at 202.364.5705 or wordbiz@gmail.com.

**DOWNLOAD THIS**

This manifesto is available from http://changethis.com/25.07.BusinessBlogging

**SEND THIS**

Click here to pass along a copy of this manifesto to others.
http://changethis.com/25.07.BusinessBlogging/email

**SUBSCRIBE**

Learn about our latest manifestos as soon as they are available. Sign up for our free newsletter and be notified by email. http://changethis.com/subscribe

# info

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the side–walk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

**NAVIGATION & USER TIPS**

Move around this manifesto by using your keyboard arrow keys or click on the right arrow ( → ) for the next page and the left arrow ( ← ). To send this by email, just click on          .

**HAVING PROBLEMS SAVING TO DISK?**

First, make sure you have the latest version of Acrobat Reader 6 which you can download from http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html. If problems persist, it may be due to your Acrobat Reader settings. To correct the problem (for Windows), a reader, J. Hansen, suggests going to your Acrobat Reader Preferences > Options > Web browser Options. Check the "Display PDF in Browser" option. Then click on Save to Disk          .

| KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS | PC | MAC |
|---|---|---|
| Zoom in (Larger view) | [ CTL ]  [ + ] | [ ⌘ ]  [ + ] |
| Zoom out | [ CTL ]  [ — ] | [ ⌘ ]  [ — ] |
| Full screen/Normal screen view | [ CTL ]  [ L ] | [ ⌘ ]  [ L ] |

# info

**BORN ON DATE**

This document was created on August 3, 2006 and is based on the best information available at that time. To check for updates, please click here to visit:
http://changethis.com/25.07.BusinessBlogging

**ABOUT CHANGETHIS**

ChangeThis is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at main site www.800ceoread.com or at our daily blog http://800ceoread.com/blog/.