Business in the Blogosphere:
Corporate Blogging

David Schuff, Temple University
Joseph A. DeLuca, Capital Management Enterprises
Brian W. Hamilton, Temple University

© November 2009
Institute for Business and Information Technology
Fox School of Business
Temple University

Fox School of Business
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY®

The IBIT Report

Bruce Fadem
Editor-in-chief
Retired VP and CIO, Wyeth

Munir Mandviwalla
Editor
Associate Professor and Executive Director
Fox School of Business, Temple University

Laurel Miller
Managing Editor
Director, Fox School of Business, Temple University

Board of editors

Andrea Anania
Retired VP and CIO, CIGNA

Jonathan A. Brassington
Founding Partner and CEO
LiquidHub Inc.

Ford Calhoun
Retired SVP and CIO
GlaxoSmithKline

Stacy Comes
Director, SAP AG

Craig Conway
President
Conway Technology Consulting Inc.

David Kaufman
Senior VP and CIO, Aramark

Tim O'Rourke
VP and CIO, Temple University

Michael Palmer
Partner, AOS Acquisition LLC

Niraj Patel
Managing Director, Witmer, LLC

Kent Seinfeld
Retired CIO, Commerce Bank

Joseph Spagnoletti
Senior VP & CIO, Campbell Soup Co.

© 2009 Institute for Business and Information Technology, Fox School of Business, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA. All rights reserved. ISSN 1938-1271.

The IBIT Report is a publication for the members of the Fox School's Institute for Business and Information Technology. IBIT reports are written for industry and based on rigorous academic research and vendor neutral analysis. For additional reports, please visit our website at http://ibit.temple.edu.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to Institute for Business and Information Technology, Fox School of Business, Temple University, 1810 N. 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA, 215.204.5642, or ibit@temple.edu.

Disclaimer: The conclusions and statements of this report are solely the work of the authors. They do not represent the opinion of Temple University or the members of the Fox School's Institute for Business and Information Technology (IBIT).

Foreword

Many of us old(er) technologists remember the days when the functions of a company's application systems were rigidly defined and tightly controlled. Information was conveyed by a company to its customers, shareholders, and employees in a pre-determined manner and the data that was passed to and from a company was structured and inflexible. Well, technology and the way in which people and companies communicate is changing dramatically. Texting, social networking, tweeting have altered how people interact and actually increased the volume of those interactions. And now we are seeing the evolution of the blog (web log) from individual websites with personal commentary and description of events to a tool used by companies to communicate with all of its constituencies. Why and how is this happening? This IBIT Report on "Business in the Blogosphere: Corporate Blogging" answers these questions and also analyzes the message, audience, and content of twenty-five company blogs. This report will be invaluable to anyone considering the applicability of blogs to their company.

Bruce Fadem
Editor-in-Chief
November 10, 2009

Abstract

Blogging is an increasingly popular tool for organizations to communicate with their employees, customers, and the general public. It is unique in its support for two-way communication and the creation of reader-generated content. This report presents the "state of the art" in corporate blogging through a multi-industry study analyzing the message, audience, and content of 25 organizations' blogs. We found company-created blogs enable organizations to create self-sustaining communities of customers that both consume and contribute content. Best practices for creating these communities are discussed and illustrated through successful examples from General Motors, Dell, and Southwest Airlines. We also present guidelines for creating internally-focused blogs, such as those intended to foster communication with employees.

Keywords

Blogging, community-building, best practices, corporate communication, multimedia, Web 2.0

Introduction

The blog is one of the most visible elements of the collection of social media known as "Web 2.0" (O'Reilly, 2005). What sets blogging apart from previous incarnations of the static web site is its interactivity. Blogs are mechanisms for self-publishing, allowing users to contribute their own content (Cayzer 2004). Blogs have now evolved into a suite of technologies that make it very easy for organizations to create and share content and elicit feedback from a broad audience. Sites such as Engadget and Gizmodo discuss new consumer technology products, while ConsumerReports and Consumerist provide consumer advocacy and product reviews.

Anatomy of a Corporate Blog

Figure 1: Key elements of a corporate blog

Many organizations, from technology firms such as Accenture to media companies such as the Wall Street Journal, are using blogs to interact with their constituents in ways that previously were impossible. This is not simply communicating new products and services to customers – instead, these blogs serve purposes ranging from recruiting to public relations. Such blogs typically incorporate multimedia to deliver a sophisticated user experience, and encourage two-way interaction through feedback mechanisms (see Figure 1 for an example). This report will summarize the current state of blogging within organizations.

