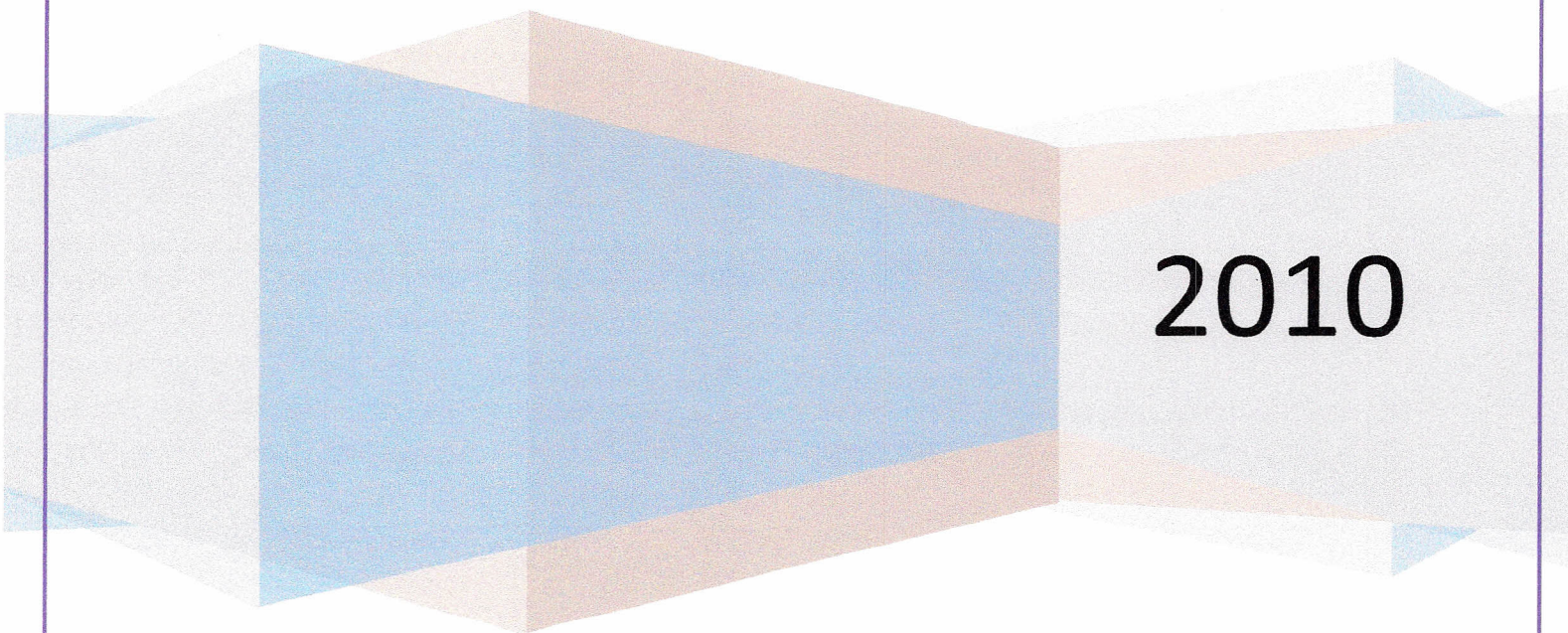


EDGEWISE CREATIVE SERVICES

Blogging Toward Tomorrow

How to blog as an effective marketing tool without getting
caught in the web



2010

*"We must find ideas big enough to be afraid of again."
– Garland Wright*

THE VALUE OF ONLINE MARKETING

Online communication is venturing into a new marketing dimension – using Web 2.0 technologies like blogs, podcasts, and video to attract search engine attention, exchange ideas and information, demonstrate expertise, engage consumers, and perhaps most importantly – build online communities. In this white paper we share with you the means by which you can supercharge your marketing, maximize internal communication, and join the latest, most effective means of communicating and collaborating with those you need to reach.

Social networks provide a low-cost, high-results tool for community building, competitive differentiation, marketing, sales, customer relations management (CRM), media contacts, and corporate collaboration. Plus, the software is much simpler than what is required for websites, so any organization can easily generate content and maintain a social network. Also, social networks serve as the perfect complement to an organizations' main business website as a means to create an online community among consumers or constituents (a.k.a. "true believers").

