

Blogs: Another tool in the arsenal

EBIG Blogging & RSS SIG Notes

1/04/05

Elisa Camahort
From Worker Bees

Announcements – from Bill Flitter, SIG Chair

- Eric Rice and Eleanor Kruszewski are joining as co-chairs of this SIG
- Next month, Feb – Steve Gilmour will be presenting – talking about RSS
- March – Blogging 101 - what's a blog, how do I get started
- April – marketing and search and how blogs play in that – Feedster presenting

Mark your calendar, First Tues evening of the month, it's the Blogging/RSS SIG.
www.ebig.org. to register. Held at the University of Phoenix 1st floor conference room in Concord, CA.

Bill also mentioned last month's Contra Costa Times article on blogging, featuring some of the SIG members and their blogs. For the link, visit:
http://www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/business/technology/personal_technology/10483138.htm

We went around the room and did introductions. A wide variety of experiences, from first-time bloggers to people who had been blogging for years.

Companies mentioned in today's presentation

www.workerbees.biz

iBlog - <http://www.lifli.com/Products/iBlog/main.htm>

www.audioblog.com

www.blogsnob.com – now go to www.pheedo.com – traffic exchange for bloggers

www.technorati.com

www.feedster.com

www.pubsub.com

www.blogdigger.com

www.kinja.com

www.bloglines.com

<http://channel9.msdn.com/>

<http://www.blogmaverick.com/>

<http://www.stonyfield.com/weblog/>

<http://42stmoon.blogspot.com/>

<http://ranchero.com/>

<http://feedstersupport.blogspot.com/>

<http://lockergnome.com>

Presenter Introduction – From Bill Flitter, SIG Chair

Elisa Camahort does freelance blogging, and I met her through blogging. Her company is Workerbees.biz, and she's going to give us her perspective on blogging.

Elisa's presentation

Blogging is a tool that fits into an overall plan.

My first blog was several years ago, to put my bio online – in high-tech. I worked at a company, consulted for a while, was going to take some time off, and instead became fascinated by online community and outreach.

I started with my bio, then Apple offered iblog software for free – started writing reviews of books, movies, restaurants – mostly for fun and family members. Then I started a business blog talking about things related to marketing.

I started writing a food column based on the restaurant section of my blog.

Then started participating in networking – food, theatre, etc. I think there are two times people are proactively willing to be sold to – when they're searching, or visiting online communities. Unlike any other method – it's where a person is going and seeking.

Theatres were a perfect melting pot for trying this out – if you go to see a live performance, and there's a mistake, it's the moment where everything bonds – the moment you remember, and how they recover can win you over forever. So I started blogging for a theatre company about rehearsals and all things going on with the theatre.

I also run Google ads for theatres, go to online communities, and manage their overall online presence.

Q: What % is allocated to blogging in the marketing mix?

For theatres, more than 50% is on blogging; a lot of that is interacting with everyone in the play, talking to the actors, it's very quality time oriented.

Agenda

- the hype and conventional wisdom about blogs
- then downside to perpetuating the hype
- what are blogs and
- (more – see slides)

The Hype

- There's a community that's been blogging a long time – that has created this aurora of “PR is dead”, “media is dead”, “big publishing is dead”, “you want 750,000 views and links and pages per month”. I don't believe in this.
- The conventional wisdom –
 - o Blogs are updated every day – no, they're not.
 - o Posts are short – no, not always.
 - o All about links – no, the value you add matters.
 - o Blogs are conversations – sort of
 - o You need big readership off of blogs – okay, if you're trying to make a living, you need to be in the Technorati Top 100 – the “A-list” bloggers

What's wrong with the hype?

- Created by people who represent a minority, i.e., early adopters
- Sounds expansive, but is limiting – to say has to be...short, links, etc.
- Ignores the symbiotic relationship blogs can and should have with their traditional counterparts of media, PR, marketing, etc.
- Scores of companies don't want to be on the bleeding edge. There are companies that want something proven – for those companies, I believe blogging is customer service, marketing, project marketing – it's not blogging to “blog”.
- We need to move blogging from hype and disruption to being an evolutionary tool that can be used in a variety of contexts. It's just a tool.

So let's talk about how blogs are different than websites.

Blogs are just a subset of websites.

Blogs vs. websites –

How are they best used. But in what contexts do they really shine? I call them the “I”s:

- Immediate & accessible
- Interactive
- Informal & Inside
- (more – see slide)

We'll go through each.

Blogs vs. Websites

Immediate & accessible

- Web-based
- Minimal html coding knowledge required
- Post in real time
- Can be hosted by blog app providers
- Mobile: Via cell phones/PDA's (“moblogging”)
- The DIY web site
- Can easily support teams

Blogs vs. Websites

Interactive

- Pew Research – 7%, 8 million people have a blog, 28% consider themselves blog readers (1 in 5 readers are bloggers – statistic has held up over time)
- Blogs have huge potential for repeat visits, and a connection.
- Public record of the conversation
- Trackbacks
- Blog rolls – on the side, saying “these are the blogs I read”.
- Blog rings – the idea is people will find one, and go to others in the ring
- Feed tracking services – technorati, feedster, pubsub, blog digger – help you track when someone new starts writing about subjects you’re interested in through alerts or searches.

Once people begin reading, 70% come back – if you want to further blogging – set people up with helping them download an application to start them reading a handful of blogs – they are addictive!

I suggest everyone do a Google alert on your name, your company name, etc. Google alerts track for everything on the Internet; PubSub and these other feed tracking services are tracking blog mentions.

