Guideposts for the New Communications Ecosystem

a.k.a. The Blogosphere Survival Guide

**Blogs are Rewriting the Rules of Corporate Communications
What You Need to Know**

January 27, 2005
8:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Garden Court Hotel, Palo Alto

Burson-Marsteller

Guideposts for the New Communications Ecosystem
a.k.a. The Blogosphere Survival Guide

EMBRACE CHANGE
- Communications is shifting from broadcast to conversation
  - "Traditional media send messages, blogs start discussions." - Loic Le Meur, prominent blogger and Executive VP and General Manager, Europe, Six Apart
  - "Markets are really just conversations; millions and millions happening at once. . . " "The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual" by Christopher Locke, Rick Levine, Doc Searls, David Weinberger
  - "The Internet is becoming a water cooler on steroids. That presents both opportunities and threats for brands." Pete Blackshaw, CMO, Intelliseek, *San Jose Mercury News*, January 21, 2005
- We thought things moved fast before. . .
  - Technorati reports that 23,000 new blogs are created every day - one every three seconds
  - Outsiders disseminate what they learn about the company (from any source) faster and more widely than ever
  - With comment posts and permalinks, stories take on a life of their own within hours – real-time monitoring and quick action are vital

THE MEDIA IS WATCHING - CLOSELY
- "Bloggers have had an impact on how the media might approach a story or get interested in a subject, and in that sense they are like sentinels," said Aly Cohen, a group leader at Poynter Institute, a nonprofit independent school for journalism. "They send signals to the mainstream press that maybe in another time could have taken longer to get attention or might have been ignored." *Investors Business Daily*, January 4, 2005
  - "We used to think that the news was finished when we printed it. But that's when the news now begins," said Jeff Jarvis, author of the blog *BuzzMachine*, and president and creative director of newspaper publisher Advance Publications' Internet division. "Why There's No Escaping the Blog," *Fortune*, January 10, 2005

THE "RULES" ARE BEING WRITTEN IN REAL TIME
- Observe blog etiquette – ignoring it has serious public consequences
  - Listen first - it's a conversation
  - Subterfuge will out
  - Authenticity is all (see below!)
- Stay close to your legal team – the issues are complex and evolving
- Create your own rules – define and evangelize company policies for employee bloggers at all levels *and* for responding to independent bloggers

AUTHENTICITY IS ALL
- Blog writers often have very personal motivations and passions – these are the voices that rise above the noise
- Real people write readable, credible blogs, corporations don't
    - "If I'm only saying, 'Use Microsoft products, rah rah rah,' I lose all ability to have a conversation," said Robert Scoble, prominent blogger and Microsoft software evangelist. *Fortune,* January 10, 2005
- Openness is essential
    - Be as candid as possible; be clear about what you can't discuss and why
    - Respectfully acknowledge dissenting opinions
    - Marketing "hype" will be evaluated with skepticism and cynicism, or worse ridiculed and treated with sarcasm

BLOGGERS ARE A FORMIDABLE TRUTH SQUAD (Just ask Dan Rather)
- Be certain that the facts you release are clear and defensible. If they are not, it will be discovered and highlighted by a blogger. "When you hit that little publish button and something goes up, you know that literally millions of eyeballs around the world are going to parse it," says Michelle Malkin, a conservative blogger. *The Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 2005
- Links to source material and authoritative third-party commentary to add weight to your positions
- Be the first to acknowledge and correct your own mistakes, misstatements

CONSIDER CAREFULLY WHEN YOU OPEN THE DOOR – IT'S NOT EASY TO CLOSE IT AGAIN!
- Once you initiate a presence in the blogosphere – either by commenting on blogs or by creating your own, changes will be noticed
- Establishing a true dialogue with customers can be painful, but is ultimately rewarding. Six Apart CEO Barak Berkowitz says, "When everybody has a tool for talking to the rest of the world, you can't hide from your mistakes. You have to face them. Once you commit to an open dialogue, you can't stop." *Fortune,* January 10, 2005

THERE IS A SILVER LINING
- You're already in the blogosphere. Your customers, employees, partners and competitors are bloggers. You can learn what's being written about your company and your products.
    - Blogs are a great way to learn from and to engage your key stakeholders
- Blogs are conversations, which means that as bloggers talk, they may also listen!