Methodology

We analyzed 25 blogs across a number of industries, including aerospace, health and pharmaceuticals, information technology, media, higher education, and transportation (see Table 1). We browsed the content of each blog, reading the posts and the comments left by the readers.

Each blog was qualitatively assessed on multiple dimensions. We first determined the blog's purpose, or the organization's goal in maintaining the blog, by examining the content of its posts and comments. We drew conclusions regarding the intended audience by looking at its content and the way in which the blog was managed. For example, we examined the blog's policies on user comments. We also looked at other indicators such as the frequency of comments, which is an indicator of the level of engagement with its intended audience. Additional data was collected regarding the design of the blog, specifically the content sharing facilities and multimedia technologies used on the site. We created a summary analysis of each blog, as well as aggregate statistics across the entire collection. The aggregate statistics are provided as sidebars throughout the report, and the summary analysis for each of the 25 blogs is available as the "Competitive Analysis" supplement to this report.

Overall, 15 of the organizations in our sample were in service-related industries (60%), and 10 were in manufacturing-related industries (40%). We decided to split much of our analysis into these two categories because their products are fundamentally different. The products of service-related industries are much more "information-rich", such as news in the case of CNBC, or an airline flight in the case of Southwest Airlines. One might expect these organizations might use blogs, an information-rich medium, differently than organizations whose business is based on products more physical in nature.

Service	Manufacturing
Accenture	Boeing
Alter Hall (TU)	Chrysler
Ask.Com	Cisco Systems
BBC News	Dell
CNBC News	General Motors
Delta Airlines	Hewlett-Packard
Google	IBM[1]
NJ.com	Johnson & Johnson
Pace University	Lenovo
Philly.com	Toyota
Princeton University	
Southwest Airlines	
Wall Street Journal	
Wikimedia Foundation	
Yahoo!	

Table 1: Companies analyzed in this study

1. One could argue that IBM falls into both categories. However, a significant share of their business is still in hardware and software, and this is highlighted in much of their blog content.

How organizations are using blogs

Highlights:

- Blogs are used for community building, public relations, or to convey a corporate message.
- Creating a community is the most common use.
- Firms in manufacturing-related industries tend to be more focused on public relations and conveying a corporate message than firms in service-related industries.

The most frequent use of corporate blogs is community building (see Figure 2). Content is created around a specific topic intended to share knowledge and generate discussion. This is a way for organizations to perform a public service by acting as a source of information. The goal is also to drive traffic to the site through participation in the comment threads around a post.

Blogs are also frequently used as engines for public relations. The main goal is to create a positive perception of the organization. Posts often describe a community initiative or an event that the organization is sponsoring. While products may be highlighted, more often specific products are not emphasized, favoring the promotion of the corporate identity as a whole.

In fact, the least frequent use of blogging by an organization is to convey a specific organizational message. Examples include describing the mission and purpose of the organization, announcement of new products, and describing promotions and sales. We saw this type of activity in less than half of the blogs included in this study.

We also found some interesting differences in how organizations use their blogs across industries (see Figure 3). Manufacturing-related industries are more likely to use blogging for public relations and to convey a message than service-related industries. This, at first, seems counterintuitive — we might expect service-related industries to use blogging more frequently "across the board" since their products are more information-based, and therefore lend themselves more to this type of media. However, we may be able to attribute this difference to the media companies and higher-education institutions included in the service-related sample. These organizations, especially the media companies, may have a better understanding of the interactive nature of blogging and therefore focusing on its best use as a communication tool.