Blogs vs. Websites:

Informal & Inside

- Individuality – blogs do have a voice
- Sounds like a person, not marketing speak
- Readers feel more involved, more invested, more interested

I had one example about being censored by corporate blog – put a post that my client disagreed with. In another, I posted on my personal blog about a theatre I was working with, included a disclaimer that let people know I worked there, and I thought I was praising an actor, but he didn’t like my language – he said, “thank you, but you offended me in how I was stereotyped” and that caused a problem – he didn’t want to put the post in the comments or engage in the discussion. And because it was on my personal blog, I didn’t change it.

[The group then discussed how some people will be more vicious online than in person – there are some etiquette points here]

Eric Rice gave an example of working collaboratively – took a position on wikis, for example, and got hounded. He listened and said some more things, and eventually saw the other perspective, somewhat. Your comments will change your perspective.

There was a discussion comparing a blog to the purpose of white paper. Elisa talked about how on a white paper you don’t go out on a limb, but on a blog, these are the

conversations you have in the office – did you see this press release, or what happened over here, what do you think – then you go back and look at it.

You could continue to refine and discuss the topic on your blog over time – in greater detail or with more refinement as something develops. It's different than working for 3 months on a white paper that's very formal.

So how would you use it in a corporate situation?

How can you get started?

Most starter services are free

No hosting service is required

In fact, no PC is required: you could blog; from an Internet café or your cell phone

Potential downsides to free/hosted services: what happens if they fold? Where's your content? Is it all lost?

Blogs are tools for...

- Marketing & PR
- Customer support and service
- Project management
- Also: publishing, training, education

Question: If it's so unregulated – what prevents someone from breaking the laws – these are rules that people have? Can someone hire 10 bloggers to say good things about my company, and badmouth the competition?

A: Yes, people have tried this, and they usually get caught. We still rely on old media for fact-checking; bloggers are still doing op-ed and opinion, media is still fact-checking, and I hope they continue to do this.

Tool #1: Marketing

1) Developer evangelism – Channel 9 example – Microsoft <http://channel9.msdn.com/>

2) Investor/customer relations, i.e., CEO

showed site examples:

Mark Cuban, CEO <http://www.blogmaverick.com/>

Stonyfield farms blog <http://www.stonyfield.com/weblog/>

42st Moon Blog – <http://42stmoon.blogspot.com/>

This is a site I blog. I give a code for a discount on theatre tickets, that allows trackability to the blog. They have established a compact with blog readers. You need to give them something, and make it trackable.

3) Customer outreach

- Stickiness to web site

- Inspires loyalty to brand
- Disseminate trackable offers

Showed example of “organic yogurt” search in Google – Stonyfield #1

Showed “Yogurt” search – Stonyfield #2

Stonyfield showed higher on the listings probably helped by their blogs.

If people have a place to go to blog their complaints – if you have a customer support blogs – people need to monitor it.

Showed these examples:

Ranchero software – makers of aggregator software <http://ranchero.com/> talks about new releases, what you can do, etc.

Feedster support – using email coming in, and developer responds.

<http://feedstersupport.blogspot.com/>

Toomuchsexy.com – showing monsoon customer support stinks – example of what can happen when you don’t have a customer support blog.

Bill gave an example of a company monitoring blogs – that he posted and mentioned (Bill, I didn’t see the post on Pheedo.info) and didn’t get a response

Bacon’s (PR firm) announced it was going to monitor blogs – but only to the top 250!
Hello?

Project management

More centralized than email trails

Better archiving than email trails

Ideal for both push and data, schedules, links, etc. and for interactive discussion of project issues

You can control the transparency...within and without the company

A way to internally market – how do you market you team to the company – how much value is the rest of the company bringing.

Examples

The red couch – the blog and robert’s book – did a book proposal.

Q: How can I get a blog on my company website?

A: Wordpress – has a free version
Movable type
Php gnu ? – content management system

Milestones upcoming –

A word about RSS – only 5% of people rely on RSS – which requires you to click here – copy the URL into where you subscribe...

There are other versions

[from the audience]

www.Kinja.com is effective

www.Bloglines.com is another

If you have a my yahoo account – there's an aggregator for "my.yahoo.com"

RSS is a must-have: Most blog readers rely on it

It's the ultimate opt-in

Does hinder site visitor track ability – no idea what your traffic is; this is changing as some services are providing some information here.

Q&A

Q: How to get started

A: Check out Chris Pirallo – lockergnome.com – how to blog basic

Also go to feedster.com – search on "how to blog"

Q: How is your selection of content different for your business blog?

- Started blogging with what I was doing – "I got this client, this is what I'm doing.." After a while, that gets boring.
- Then I started blogging more about what other people are saying about my topics – what do other people think about that, what do I think about that? Sometimes, I found I couldn't say it much better – so go read his!
- Can be about applying my life to what's going on in the larger world – not a diary entry, but relating what's happening to larger trends.

Q: what types or genres of blogs are there?

A: Personal blogs – online diaries, life blogs

Op-ed, punditry blogs – daily coast, little green footballs, instapundit

Link blogs

Business blogs

I also have thought about the dark side of the internet – how about how it changes how you think. I've often experienced things, and wonder, how would I blog about this?

Audience comment: a lot of this is an epiphany for me, this is really about creating a foundation of being trustworthy, by being authentic, genuine, real. Forget about the hype of advertising and marketing – and develop a real foundation for trust.

Also mentioned the Tipping Point, how blog are another way to expand your “weak ties” in a networking sense.

Q: How to get started with reading blogs – read on topics you’re interested in, or visit sites you’re interested in.

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Also mentioned by audience member –

Hugh McCloud – gapingvoid.com – a 28-point thing on “How to be creative” try to Google this – evolution of the changing markets – branding is dead.

Additional thoughts for Blog 101 session (my own notes)

- Need to show a real demo – starting a blog
- Making a post
- Running an aggregator
- Doing a search

What’s RSS

What’s a Blog

Notes by Steve Tennant

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