



MARKETING INSIGHTS

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To BLOG or not to BLOG? That is the question

Most blogs are traffic jams clogging the internet highway, started for the wrong reasons, and lacking key ingredients or substance. Most are badly written by people who don't know or care – and it shows. These charges apply to corporate blogs too, only more so.

So, before you rush in, take this quick sanity check:

DON'T START A BLOG:

- Because your competitors do
- Because your PR agency thinks you should
- To promote your company
- Just to share your thoughts
- Unless you have material of value or interest
- Unless you can sustain it long term
- Unless you're clear about **why, what** and **how to**.

However, there's more to it than just sanity. Here are 10 top tips.

1. Ignore these points if you're a celebrity

People will always read celebrity blogs e.g. Richard Branson
<http://entrepreneur.virgin.com/>

or Mark Shuttleworth, the father of Ubuntu Linux and first private space traveller
<http://www.markshuttleworth.com/archives/date/2008/11>. If Bill Gates had a blog, he'd be sure to be read too.

2. Ignore these points if you're Apple or Google

If you're hot, high-tech and your fans demand it, write a blog or they will do it for you e.g. *'Secret Diary of Steve Jobs'*. But you must deliver what they expect, or you'll lose the most faithful in a click.

3. Accept that it'll probably be tougher

If you're not famous and your company isn't hot with a celebrity figurehead, you'll have to work harder to attract and keep readers. Worse, your readers will suspect your blog is just another way to promote your company.

4. Don't Blog about your company, products or services

Blog about the challenges your industry or customers face or insights they can use. Good blogs are useful and inspire, entertain or educate readers; they're not ads or infomercials.

5. Don't Blog unless you can share

Don't worry about giving away your secrets - successful entrepreneurs don't. They know there's really nothing new and that success doesn't come from knowledge, but how it's applied.

6. A Blog is not a new ad channel

Blogs are about communities and sharing and receiving freely, not about building email lists and collecting opt-ins. The more useful info you share - about your industry, challenges, trends and lessons learnt - the more popular your blog will be and the more it will be shared.

7. Understand what Blogs can and can't do

Your corporate blog is just one communication line with your customers and market. You can use it to get frank feedback or as an immediate way to get useful news out. A corporate blog with the right form and content can do wonders - and the reverse is true too.

8. Who should write the Blog

Just because you are CEO, CTO or CMO, doesn't make you a great blogger. You may have valuable insights, but do you tell an interesting story, use the right phrase or add the right amount of humour? Find the person in your company who can - and support him or her - or you'll lose the audience in another click.

9. Know what your audience wants

If you're close to clients and business partners, to your sales reps and support people, you'll know the buzz - or you can use your website hits as a guide to hot topics.

A prime example: In 2008 we wrote a user piece called 'How to make Vista Fly' <http://www.technoledge.com.au/resources.htm> gaining a whopping 200,000 downloads. This showed just how hot the sluggishness of Microsoft's OS was at the time.

10. Start a conversation with your readers

Allow visitors to comment on your blog and publish the raw feedback (after filtering it for SPAM etc of course). You'll need real, blunt and honest feedback if want to fine-tune your blog. You also want open dialogue between your readers.

EXAMPLES

Here are some corporate blogs—some good, some not so good. Judge for yourself.

<http://www.37signals.com/svn/> - a great blog, very successful, lots of stuff about a favourite subject - User Interface design - and very little about the company.

<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/> - the exact opposite. Google clearly thinks it's a celebrity; the blog is about Google and nothing but Google.

<http://fastlane.qmblogs.com/> - multiple bloggers and lots of photos.

<http://storageeffect.com/> - blog by hard drive maker Seagate; a crashing bore of a topic? Actually, no- this is a great model.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/> - inside broadcasting, with multiple editors contributing; interesting idea.

<http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/hqblog/> - of course!