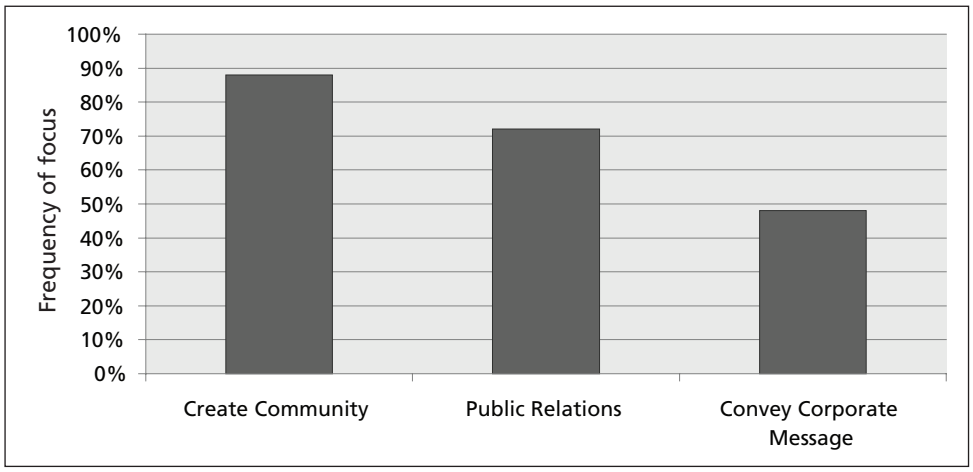

Figure 2: Focus of organizations' blogs

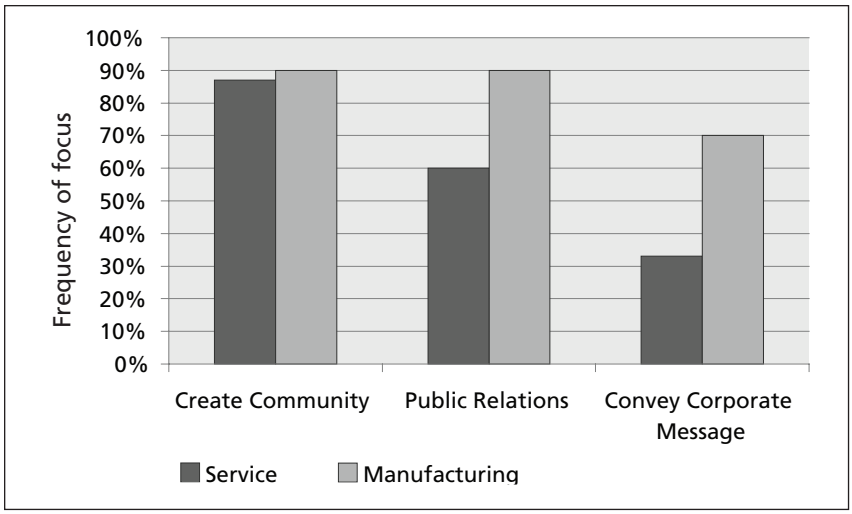

Figure 3: How blog focus differs by industry type

The intended audience and content of organizations' blogs

Highlights:

- Blogs target customers as their primary audience.
- Investors are more likely to be targeted by manufacturing firms, and the general public and job seekers are more likely to be targeted by service firms.
- There is an unrealized opportunity for companies to use blogging to open up communication with both current and potential employees.

We found organizations target customers, the general public, investors, job seekers, and employees (see Figure 4). We can see from this that organizations see blogs as primarily a tool to reach external constituents, mostly on the consumer side (80%). Blogs were least often targeted to current employees (24%), and only somewhat more often used to reach potential employees (28%). This in itself is interesting, as it may indicate reluctance for companies to embrace "internal blogging." Indeed, there are multiple issues surrounding an internal blog. Employees may be apprehensive attaching their name to a blog post about a controversial company issue, and comments would have to be constantly monitored to avoid liability