Additional Resources

The most recent study on blog usage:
Technology & Media Use: The State of Blogging (1/2/2005) Lee Rainie
http://www.pewinternet.org/

The best resource for learning what's being said about your company in the blogosphere and in all other user-generated media: **http://www.intelliseek.com/**

Technorati's List of Top 100 most authoritative blogs, ranked by the number of sources that link to each blog : **http://www.technorati.com/live/top100.html**

Burson-Marsteller's e-fluentials resources at **http://www.efluentials.com/**

On the new media ecosystem, citizen journalism, etc:

http://wethemedia.oreilly.com/
http://www.micropersuasion.com/
http://dangillmor.typepad.com/dan_gillmor_on_grassroots/

An international picture:

Excellent amalgam of international blogging: Rebecca MacKinnon's
http://rconversation.blogs.com/

Another great clearinghouse for international blogging:
http://www.loiclemeur.com/

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Blogs

Lisa Poulson, Managing Director, Burson-Marsteller Technology Practice
published online

What's a Blog Really Worth?   New Rules for Communicators
Who are the Masses? What do they want to hear?
What do Corporations Really Want?   Can a Corporation be Credible?
Tips for the Corporate Blogger
BlogOn: Damage Control

What's a Blog Really Worth?

It's been a good long while since I posted (breaking all the rules I set for my clients), but in the last three months things have changed. Instead of my PR clients wanting to talk about writing blogs, now everyone wants to talk about monitoring and searching blogs. This tectonic plate shift seems to have occurred some time in late May or early June. That's got to be a good thing – it seems like the entire blogosphere wants corporations to *LISTEN* to them, and now corporations are trying to figure out how to do just that.

The thing is, if a company wants to penetrate a market or build relationships in the blogosphere the single most important thing is listening. But how? While all of the blog search companies are now fast at work creating tools that do spiffy charts and graphs, (as ever, the wonderful engineers at the blog search companies are doing what engineers do – thinking about numbers, algorithms, ways to automatically generate data) my clients want qualitative analysis. What are the verbatim quotes? What do they mean in a larger sense? What are the big themes? What should we do with this data? No matter what anyone says, semantic analysis and sentiment analysis are a long way away from being truly accurate or truly useful.

For now, manual labor is the only way to *REALLY* understand what's being said. We just had five interns spend about eight business days (yes, that's 40 total business days) doing a blogosphere search and analysis on behalf of a consumer products client. But the results we got were dramatically different than what's available via any of the blog search technology companies now. On the other hand, search technologies are evolving weekly. **Mary Hodder** did the best overview of what's possible that I've seen. I expect a lot of change here in the next three months – a little less manual labor is always good!

When I'm not having conversations about blog monitoring, I'm having conversations about RSS. We have a long way to go before RSS penetration delivers on the promises that RSS technology makes, as this recent **Nielsen study** of blog readers makes clear. Where we are with RSS today reminds me of where we were with the Web in 1995 – I remember a national network news crew that came out to interview Sun executives about "the Internet." Someone mentioned that Bank of America had a URL on a billboard on Highway 101 in Silicon Valley. This was such a major development that the news crew (who flew out from New York) asked us where the billboard was so they could shoot it. So if RSS is now where the Web was in 1995, there's no way we can accurately or completely predict how RSS will change

business, change media, change communication, and indeed change our day-to-day lives. All we know is that it will. That's going to be even more interesting to watch!

--Lisa Poulson

Managing Director, Technology Practice

Burson-Marsteller San Francisco

Posted by Lisa Poulson at August 23, 2005 08:15 AM
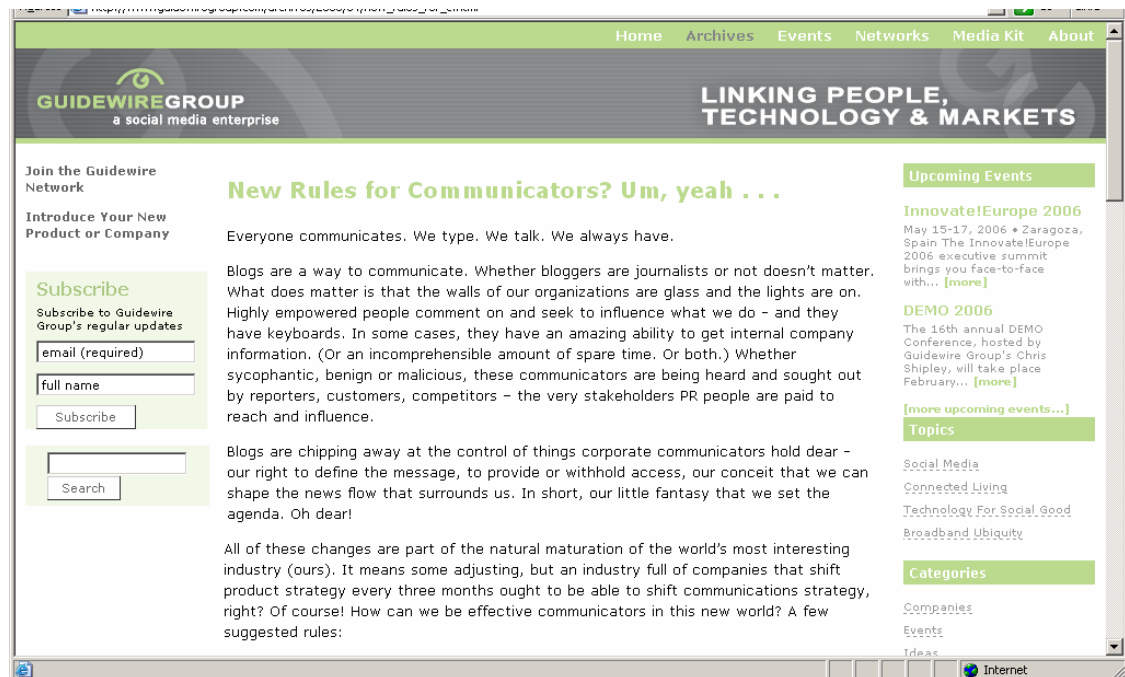
New Rules for Communicators? Um, yeah . . .