Social networks allow companies to:

- Increase revenue potential with advertising and sponsorships
- Extend their online presence
- Increase search engine traffic
- Effectively execute sales and marketing activities for single and cross-platform sites
- Generate a greater sense of community with visitors, users, consumers, and members
- Reach new audiences and build a loyal web following

SOCIAL NETWORKS – THE NEW MARKETING TOOL

Albert Einstein once remarked, "Insanity is doing the same thing over again and expecting different results." Using the same methods as everyone else gives you zero visibility in a very crowded marketplace. Rather than using the same tactics and techniques as everyone else, be innovative and try something no one else in the marketplace has tried.

Here are some of the possible benefits of using social marketing:

Grow Your List of Prospects: Your social network can become a lead-generation tool more valuable than any other. Because of the personal interactions social networks facilitate, prospects and clients will respond to you and the online community with interest.

Create Long-Term Customers: Your readers will come to know your organization. Over time, you will have the opportunity to develop lifelong relationships with your social network participants.

Gain Increased Customer Loyalty: Social networks establish a relationship through the regular personal contact of your site. The result will be that your customers will stay loyal.

Establish Customer Referrals: Not only will customers stay loyal, but they will also become referral sources for you. These "true believers" will promote your company to family and friends.

Get Your Message Out: Your company can get your message out in a timely fashion to the widest audience possible and in a manner in which you want it presented.

But we may be getting ahead of ourselves. Let's take a step back and address the big picture first...

*"Hell is God showing you all the opportunities you missed."
– Robert Schuller*

WHY BLOG?

Done well, there are many benefits to a business blog. Although this guide begins with the most obvious reason for blogging, to assist in your company's search engine optimization (SEO) campaign, you should soon see how useful a blog can be in enhancing other areas of your marketing efforts.

SEO: When it comes to organic optimization, namely, where your company ranks in the search engine results pages, a blog ticks every box. Your blog fills your pages with relevant content, providing an ideal platform for your targeted keywords to be used in a natural setting. It encourages people to link to your website, adding to your credibility in the search engine's eyes, but it also allows you to build internal links within your own site, making it easily navigated by search engine spiders.

Your blog should be filled with regular fresh content, which means the search engines visit your pages more frequently. That means that breaking news, product launches, and other important events gain maximum search exposure as quickly as possible.

Authority: By regularly updating your corporate blog with industry analysis and commentary, you cement your business as an authority within your sector. A successful blog allows you to be the opinion maker, rather than just another business. It shows you have a deep interest in your sector and are more informed than the average participant. Your potential customers will find this a compelling reason to choose you over competitors.

Media: It isn't just your industry that will see you as an authority. If a news story happens that closely involves your sector, the press will search for an expert. The more obscure your industry, the more the media will struggle to know who to interview, so having a blog will make you a prime candidate. All of which means you stand to gain exposure and publicity.

Sales: Although a blog should never be used for bare-faced selling, it can still be a great platform for driving sales. Your posts should always offer the reader value and not simply be an extension of your sales literature, but they can still mention and link to relevant products elsewhere in your site.

Personality: Blogs are, by their very nature, much more informal than the rest of your business' website. They are chatty, casual, and a platform for opinion, humor, and advice. For a visitor considering whether or not to purchase a service from your organization, this makes you seem more approachable and gives your business a human face. The Internet can be impersonal, but a blog is definitely not.

Traffic: If your blog is interesting and relevant to someone's work or life, then they will continue to visit. Perhaps they will subscribe or save you to their favorites. Either way, a useful blog will soon have a crowd of regular followers. Even if those followers are not in the market for your particular product or service at the time, when they come to do so, your website will be at the front of their mind.

WHAT TO BLOG ABOUT

Perhaps you're reading this and thinking, "This would work for some businesses but no one wants to read a blog about my industry." Well, you're probably wrong. OK, if you manufacture pesticides then your blog may never make Google's Recommended Blogs List, because it's unlikely to have widespread appeal. However, widespread appeal isn't your goal, you want your blog to contain very specialized information and analysis that only those interested in your services or operating in your sector would like to read.