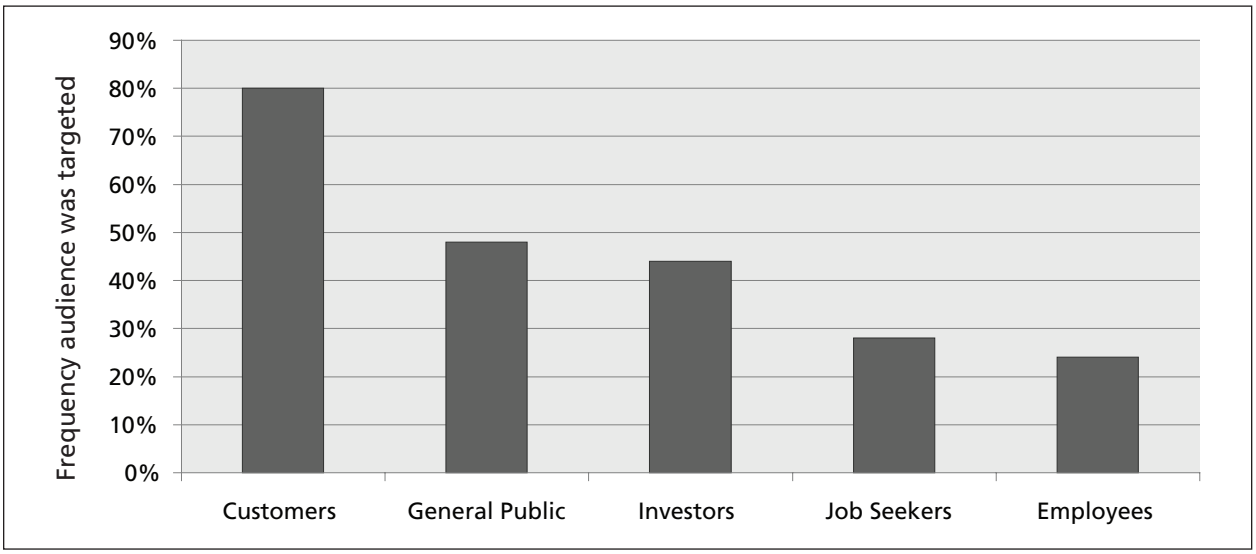

Figure 4: Audiences targeted by blogs

Intended Message by Blog

Manufacturing Organizations			
	Create Community	Public Relations	Convey Corporate Message
Boeing	✓	✓	✓
Chrysler	✓	✓	
Cisco Systems	✓	✓	✓
Dell	✓	✓	✓
General Motors	✓	✓	✓
Hewlett-Packard	✓	✓	✓
IBM	✓		
Johnson & Johnson		✓	
Lenovo	✓	✓	✓
Toyota	✓	✓	✓
Manufacturing Total	**90%**	**90%**	**70%**

Service Organizations			
	Create Community	Public Relations	Convey Corporate Message
Accenture Consulting	✓	✓	✓
Alter Hall (Temple University)		✓	
Ask.Com	✓	✓	
BBC News	✓		
CNBC News	✓		
Delta Airlines	✓	✓	
Google	✓	✓	✓
NJ.Com	✓		
Pace University		✓	
Philly.Com	✓		
Princeton University	✓		
Southwest Airlines	✓	✓	✓
Wall Street Journal	✓		
Wikimedia Foundation	✓	✓	✓
Yahoo!	✓	✓	✓
Service Total	**87%**	**60%**	**33%**

Overall Total	**88%**	**72%**	**48%**

issues (especially in regulated industries).

One would expect since there are differences in the intended purpose of blogs across industry type, the targeted audience would also differ (see Figure 5). The most pronounced differences were with regard to the general public, investors and job seekers. Service-related industries used their blogs more than the manufacturing-related industries to target the general public (67% to 20%) and job seekers (40% to 10%). Investors were more often the targeted audience of blogs by companies in manufacturing (27% to 70%).

These findings, we believe, also reflect a difference in the understanding of the blogging medium across industries and a targeted, more sophisticated use of blogging by organizations in the service industry. Because blogging is essentially a two-way, interactive method of communication, we would expect it to be most effective in settings where there is value in some level of discussion, either among customers, the general public, or employees (current or future).

Employees may be apprehensive attaching their name to a blog post about a controversial company issue, and comments would have to be constantly monitored to avoid liability issues.

It appears there is a general consensus this is a way to reach customers, but the manufacturing firms seem to be less aware of the potential for this medium in other areas of outreach, such as the shaping of public perception. Interestingly, manufacturing firms much more frequently target investors using their blogs; it is unclear how much two-way interaction is needed, especially in the type of forum created by a blog.