Everyone communicates. We type. We talk. We always have.

Blogs are a way to communicate. Whether bloggers are journalists or not doesn't matter. What does matter is that the walls of our organizations are glass and the lights are on. Highly empowered people comment on and seek to influence what we do - and they have keyboards. In some cases, they have an amazing ability to get internal company information. (Or an incomprehensible amount of spare time. Or both.) Whether sycophantic, benign or malicious, these communicators are being heard and sought out by reporters, customers, competitors – the very stakeholders PR people are paid to reach and influence.

Blogs are chipping away at the control of things corporate communicators hold dear - our right to define the message, to provide or withhold access, our conceit that we can shape the news flow that surrounds us. In short, our little fantasy that we set the agenda. Oh dear!

All of these changes are part of the natural maturation of the world's most interesting industry (ours). It means some adjusting, but an industry full of companies that shift product strategy every three months ought to be able to shift communications strategy, right? Of course! How can we be effective communicators in this new world? A few suggested rules:

Rule One: There are no rules. Why are we so eager to determine whether bloggers are journalists? If we can categorize them, maybe then we'll know how to treat them. There are as many types of bloggers as there are mammals. The only absolute is that bloggers want to communicate. Everything else we learn on a case-by-case basis.

Rule Two: Use your orienteering skills. Figure out which blogs matter to you, your company, your clients. Get yourself a good RSS reader and start tracking these blogs every day. If you need help, try **Intelliseek**, **Technorati**, or **Feedster**.

Rule Three: Learn the meaning of "conversation." "Traditional media send messages, blogs start discussions," says **Loic Le Meur** at Six Apart. A conversation requires respect, trust and ongoing participation. A conversation is about individuals. According to Chris Shipley, "It's easy to hate a big monolithic company; it's hard to hate individuals, especially when they tell the truth."

A word on mutual respect: Despite what start-up CEOs tend to think, journalists are not a marcom tool. Neither are bloggers. They examine skeptically and then perhaps disapprove of a company's actions or executives. Sometimes we'll agree, sometimes we won't, sometimes we'll just bore each other.

Rule Four: Embrace transparency. It's not a bug, it's a feature! If you're afraid of the truth getting out, your company has bigger problems than PR. Let's assume you have a good story to tell. Tell it! At the same time, public companies live with particular responsibilities about what they communicate and when. Stay close to your legal team as you enter the blogosphere. The issues are complex and evolving. Get someone in your legal department assigned to work with you to create a blogging policy for your company immediately.

Rule Five: It's a meritocracy - so say something interesting! Real people write readable, credible blogs; corporations don't. In this industry we're philosophers, artists, hucksters, and evangelists. Bring out your personalities and create meaningful dialogues.

And while you're at it, make sure that what you say is accurate and truthful. When you err, be the first to acknowledge and correct your mistakes. Building credibility is a serious, incremental process. If you lose your credibility in the blogosphere, you're losing it very publicly indeed.

Rule Six: Feed the blogosphere. Invite your watchers and commentators in, and give them interesting things to think about and do. Whatever you may think of their message and motivations, the PR people behind the Swift Boat Veterans For Truth cleverly invited bloggers to attend the taping of their ads during campaign season and got tremendous play on blogs as a result.

In addition, as my colleague **Idil Cakim** points out, bloggers build a substantial portion of their content by linking to official sources. Keep them in the loop by providing easy-to-find, current information on your company Web site. Include transcripts of important offline news coverage about your business.

Change is good. Embrace it! Guide your organization to embrace it, too. After all, you're already in the blogosphere – your customers, employees, partners and competitors are bloggers. Join the party!

By Lisa Poulson

Managing Director, Technology Practice

Burson-Marsteller San Francisco

Posted by Lisa Poulson at April 14, 2005 06:58 AM

continues....

Who Are the Masses? What Do They Want To Hear?