Think about some of the questions you had when you first moved into your industry and then answer them. List advice you share with your own clients and use interesting case studies from your own experience – the opportunities are endless. By freely giving out advice and information you will become an online repository of specialist knowledge, attracting the specific, relevant audience you need.

WRITING FOR SEARCH ENGINES

When blogging, the most important thing to do is – write for people, not search engines alone. Google (and all of its competitors) has become far more sophisticated, and keyword-stuffed content is not what they're after. There's no point in having brilliantly optimized copy visitors click away from once they find your page. Those all-important inbound links will only come your way if a blog's content is interesting. However, there are some other interesting ways to make a blog even more attractive to search engines, here are the key ones:

Keep Going: There will be times when updating the corporate blog is so down on your list of priorities you want to discard it. Don't fall into this trap. Search engines want regular, fresh content – it keeps them coming back to your pages more often and gives greater visibility to any changes you make on your site. If you don't have time, ask another member of your staff to contribute, or even occasionally use a professional blogger to create an article for you. If you allow your blog to slack off, the search engines and your readers will lose interest.

Consider Your Keywords: Keep keywords in mind throughout the content and use them naturally. Talk to whoever is managing your wider SEO campaign and find out what the long tail keywords being targeted are, i.e. the more specific and lengthy search terms, for example "health care for senior citizens" instead of just "health care". Since you'll be writing about the industry anyway, these should flow seamlessly into your content.

Make Your Headlines Work Hard: The headline is the hook that will entice the reader into clicking on the story, so don't stuff it with keywords. However, if you can use them then do and aim to use H1, H2, or H3 headings. Inside your content, break up the post into sections and use subheadings, again preferably in H2 or H3. It will be easier to use your keywords in these subheadings and it also breaks down the copy for your reader and makes it easier to digest.

Don't Be Afraid to Link Out: Many people don't want to link out of their blog posts, for fear the Google spiders will zip off to other pages and never return to you. However, links are an important aspect of the online community, and by linking to relevant pages and resources you're enhancing your readers' experiences and also building useful connections to other websites. They may well link to you in return, especially if you've written a response to a blog post of theirs.

Make Your Meta Data Unique: Avoid duplicated content like the plague, and give each blog post its own meta description. Spelling it out for the search engines never hurts.

URL: Don't just use a unique number for any of your URLs, for example "yourdomain.com/ blog/00012345" isn't going to get anyone's attention. Use your headlines as the latter part of your URLs – it's better for the reader, easier to keep track of, and it will make the search engines happy.

Internal Links: Your website's internal links will keep the search engine crawlers zinging around inside your site, so it's worth adding them wherever appropriate. Link to your site throughout your blog and consider adding a "recent blog posts" fragment to your home page or somewhere on your pages. This will also encourage your readers to click through. Use your keywords as the hyperlinked text where you can.

Blogging Dos and Don'ts: Writing for the web is different than writing for print. People read differently online. Most importantly, they are much less committed to the content. They haven't paid for it (generally speaking) and have probably just clicked through to it. Bore them, or offend them, and they'll easily click away again. That means the most essential "do" is "do be interesting". Don't worry, industry specific blog posts don't have to be interesting to the wider community, just to your target audience.

Be Snappy: Online readers are lazy. It's much more difficult to read something on a screen with crowded paragraphs, and crammed text can be hard to read and unappealing. Write snappy sentences and keep your paragraphs short. Each paragraph should only be one or two sentences long. Readers will often only scan the first few paragraphs, so make sure any important points or links are made early on.

Grab Them: Make your headline and introduction exciting. Pick the most relevant point and outline it – tell the reader what your article is going to do. This is essential if you are encouraging your readers to click through to the full post.

SP&G: Remember your spelling, punctuation, and grammar – get them right. Online readers are a little more blasé about what they're reading than they would be with a newspaper or magazine, but that doesn't mean you should be complacent. Do check your copy for grammatical errors and typos, or ask a colleague to scan your content. Your blog is an extension of your corporate persona so errors could damage your authority and appeal.