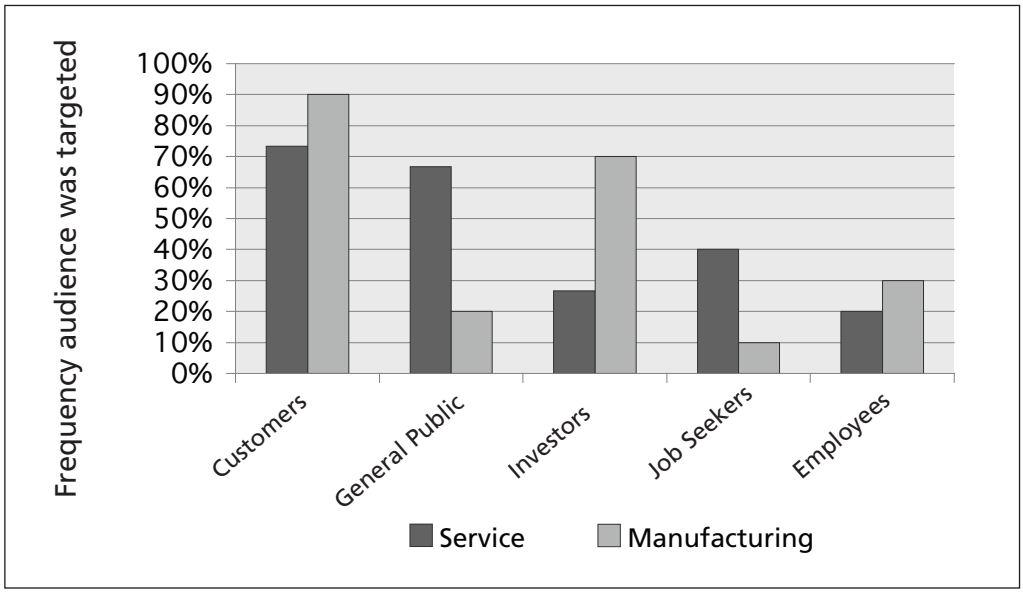

Figure 5: How blog audience differs by industry type

Approaches to blogging content

Whether the blog is internally or externally focused, there are several broad approaches to generating blog content which companies may employ:

Discourse blogging – This is a blog created to bring out a discussion of competing ideas. They are useful for audiences with expertise on the given subject. The goal can be either to simply generate discussion, or to bring out new ideas. It also has the potential to bring awareness to an issue and encourages readers to visit frequently to see how the discussion develops. Example topics include current events or new company policies.

Tutorial blogging – This type of blog allows readers and experts to share advice on a given topic. Experts provide the basic content, and readers will be given the opportunity to comment and create discussion based upon their own experiences. Examples include health and wellness topics such as diet and exercise.

Polling with discussion – This type of blog encourages discourse by leading with a poll. Responding to a poll is easier for readers than writing a comment, and therefore is more likely to draw people in. The use of polls is also effective because readers can participate anonymously, making it a good way to encourage participation when the topic is potentially controversial. For those who wish to participate further, a follow up discussion through posts and comments can be utilized.

The importance of comments

Highlights:

- Encouraging comments is a critical part of building a community.
- Most organizations' blogs encourage their users to comment, these blogs have minimal restrictions on posts.
- Blog authors can increase the sense of community by reading and replying to comments.
- Several firms have created "best of breed" examples that may apply to other industries.

Developing a base of users who contribute comments is a critical part of community building. A blog serves as a two-way communication tool between company and customer — reader comments are an essential aspect of corporate blogging. Users are more likely to be regular readers of the blog if they contribute comments, and the unique content they generate attracts additional readers. Ultimately, organizations should take advantage of the disintermediation inherent in web-based technologies — once the framework for the blog is established, its content (with moderation from the organization) can be self-sustaining.

An effective blog can be measured based on its frequency of comments. Group discussion, as demonstrated through the initial post and the comments that follow, show that blog readers simply do not just arrive at the site and leave. Rather, they take time to read posts, read the comments, and leave their own. As a company, it is important to make sure comments are encouraged and valued, because this is an important part of creating a sense of familiarity with the organization behind the blog.

Users are more likely to be regular readers of the blog if they contribute comments, and the unique content they generate attracts additional readers.