Every day the impact of blogs on corporate communications and corporate reputation becomes clearer. *Fortune*'s cover in January and *BusinessWeek*'s cover **this week** aren't about the fact that blogs exist; they're about the impact of blogs on corporate reputation about a paradigm shift that we're only beginning to understand.

Why are blogs so powerful? Because real people write them and real people read them. As *BusinessWeek* says in their tips, "PR Truly Means Public Relations." It means talking to the public, not in a Norma Desmond, "I'm ready for my close up" way, to be sure, but in a way that each corporation must define.

Talking to regular people means saying things that regular people want to hear. This, unfortunately, is a challenge for those of us in the technology business. (If you disagree just think about leveraging paradigmatic shifts to achieve platform independence blah blah blah. . .)

"Disciplined" may not be the first word that comes to mind when you think about a politician, but people in this business know that, in order to succeed in communicating with voters, the message must be very simple, and must be said over and over and over again. This is pure torture for technologists. No matter how in love our CEO, CTO, product manager or even head of sales is with an idea, some other idea comes along and it's "Hey look, there's something shiny over there." And the message is lost.

We have to learn how to tell a story that regular people will understand. And to tell it enough times that it makes sense. Why? Because everyone (consumers, voters, your parents) now knows who we are and where we live –we're the ones who lost so much of their money back in 2001 and they use all of the stuff we make much more than they did ten years ago. So they're watching us – and having feelings and opinions about what we do. And many of them are connecting to each other online and sharing those feelings and opinions. (See above.)

In the new world of true "public" relations, only the multilingual will survive. We have to talk to all of our audiences – business partners, regulators, shareholders, end users, CIOs, with the same message and the same story – but translated in a way that they'll understand.

When I worked at Sun we were lucky enough to have a former *USA Today* reporter on our staff (here's a shout out to Mary Smaragdis!). Mary edited every single press release about the Java technology according to *USA Today's* rules. No acronyms, no industry buzz words, no technology described in a way that someone's grandmother

wouldn't understand. This worked. The truth is, just because *we* understand our own messages doesn't mean they're good.

And while we're at it, let's cut out the inside baseball. Well, not all of it because it's fun, but let's change the ratio. I love a good architecture war as much as the next person, but let's realize what the rhetoric is, understand its function in our business, and put it in its proper place.

Let's not try our audiences' patience so much anymore. If we don't, we'll pay for it eventually. Much of what we say and do is incomprehensible to our newly empowered constituents, and we often don't pay attention to or understand how they perceive our way of doing business. It seems that most Valley leaders didn't think for a moment that Enron's egregious abuse of stock options would ever come home to roost here. That was an avoidable mess if there ever was one.

Finally, as I say to every person I media train, "Your audiences do not find you, your company, your products nearly as interesting as you find yourself, your company, your products." If we can keep this essential truth in mind as we figure out how to describe what matters to us to the people who matter to us, we'll make a lot of progress!

--Lisa Poulson

Managing Director, Technology Practice

Burson-Marsteller San Francisco

Lisa Poulson is a member of the Guidewire Group Sounding Board.

Posted by Lisa Poulson at April 26, 2005 10:40 AM

What do corporations want?

When last I contributed to Guidewire, I talked about how corporate PR people are trying to make sense of and figure out how to jump into the blogosphere. I've just come back from a week in New York where I attended **Personal Democracy Forum** and **Syndicate**, two conferences that were all about the blogosphere. As ever, the technology is moving at lightning speed and I met so many entrepreneurs who are building exciting and useful tools and services to power RSS, etc.

Interestingly, there was little discussion about corporations and the blogosphere at these events. Based on conversations I had over the course of the three days, it's clear that there is very little mutual understanding between the entrepreneurs, geeks and enthusiasts on one side and the mainstream corporate marketing and communications professionals on the other. Which makes me feel like a U.N. interpreter.

I opened my remarks at a panel presentation at Syndicate by saying:

--Most corporate communications and marketing people – even at technology companies - don't even know what RSS is.

--Those who have heard of blogs and RSS don't think they need to worry about them yet – and until a Wall Street Journal reporter calls the corporate communications director and says "Hey, I read [fill in the blank] about your company in this blog, what's your response?" they'll think they're right.

--At the same time, they all know something is going on out there on the Web and that they better keep an eye on it.

During the panel, we talked a bit about why corporations are reticent to move into the blogosphere. In the interest of fostering mutual understanding, here are three things companies worry about:

--Liability – in our litigious business environment, any public utterance by any corporate representative is fair game for a combative lawyer. This is no small concern. Open-minded in-house lawyers and persistent corporate PR people are working it out one conference call at a time, but this struggle will take place at every corporation.

