

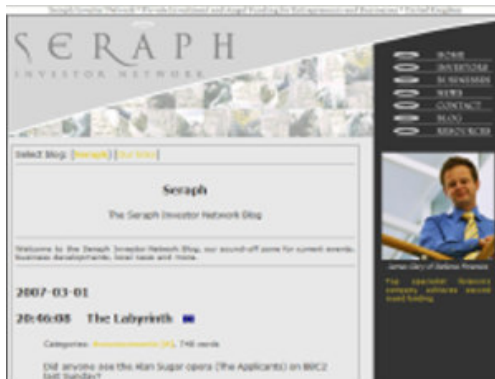
BLOGGING YOUR BUSINESS

What is a blog? The term was coined in 1999, and today Webster's dictionary defines a blog as a "diary; a personal chronological log of thoughts published on a Web page." More importantly, it says that blogs are "typically updated daily" and that "blogs often reflect the personality of the author." But think seriously about frequent blogging. According to Technorati - an internet search engine focused on the world of blogs - only 11% of all blogs update weekly or more. What matters more and more is what you write not how often you write - quality not quantity or frequency.



For a business, there are several potential reasons to blog, but, (there is always a but, isn't there?) what you really need to consider before blogging, is: Why are you doing it?

- Is it a forum to have a more personal relationship between you and your customers?
- Is it to create a channel where media regularly check what you have to say, instead of media just being passive recipients of press releases.
- Is it private, a workspace where project members keep each other updated without wasting time?
- Is it to establish your company as a thought leader so that people in your business will pay attention?
- Is it to test ideas or products, a place where people can comment, and provide you with a measure of value or interest?
- Is it a bit more 'cynical' another attempt to rank higher in search engines because they reward sites that update often, that link to other sites and have many inbound links?



Blogging tools (our favourite is b2evolution) will allow you to publish news, information and opinions widely. You do not need any real technical expertise to write a blog. You just add pages or articles through a "Windows" type of interface so there is no need to rely on a web designer to update it for you.

Business Blogs can be very effective. Blogs can put a human face on your company and the products and services that you offer, which increases the value

of your organisation in the eyes of your customers. This in turn will build much higher levels of trust so that, in fact, the readers of your Blog often become your most passionate word-of-mouth ambassadors.

The key issue is discovering what a Blog really can do for you. However, I find that once a business has the chance to have their questions answered about blogs and understand what they can offer, the question tends to change from "Why have a blog?" to "Why haven't we got a blog?"

Northeastern University's Professor Walter Carl, the students in his Advanced Organizational Communications class (Spring 2006), John Cass and his colleagues at Backbone Media, Inc. carried out the "Blogging Success Study".

The research team interviewed twenty corporate bloggers from companies of varied size and industry, and asked each blogger a series of standardized questions. Only bloggers who had been blogging for over one year and considered their blogging efforts successful were eligible to participate.

They identified five factors for success.

- 1. Culture:** If a company has particular cultural traits worth revealing or a bad reputation it wants to repudiate, blogging can be an attractive option.
- 2. Transparency:** Transparency is critical to establishing credibility and trust with an audience. People want to see an honest portrayal of a company.
- 3. Time:** It takes a lot of time to set up, research and write a quality blog. Companies need to identify a person who has the time to blog.
- 4. Dialogue:** A company's ability and willingness to engage in a dialogue with their customer base about topics that the customer base is interested in is critical to its blogging success.
- 5. Entertaining writing style and personalization:** A blogger's writing style and how much they are willing to reveal about their life, experience and opinions brings human interest to a blog, helps build a personal connection with readers and will keep people reading.

Nevertheless, they missed out the most important:

6. It takes time and dedication to build a good business blog. You must stick with it and expect it to take months to build up a sizable audience. Lots of people blog for a few months and stop. You need to blog constantly and at a constant pace. You need to find time to write posts, to reply to comments from readers, monitor other blogs, keep up with the latest industry news and build relationships with other bloggers. However, sticking with it is actually the only hard and fast rule to creating a successful business orientated blog.