88% percent of the blogs we analyzed used some form of commenting. While organizations may be wary of unregulated user-generated content, it is vital to allow readers the opportunity to comment freely. This creates an experience where readers feel their opinions will be heard and appreciated. In our research, we found 24% of the blogs required users

Intended Audience by Blog

Manufacturing Organizations					
	Customers	General Public	Investors	Job Seekers	Employees
Boeing	✓		✓		
Chrysler	✓				
Cisco Systems	✓		✓		✓
Dell	✓		✓	✓	✓
General Motors	✓		✓		✓
Hewlett-Packard	✓		✓		
IBM	✓	✓			
Johnson & Johnson		✓			
Lenovo	✓		✓		
Toyota	✓		✓		
Manufacturing Total	**90%**	**20%**	**70%**	**10%**	**30%**

Service Organizations					
	Customers	General Public	Investors	Job Seekers	Employees
Accenture Consulting	✓		✓	✓	✓
Alter Hall (Temple University)	✓		✓	✓	✓
Ask.Com	✓	✓			
BBC News	✓	✓			
CNBC News	✓	✓			
Delta Airlines	✓				
Google	✓	✓	✓	✓	
NJ.Com		✓			
Pace University	✓				
Philly.Com		✓			
Princeton University		✓			
Southwest Airlines	✓			✓	
Wall Street Journal	✓	✓			
Wikimedia Foundation		✓	✓	✓	
Yahoo!	✓	✓		✓	✓
Service Total	**73%**	**67%**	**27%**	**40%**	**20%**

Overall Total	**80%**	**48%**	**44%**	**28%**	**24%**

to register with a username and password before being allowed to participate in discussion. Some corporate blogs were even more restrictive and only offered its readers the chance to submit comments through e-mail. Although these practices may be seen as necessary in order to manage and filter unwanted (i.e., negative or inappropriate) comments, they also have the effect of creating a hurdle for community building because many potential users will simply not make the additional effort.

Using a pre-review approach may prove to be most advantageous for managing comments, especially for larger companies. In this scenario, comments can be submitted anonymously and without registration, but they are reviewed before being publicly posted online. The company can assess negative or inappropriate comments while still managing the discussion so all comments are constructive and related to the posted topic. Furthermore, it is crucial for companies to establish a comment policy that is visible to readers so contributors know how their comments are screened and what types of comments are acceptable.

The blog authors can also do their part to increase user comments and make them more effective. If the author of the post replies to comments, readers will know their interest is appreciated, and as a result, a sense of community will begin to develop. We also observed that when readers are directly asked to share their opinions or give feedback about a particular topic, they usually do. For that reason, simply including open-ended questions in posts can increase user comments. Additionally, providing incentives may encourage greater participation. Offering a small cash prize, creating a "top commenters" list, or featuring the point made in a good comment as the next topic of discussion are ways that will attract and retain more readers and comments.

The style of the posts also is an important factor in eliciting comments from readers. Blogs are a form of media, and as such, must be engaging in order to attract and hold audience attention.

• **Southwest Airlines' "Nuts About Southwest"** blog features employees writing about both their work and personal travel experiences. The posts are written in a "story-like" narrative intended to keep readers engaged. As people read about Southwest employees' travels, they feel compelled to share their own personal stories through the comment facility. This is an innovative example of community building because there is no pressure for commenters to feel they need to be highly knowledgeable, or even focused on Southwest. Instead, users are merely engaging in a social discussion that appeals to a broad audience.

• **General Motors' FastLane** blog features company officials that host live webchats about a specific topic. The live session is recorded and is accessible for viewing later. This achieves many of the same goals as blogs with user comments — customers can interact with the company on a personal level. Additionally, FastLane allows users to leave "traditional" comments on the entire webchat session. This keeps readers engaged in the discussion, and encourages them to return in order to continue the conversation.

• **Dell's Direct2Dell** blog encourages discussion by featuring the most popular posts first. They determine popularity by the posts that received the most user comments. By making the posts with a lot of discussion around them the most visible, they are putting forth the material that is most likely to draw a larger audience.

Getting the message out

Highlights:

- Syndication technologies such as RSS expand the reach of blog content, allowing it to be shared beyond the site itself.
- Tools can be integrated into blogs that allow content to be posted directly to content sharing sites such as Digg and Reddit.
- Social networking sites like Facebook share content over a trusted network of "friends."

A key aspect of blogging is the ability to disseminate content beyond the blog site itself. The core technology to facilitate this is Really Simple Syndication (RSS), which formats each blog post as a "story" that can be shared. These stories can be posted on another site, such as Technorati.com, or downloaded to a mobile device using an application such as Viigo[2]. RSS is widely used – 96% of the blogs included in this analysis used RSS as a way of distributing their content.