Now let's get back to the more specific features...

*"A first rate soup is more creative than a second rate painting."
– Abraham Maslow*

SOCIAL NETWORKING FEATURES

A Forrester Research report concludes that social networks provide the following benefits, among others:

- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Improved communication and collaboration within organizations

Public relations firm Edelman reports that consumers are now less brand-loyal, less trusting of traditional media messaging, and more independent. Social networking provides a solution to these challenges in a spontaneous, real time, and participatory manner. Consumer-generated content created via an online community will provide buzz and insight to companies.

Forrester advises companies not to build their own collaboration tools and technologies. "Few companies will have the appetite for training their organizations in a separate set of social computing tools. Instead, vendors should focus on hooking into enterprise collaboration platforms..."

It's not too late for any company to take advantage of social networking. According to a recent iProspect study: "Though sites such as YouTube and MySpace were designed to appeal to a high percentage of the online user population, many social search engines have been built to serve, and attract, a community that is defined by their affinity to a vertical industry, a business model, or an interactive activity type.

"It's still early in the history of social networking, yet one out of three Internet users is already taking advantage of a site containing user-generated content to help make a decision to buy, or not buy something."

"Business Week's" article on Web 2.0 tools (blogs, wikis, etc.) states, "These services haven't had much to offer the vast world of business – until now...Web 2.0 portends a real sea change on the Internet...For all its appeal to the young and the wired, Web 2.0 may end up making its greatest impact in business."

GROWTH THROUGH BLOG COMMUNITIES

Blog communities carry the idea of a social network at their root, in the sense that they strengthen communication and connections amongst different groups of people with a similar mindset. Imagine joining a blogging community where people can find and read your blog, get your blog reviewed, or even chat with other bloggers all around the world.

Whether you like to talk about politics, business, or simply enjoy sharing your life experiences on your blog with other people, blog communities are a great way to expand the number of people that read your blog. Blog communities allow communities of interest, organizations, loose associations, groups of alumni, etc. to instantly, easily, and effectively create a single point of access and content aggregation.

Blog communities represent an aggregation of individual blogs giving readers an overview of the breadth and depth of content and knowledge within a group. This way, blog communities allow the popularity of an individual blog to grow, and help to spread the message on a cause. The advantage of establishing a blog community, either amongst friends, colleagues, or communities of interest, lies in the group effect. Users can benefit by networking, finding new friends, or simply having a stronger communication tool within the blogosphere.

Companies and organizations like Amnesty International and "Business Week" have integrated blog communities, so-called blog portals, into their websites. Blogging communities operate under a private label and their own individual domain names, and can be customized to reflect the look and feel of any organization.

WHAT IS A BLOG COMMUNITY?

Blog communities can be manifold. Sometimes, the term is used to describe people using the same blogging platform, e.g. Xanga. Other times, it is used to describe group blogs, in which members do not run individual blogs but rather all contribute to the same blog.

The way we like to define a blog community, in comparison to a group blog, is that blog communities aggregate the individual and independent blogs of a number of people with a shared interest – the same cause, similar political views, business interest, etc. As blogging has evolved, bloggers have used all different kinds of applications to run and host their blogs. Blog communities know no borders – they are not bound by certain provider, country borders, or age. They can connect bloggers discussing the same subjects from different cities, countries, or continents.

In the age of social communities like Facebook (and others), blog communities offer groups of bloggers the opportunity to form connections and bonds in much more focused groups. They bring together different individual bloggers and can be used as a platform to share wisdom about everyday issues, such as children, fashion, etc., but they can also be used to educate about human, political, educational, or environmental issues.

The benefit of establishing a blog community, either amongst friends, colleagues, or communities of interest, lies in the group effect and the increased reach. Users can benefit by networking, finding new friends, or simply have a stronger communication tool within the blogosphere. Individual bloggers can forge connections and learn more about their field of interest.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A BLOG COMMUNITY?

Blog communities usually consist of two layers: On the first layer, readers and users find a community homepage, that aggregates content, such as new posts from various individual blogs, has messages and news for community members, and lists features intended to drive the community, such as a blog directory. On the second layer readers will find all the users' individual blogs, which all reflect their individual design. The community homepage serves as a platform to connect individual blogs and ease communication amongst the community's members.