--Love – companies are filled with people, and no person likes to see the product they make, the policy they create or the opinions they share lambasted in public by a sharp-tongued blogger. If it's the blogosphere vs. THE MAN, people at corporations know they're battling a stereotype, and that's daunting.

--Scaling – the blogosphere is about conversations. No corporation has the staff to conduct quality 1:1 conversations with everyone in the blogosphere who may want to communicate with them. They don't know how much energy and commitment quality participation in the blogosphere will take; jumping in half-way may be worse than not jumping in at all . . .

Having said all of this, the corporate PR people I've spoken with understand there is much to gain from participating. The hurdles are significant however and corporations need help crossing them. They need clear, thorough analysis of what's going on in the blogopshere that impacts them. They need sound guidance on policies. They need to study examples of corporations that successfully blog. They need to study examples of corporations who have made big fat mistakes. And they need to have this information presented to them by people who understand what life is like inside their organizations. Then they'll get there.

--Lisa Poulson

Managing Director, Technology Practice

Burson-Marsteller San Francisco

Posted by Lisa Poulson at May 25, 2005 08:49 AM

Can a corporation be credible?

Right now almost every PR person I know is trying to figure out how to jump into the blogosphere, how to create a blog for their CEO, etc. My advice to anyone who wants to ghostwrite a blog is **STOP RIGHT NOW. STEP AWAY FROM THE KEYBOARD.** Why? First, we're on the verge of a blogosphere bubble. There are lots of voices out there – now that Rosie O'Donnell and Arianna Huffington call themselves bloggers, it's clear to me we've crossed the chasm. Bland ghostwritten corporate speak doesn't stand a chance. Instead, the clearest and most authentic voices will be heard. Second, people who work at corporations should blog to develop and deepen relationships – with customers, employees, partners, shareholders – all of their key audiences. To create productive and valuable dialogues online, you've got to have a credible voice (Match.com notwithstanding). And, to state the obvious, credibility is won and maintained by individuals. Blogs are powerful because real people write them and real people read them.

A corporation's credibility is the sum of the credibility of each of the people who work at and represent the corporation - some more than others. According to research conducted by my employer, Burson-Marsteller, CEOs are held responsible for 50% of a company's reputation. The CEO's importance to a company's reputation has increased 25% since 1997. (www.ceogo.com)

After spending nearly 20 years in the PR business, I'm a little bit obsessed with credibility. Thesaurus.com equates credibility to: believability, integrity, plausibility, possibility, probability, reliability, solidness, soundness, tenability, trustworthiness, validity. After a lot of thought over a lot of years, I think credibility distills down to one basic thing – reasonable-ness. What do I mean by reasonable-ness? Here are a few examples:

· When you make statements - in a blog, a press interview, a speech - be certain that your facts are clear and defensible. "When you hit that little publish button and something goes up, you know that literally millions of eyeballs around the world are going to parse it," says Michelle Malkin, a conservative blogger. *The Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 2005

· Connect. Link to source material and authoritative third-party commentary to add weight to your positions and show that you're reasonable.

· Shout out your mistakes. Be the first to acknowledge and correct your own mistakes and misstatements. A reasonable communicator does NOT hold on blindly to a position and refuse to acknowledge errors.

· Be clear about what you can't discuss and why. A reasonable communicator assumes that his or her readers are smart and reasonable people. Reasonable

readers don't expect material disclosures in a blog entry — they know the SEC has rules. They've heard of Sarbanes Oxley. As a PR person who has handled litigation more than once in my career, I found that if I said to reporters something like "I know you want access to all the evidence in the case, but we can't show you evidence until after it is presented in court," I pretty much always got an, "Oh, OK, I'd just like to see it when you can show it to me" response from reporters. Thus we avoided all sorts of conflicts. Reasonable explanation, reasonable response.

· Be respectful in acknowledging dissenting opinions. This is the single most important factor in building credibility. Two intelligent, motivated and reasonable people with the same fact set can come to opposite conclusions. And that's just fine. Not everyone has to agree with and love your corporation. They just need to know that you're not afraid of their dissenting opinion and that you respect it. When you respond to them in this reasonable way, your critics lose their fangs.

While this is intuitive in personal relationships, it can be much harder to achieve in the business world. But it is very much worth the effort. Building credibility is a serious process that happens incrementally over what can be an excruciatingly long time. Credibility is hard won and easily lost. Warren Buffett famously said, "If you lose dollars for the firm by bad decisions, I will be understanding. If you lose reputation for the firm, I will be ruthless."

For every communications professional, maintaining and expanding the company's credibility should be the paramount goal of corporate blogging. If you don't think your corporation is ready to do what it takes, stay on the sidelines for now. Watch and learn as others succeed and fail. Then you can show your executives how to do it right.