There is also a series of content aggregators, which either use the RSS feed from the organization's

2. See www.viigo.com for more information.

Is this a green cloud or a dark cloud? Take a fresh look at cloud computing

Published: **Jun-02-09**

One of my clients, an IT director, asked me a very interesting question this week: "Can cloud computing be called a green initiative?" My instant answer was: "It could." Not a straight answer, but enough for us to get into a conversation of whether cloud computing was a green IT enabler.

Cloud computing is certainly a hot topic at the moment. Oracle's recent purchase of Sun points to the fact that more major players in the IT industry are focusing on providing business applications. Salesforce, which is one of the largest in the cloud computing space for business applications, will soon find itself with more competitors.

Back to the point: Is cloud computing a green IT enabler? With new data centers that are more efficient with regards to energy usage, that leverage virtual infrastructures, and which are hosted in green-certified buildings, the answer would be "yes." Also, with the workplace going thin client and leveraging virtual PCs, and organizations instituting work-from-home policies resulting in less use of office space—add another yes.

However, service-level agreements, security and legal requirements still pose a challenge to big enterprises when starting the conversation around cloud computing and about hosting their systems on an external-vendor's infrastructure. You may not want to host your e-mail system externally and you're not considering hosting your office communicator service outside your organization's infrastructure—fair enough. But consider this: Can you at least make your infrastructure as efficient as the vendors are to support cloud computing?

If nothing else, cloud computing is teaching everyone how poorly data centers, workplace infrastructures and critical systems are being managed. It may not be a fair comparison, but if we look at how some companies like IBM, Microsoft and Google run their servers and data centers, applications and workplace, we would say: "Gosh, we have a lot of room to save here!" Cloud computing can play this role in helping you sort out your own cloud.

Yes, yours—the cloud can be the one hosted on your infrastructure. More efficient, greener and saving costs. Take a look at the new data centers; leverage the virtual infrastructure and the virtual workplace. I am down in South America next week, and it is fantastic how well my Office Communicator reaches the people I need, and transfers my calls. It's my own, virtual cloud—everywhere and on the Accenture infrastructure.

There is still a lot to happen in this space: common standards, new service offerings, legal restrictions, etc. And one thing in IT is true: just because something is very cool, it does not mean we will use it.

Take a look on cloud computing, and look at it differently. It may look dark at first, but with a closer look, it can become greener.

By André Guerreiro, US Workplace Technology & Collaboration

Return to Blog

Link to post (0) | Comment (0) | Trackback URL |

Figure 6: Ways of sharing blog content

blog or a direct hyperlink back to a post. An important aspect of these aggregation sites is that they combine content from a variety of sources and present them in a consolidated view. Links are provided next to the blog articles that allow people to post content to the aggregation site. Figure 6 shows a blog post from Accenture.com[3] — each post has a "Share It" section that allows the reader to share the content on Del.icio.us, Digg, Facebook, Technorati, or Reddit.

3. See www.accenture.com/Global/Accenture_Blogs/Technology_Consulting_Green_IT/IsCloudComputing.htm)

We found twelve content aggregation services used by the blogs (see Figure 7). The most frequently used sites for sharing content are Del.icio.us (44%), Digg (40%), and Facebook (32%). Del.icio.us and Digg present their content based on a voting mechanism. The more positive votes a blog entry receives, either from the original blog or the aggregation site itself, the more prominently it is displayed on the site. Many other sites work in a similar way (for example, Yahoo! Buzz and Reddit). Facebook is different, as its users post the organization's blog content to their own pages, which are only visible within their social network. Meanwhile, Del.icio.us and Digg have the widest reach since their users' preferred content is visible by anyone and is not limited to a circle of "friends." However, Facebook offers a more targeted approach since its users' preferred content is essentially endorsed by someone familiar to the reader.