Registration for Blog Communities: When registering for or establishing a new blog community, the registration process and login for new members are quite simple. One administrator sets up the initial platform and can then sign up other members or simply add their feeds. New members signing up do not have to go through a long design and set-up process for their blog, because they can usually set it up within a pre-established realm set by the blog community's administrator.

Readers of the blog community have the advantage of getting a complete overview of different blog entries on their topic of interest on one platform. Thus, the advantages of a blog community can be summarized as follows: blog communities can connect bloggers hailing from different cities, countries, or continents discussing the same topics. They can also connect groups of friends or colleagues, or like-minded groups. They can serve as a platform to ease communication within communities representing individual blogs aggregated into a single point of entry, giving readers an overview of the breadth and depth of knowledge within that community.

Communities of Interest: Consider the blog community called marmaBLOGS. The idea behind this community is to connect business women in, as they say, a "rather ladylike place to blog". Topics connecting these women include business and personal issues – new business ventures, new gadgets, new friends, seeing movies, posting baby pictures, planning a wedding, etc. The essence is to give women a place to share their life with others. New members signing up have the option of starting a new blog or feeding in their existing blog.

Members can also create a profile page where they can let others know about themselves, download pictures and create their own tags. The homepage of the marmaBLOG's portal features the most recent posts, a blog list, and, as an important community feature, a number of aggregated tags, the most popular ones of which are standing out, leading readers to corresponding pages on the Internet. New users can also take a look at a bloglist for information and inspiration. The marmaBLOGS community clearly focuses on working women and the issues in their everyday lives and represents a perfect example of bringing together a group sharing the same interests on one platform.

The Benefits for Organizations: An organization's blog community can provide more benefits in gaining supporters than a collection of individual blogs. In such a community, different individual blogs are easily aggregated into a single point of entry, which quickly gives the reader an overview of the breadth and depth of collective knowledge within an organization.

Effectiveness: For blog communities to be effective for users, a few elements should be considered:

- Be clear in direction and topic — the community should have a clear direction and purpose.
- Establish a community manager/organizer — this person is the key to making the blog community work. In essence, they are the face of the blog community and the sole contact person for any question regarding the community. They are also responsible for recruitment and driving interaction within the community.
- Communicate the community's cause, topic, or theme and also use meta tags for search engines to find and link to your blog. This is the key to making your blog community known within the blogosphere and to help others find your community.
- Integrate existing blogs and invite users. Invite users whose individual blogs fit into your community and invite users that you know would like to join a community and begin blogging.
- Offer new bloggers or like-minded people a simple means to start their personal blog on your platform. Allow new users to sign up their existing blog and also offer them the possibility of starting a new blog. Make the sign-up process quick and simple by providing a pre-selected set of layouts, etc.
- Write news for the community. Keep the members of your community involved and informed and foster communication within the community. Send out frequent newsletters in which you write about new members, the hot topics of the week or month, the most prolific blog, etc.

- Activate community features wherever possible. Put things like a blog directory and a user directory directly on the homepage of your community portal. This way readers, as well as community members, will have easy access to any blog and have another quick way for communication.
- Integrate RSS Feeds from entries tagged on Technorati. You can link entries, which are tagged on Technorati, i.e. education, fashion, etc., to your blog community through an RSS feed from Technorati. This way, your blog community members will be informed about new blog entries written, on your subject of interest, anywhere.

Blog communities are intended to connect existing blogs as well as give the opportunity to start new ones. Communities of interest or a group of friends, colleagues, or fellow students, who all keep separate blogs and want to combine their blogs on one portal, are the ideal candidates and need to find a provider that offers the right solution to combine the blogs.

Once this provider has been found and the portal has been established, an administrator needs to drive the growth of the blog community. The best way to encourage growth is also to get your blog community linked and listed on search engines. Administrators should try to find sites that are already in the community's field of interest and ask them to link to the community. These link exchanges can be a way to develop traffic and discussion.