--Lisa Poulson
Managing Director, Technology Practice
Burson-Marsteller San Francisco
Posted by Lisa Poulson at May 11, 2005 08:31 AM

InsideGoogle

SYNDICATE CONFERENCE: DOC SEARLS KEYNOTE
By Nathan Weinberg

I'm just listening to Doc Searls, who is both smart and entertaining.

SYNDICATE CONFERENCE: CASE STUDIES ON BLOGGING IN THE CORPORATE WORLD
By Nathan Weinberg
This session discusses issues facing companies that want to take advantage of the opportunities blogs afford.

Case Studies: Blogging, RSS and the Changing Corporate Marketing World

Moderator:
Mark Carlson, CEO, SimpleFeed, Inc.
Speakers:
Lisa Poulson, Managing Director, Technology Practice, Burson-Marsteller.
Elliott Ng, Director of Interactive Marketing, QuickBooks Group, Intuit, Inc.
Scott K. Wilder, Group Manager, Interactive Marketing.

Elliot Ng kicks it off talking about the long tail, how with all the small businesses they are trying to serve, all with very different needs, and how they can use blogs to reach all of these people.

Scott Wilder discusses the way Intuit has begun using RSS feeds to get support information to customers. One point he stresses is that it is important to know your audiences limitations. They are putting together blogs and wikis, but are taking their time to introduce it to their audience.

Lisa Poulson stresses the importance of having a blogging policy at every company before they have a "employee fired for blogging" story all over the blogosphere. She also says the best way to do this is to learn by making mistakes. Companies willing to make mistakes and fix them publicly. HP had a major case where a deleted comment made it to Slashdot, and got praised when they gracefully responded. HP has learned a valuable lesson, one other companies would do well to emulate.

She notes that while Sun has an extensive policy, Microsoft's is, for the most part, "Don't be stupid" and that has surprisingly worked very well for them.

Syndicate Conference: Case Studies On Blogging In The Corporate World

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Lisa also notes that every executive is different with regards to blogging. Some of it see it as a chore, others love it. They try to post very short items. It's impossible to say if corporate blogging has affected company sales yet.

She notes that the phrmaceutical industry may never blog, because of heavy regulation. She also thinks Google makes a mistake by not blogging. She also notes how some bloggers can be very excited and swayed by receiving mainstream media access. Elliot notes how many people want to be behind the scenes.

Online posts continue with **"Tips for the Corporate Blogger"**

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Address http://www.marketsentinel.com/blog/2005/05/

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One to one RSS?

Last night a phone call from Chloe Stromberg at Forrester in San Francisco. She is working with Henry Harteveldt writing about the use of RSS by travel websites and wanted to know if we had developed one-to-one RSS feeds (yes), with end to end encryption (no). People have been discussing this as a possible solution to the issue of spam filtering. Why should I open my genuine mail from eBay or Paypal if I am deluged with Phishing scams (emails that purport to be genuine asking me for my credit card details)?

An RSS reader may be the answer to this. Market Sentinel produces account specific RSS feeds (all the information personalised to one user) but do not yet encrypt. Instead we make security a condition of our contract.

Two solutions:

1) A secure website updates a feed first with neutral information in the feed title, say the words: "account notification" and keeps the description blank. The user then clicks the link to access the secure site using browser security.

2) The RSS feed itself is https and the feedreader and publisher exchange tokens.

feeds

RSS feed of postings
RSS feed of comments

recent comments

Small comment : Nicolas Sarkozy is not the current French Prime Minister...... by Frenchie
Blog Bits - Week of October 31st Did you know that almost ½... by Cymfony's Marketing Insight
This is just not new. Back in the 1990's Usenet was posing... by David Phillips
Blog Bits - Week of October 17th Market Sentinel points us to a... by Cymfony's Marketing Insight
Blog Bits - Week of September 19th Can brands ignore blogs? Market Sentinel... by Cymfony's Marketing Insight
New Home Blogs Review According to Market Sentinel. This blog is: "A neat... by New Homes
I agree with Allen. The revenue with YPN has been much better... by Lee Odden

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Address http://www.marketsentinel.com/blog/2005/05/

technology

Tips for the corporate blogger

Many thanks are due to Lisa Poulson of Burson Marsteller (via Constantin Basturea's PR digest). Here are some dos and donts for CEOs and PRs plunging into the world of corporate blogs. Lisa's are in Italics and mine are in normal type.

- When you make statements - in a blog, a press interview, a speech - be certain that your facts are clear and defensible. "When you hit that little publish button and something goes up, you know that literally millions of eyeballs around the world are going to parse it," says Michelle Malkin, a conservative blogger. The Wall Street Journal, January 21, 2005

- Connect. Link to source material and authoritative third-party commentary to add weight to your positions and show that you're reasonable.

- Shout out your mistakes. Be the first to acknowledge and correct your own mistakes and misstatements. A reasonable communicator does NOT hold on blindly to a position and refuse to acknowledge errors.

- Be clear about what you can't discuss and why. A reasonable communicator assumes that his or her readers are smart and reasonable people. Reasonable readers don't expect material disclosures in a blog entry â€" they know the SEC has rules. They've heard of Sarbanes Oxley. As a PR person who has handled litigation more than once in my career, I found that if I said to reporters something like "I know you want access to all the evidence in the case, but we can't show you evidence until after it is presented in court," I pretty much always got an, "Oh, OK, Iâ€™d just like to see it when you can show it to me" response from reporters. Thus we avoided all sorts of conflicts. Reasonable explanation, reasonable response.

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Blog hosting
Blog monitoring
Blogging
brand audit
Business blogging
Buzz tracking
Competitive Intelligence
Corporate communications
Customer service
Dell
Events
Feedreaders
Ford Focus
Frederick Reichheld
Internal communications
Les Blogs
Madonna
Market Sentinel
Marketing
Media
Message boards
Microsoft
net promoters
Online detractors
Paris Hilton
Personal
Phishing
Politics
PR
Reputation management
RSS technology
search engine marketing
search engine optimisation
Search is brand
Seth Godin
Sony Ericsson P900
Spam blogs
Splogs
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Tips for the corporate blogger

Many thanks are due to **Lisa Poulson** of Burson Marsteller (via Constantin Basturea's PR digest). Here are some dos and donts for CEOs and PRs plunging into the world of corporate blogs. Lisa's are in Italics and mine are in normal type.

- When you make statements - in a blog, a press interview, a speech - be certain that your facts are clear and defensible. â€œWhen you hit that little publish button and something goes up, you know that literally millions of eyeballs around the world are going to parse it,â€ says Michelle Malkin, a conservative blogger. The Wall Street Journal, January 21, 2005

- Connect. Link to source material and authoritative third-party commentary to add weight to your positions and show that youâ€™re reasonable.

- Shout out your mistakes. Be the first to acknowledge and correct your own mistakes and misstatements. A reasonable communicator does NOT hold on blindly to a position and refuse to acknowledge errors.

- Be clear about what you canâ€™t discuss and why. A reasonable communicator assumes that his or her readers are smart and reasonable people. Reasonable readers donâ€™t expect material disclosures in a blog entry â€“ they know the SEC has rules. Theyâ€™ve heard of Sarbanes Oxley. As a PR person who has handled litigation more than once in my career, I found that if I said to reporters something like â€œI know you want access to all the evidence in the case, but we canâ€™t show you evidence until after it is presented in court,â€ I pretty much always got an, â€œOh, OK, Iâ€™d just like to see it when you can show it to meâ€ response from reporters. Thus we avoided all sorts of conflicts. Reasonable explanation, reasonable response.

- Be respectful in acknowledging dissenting opinions. This is the single most important factor in building credibility. Two intelligent, motivated and reasonable people with the same fact set can come to opposite conclusions. And thatâ€™s just fine. Not everyone has to agree with and love your corporation. They just need to know that youâ€™re not afraid of their dissenting opinion and that you respect it. When you respond to them in this reasonable way, your critics lose their fangs.

Additional dos and donts from Market Sentinel:

- Don't leave the field to your opponents. Always publish some response. If you have undergone a widely-publicised attack in the blogs or mainstream media, reflect the fact on your website with a clear link to your statement. Talk to an expert about optimising your website so that your response appears high in a Google search of the keywords.

- When you respond, use facts. Bloggers link to facts, they don't link to statements of intent such as "We take the problem of X very seriously …" (and as Lisa Poulson suggests, make sure the facts stack up - don't say that there is no status in a story you haven't checked out).

- Engage with your critics. Visit their blogs, or have the appropriate person do so on your behalf (they don't expect the CEO, but the product manager would be effective). People who have been engaged in a sensible dialogue moderate their tone. And if they don't moderate their tone they lose credibility.

- Seize the agenda. Take action against the underlying cause of the reputational problem. Announce that action on your own blog. And then link to that action in the places where other

bloggers can find it. This is a very effective way of rebuilding your brand's credibility and establishing your blog's search engine credentials as an authorative source.

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Posted on Thursday, 19th May, 2005 by Mark Rogers.
Filed at this permanent link under the following categories: Market Sentinel, PR, Blogging

BlogOn: Damage Control   Posted on October 17, 2005

Gil Schwartz, EVP of Communications, CBS Television spoke one-on-one with Lisa Poulson, Managing Director, Burson-Marsteller.

Negative publicity can spread through the blogging world like wildfire. Ignoring it can lead to disaster, but how exactly do you respond to such criticism? What steps should you take to forestall or limit damage? And how do you handle a PR crisis that originates in and is propogated through the blogosphere?