SELECTING A SOLUTION FOR A BLOG COMMUNITY

There are a number of different organizations offering solutions for blog communities. When looking at blogging software for blog communities the following should be areas of consideration:

Hosted Versus Proprietary: A hosted solution provides the quickest way to get up and running since no information technology staff or equipment are required, and there are no maintenance costs. Free solutions, like the one offered by 21Publish, can be found through web searches. If you have the time and knowledge to set up, install, and maintain software on your own server, you may want to consider Open Source Software like Wordpress MU.

The Integration of Blogs: The mixture of new and existing blogs provides a balanced exchange between established and new bloggers. Ensure that the blog solution you are using for your platform allows new members to set up new blogs, as well as sign up their existing individual blogs.

Ease of Use: The blog platform you use should provide an easy way for you to set up and manage the community. In the same sense you should be able to create and pre-select an easy way for your new members to sign up. Alternatively the platform should offer you an easy way to sign up new members yourself.

Customizable Design: A key to establishing a blog community under any label is to make sure that a similar look is preserved amongst the different blogs within the community. Make sure that the vendor provides a blog solution where both look and feel, and web domain address, can be fully customized.

Co-Authoring: Co-authoring refers to the ability to have different bloggers write for multiple blogs or for different categories. Some blog platforms permit draft posts to be reviewed before being published to the public.

Scalability: This is a key argument for many people. While some initial blogging deployments may only start with a smaller number of blogs, many communities should have a solution easily scalable to a growing number of blogs (and still make the process seamless and manageable).

COMPANY INTRANET NETWORKS

Using a social networking platform as a tool to facilitate internal communication can be very effective for any number of reasons, not the least of which is its ease-of-use. Blogs are useful as a central repository for archiving information, are an email saver, a project management tool, and a tool for collaboration across the enterprise. They facilitate training needs and the sharing of best practices as well.

Thanks to the interactive nature of social networks, staff, officers, committee leaders, and employees can contribute to the conversation. Social networks can be used to establish a sense of community within an organization. An intranet social network can give voice to many authorized individuals, and allow each to publish content on their own individual blog within the larger platform. In addition the individual blogs there could also be group blogs for committees, departments (human resources, sales, events, training, etc.), geographic regions, and other groups – enabling those interested in specific topics to continue ongoing conversations on those topics with others in the organization.

When Mary Marketing creates content in her individual blog, she chooses with a click of a button whether to also publish that content to one or more group blogs and/or the main aggregation section of the company marketing (public) or intranet network. Your company chooses which permissions any participant has and to which groups they may post. For example, you may want to have only committee members able to submit content to a committee group and not have that group be open to all employees.

An intranet community can create a social environment within the walls of an organization or association that enables staff, employees, committees, offices, and members to connect in a manner unavailable in any other online medium.

"A good business has interesting problems, a bad business has boring ones." – Paul Hawken

CONCLUSION

How would integrating blogs benefit your company? In a number of ways:

- Increased level of interactivity and heightened sense of community between all layers of the company: staff, employees, officers, and committees all made available through the use of social networking
- Greater opportunity for the viral spread of your value through word-of-mouth fostered by participation in the blogosphere and the use of RSS
- Increased site branding and SEO benefit

Online participants are joining the blogosphere in droves, so timing is everything. Industry leaders who have the vision to implement the use of blogs and social networks for brand building, marketing, and communication and collaboration tools early will reap the benefits from this phenomenon.

ABOUT US

Edgewise Creative Services: was founded by Grant Guimont, who has been a writer and marketer for hire since 2007, creating everything from Internet advertising to press releases – and all points in between. His background is in copywriting and magazine publishing, where he has more than a dozen years of experience. Guimont has written for various media including catalogs, e-mails, print advertising, search engine optimization, direct mail, merchandise copy, blogs, product description, and television and radio advertising.

Quite simply his passion is working with any company that sells unique products or services to a business or consumer audience. When you work with **Edgewise Creative Services**, you work with an experienced writer/marketer with proven results. Guimont thoroughly enjoys working with other professionals who are eager to improve their marketing results, online or offline. Whatever your particular marketing mission is – he is sure he has a creative answer for you.