With the blogosphere being part of what is negative, how do companies handle what is being said out there by bloggers? As CBS was attacked by many bloggers, one blogger had written erroneously that Schwartz was going to be let go - while he was actually being promoted - and when he did contact the blog to let them know it was wrong, they said it happens every day and that's how it goes.

It's like playing whack-a-mole forever. But, it's a part of the media now, and part of what companies need to do to ensure that there is not a crisis out there that is slowly starting, because there is no such thing as "it's just a blog" anymore.

There is not a huge difference between bloggers and mainstream media. The lines have blurred, where blogs cover the same topics as media.

CBS PR will treat bloggers like press - answering questions from bloggers. During the promo for the new shows, it will look at blogs as well as mainstream media that DO cover television to invite to the previews.

You can read more of my posts on BlogOn2005 here.
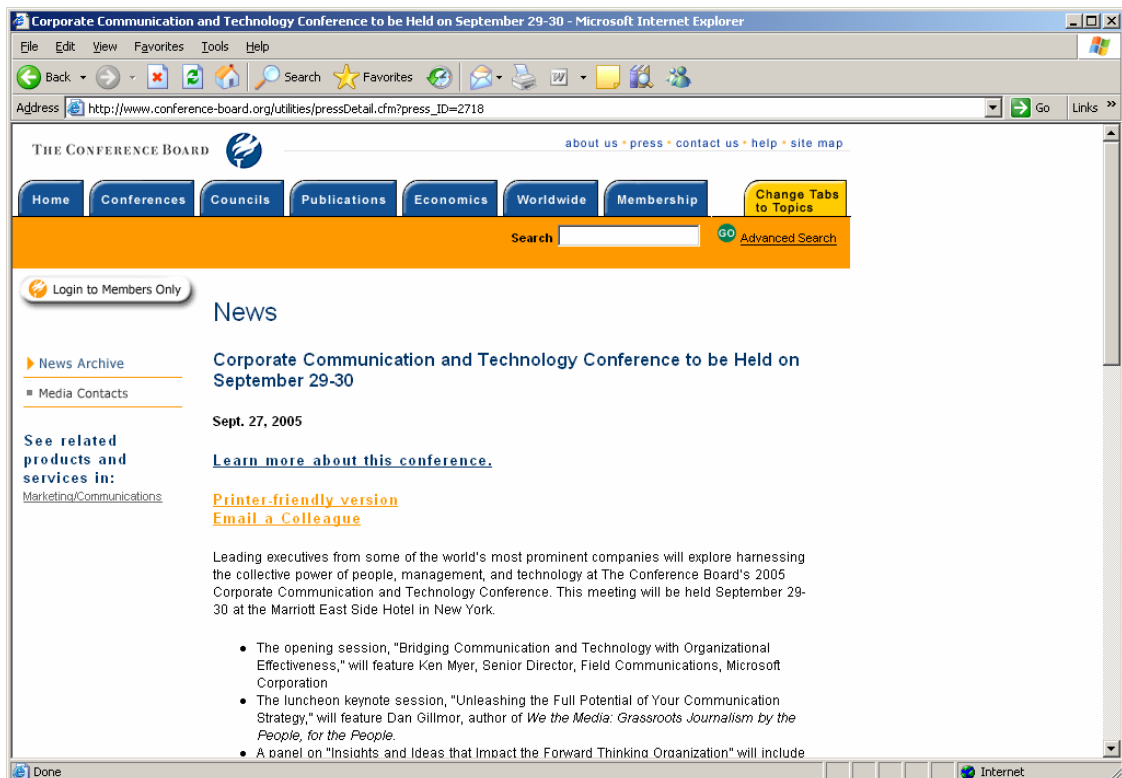
The Conference Board

Corporate Communication and Technology Conference to be Held on September 29-30

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Tuesday, 23 August 2005

Interesting Perspective on Blog Analytics - Use People!

Lisa Poulson, Managing Director of Technology Practice at Burson-Marsteller, San Francisco writes:

While all of the blog search companies are now fast at work creating tools that do spiffy charts and graphs, (as ever, the wonderful engineers at the blog search companies are doing what engineers do – thinking about numbers, algorithms, ways to automatically generate data) my clients want qualitative analysis. What are the verbatim quotes? What do they mean in a larger sense? What are the big themes? What should we do with this data? No matter what anyone says, semantic analysis and sentiment analysis are a long way away from being truly accurate or truly useful.

She also says that her corporate clients have moved from w*anting to blog* to wanting to *monitor blogs*.

She's got some good stuff, but I think her sentiment can be generalized to any MR - You need some smart folks who understand the methodology and the research results to make sense of any MR data. True with blogs, true with surveys, true with focus groups, etc.