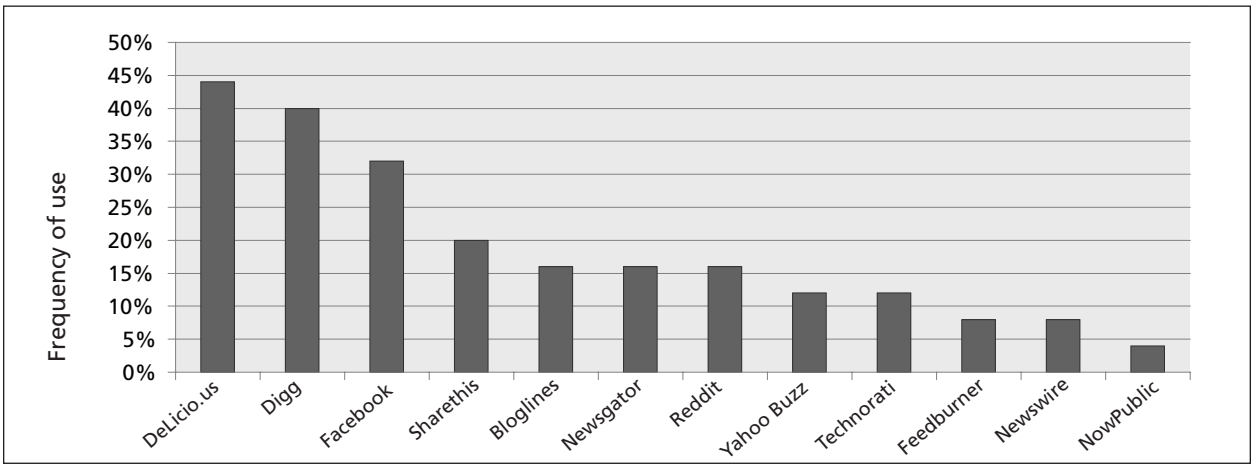

Figure 7: Use of services that share blog content

The role of search engine optimization:

Blogs are, at their core, web sites. This means they can be indexed by search engines, and this creates an opportunity for an organization to promote their site. Search engine optimization (called SEO) is the "process of improving the volume or quality of traffic to a web site from search engines,"[4] and basically it involves placing the site higher in search results. This largely depends on the content of the site. Some best practices for SEO include:

Provide a significant amount of text that a search engine can read. This can be done by thoroughly explaining the subject discussed in the post and by choosing descriptive words that precisely describe the subject with which the post should be associated.

Encourage other sites to link to your blog and other readers to share its content. The more inbound links, the more likely the site is to be more highly placed in search results.

Use effective titles and meta tags to accurately describe the blog. Web page titles and descriptive tags mean little to readers but are used extensively by search engines to determine whether the page is a match for a given search query.

4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization

Content Sharing Tools

	Del.icio.us	Digg	Facebook	Sharethis	Bloglines	Newsgator	Reddit	Yahoo Buzz	Technorait	Feedburner	Newsvine	NowPublic
Accenture	✓	✓	✓				✓				✓	
Alter Hall (TU)												
Ask.com					✓							
BBC News	✓	✓	✓				✓				✓	✓
Boeing												
Chrysler	✓	✓	✓									
Cisco Systems	✓				✓	✓						
CNBC News	✓	✓										
Dell	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓						
Delta Airlines				✓								
General Motors		✓			✓	✓			✓			
Google										✓		
Hewlett-Packard				✓								
IBM												
Johnson & Johnson	✓	✓										
Lenovo	✓								✓	✓		
NJ.Com	✓	✓					✓					
Pace University												
Philly.Com	✓	✓	✓				✓					
Princeton University			✓	✓				✓				
Southwest Airlines			✓	✓		✓						
Toyota				✓					✓			
Wall Street Journal	✓	✓	✓					✓				
Wikimedia Foundation												
Yahoo!								✓				
Total	**44%**	**40%**	**32%**	**20%**	**16%**	**16%**	**16%**	**12%**	**12%**	**8%**	**8%**	**4%**

Use of Media

Highlights:

- Audio and video can augment the blog reader's experience.
- Podcasting through blogs is still relatively rare.
- Leveraging services such as YouTube are an effective way to share multimedia content while minimizing the impact on server bandwidth.

Blogs are fundamentally a text-based medium, but they are frequently augmented by various multimedia technologies. The use of simple, static images is ubiquitous, but there is also a significant reliance on audio and video. However, for all the buzz surrounding podcasting, it is used relatively rarely in conjunction with blogs. We found only 16% of blogs were augmented by podcasts.

That said, organizations appear to use multimedia sharing services such as YouTube, Flickr, and Vimeo instead of hosting the media themselves (see Figure 8). YouTube is, by far, the most frequently used service for integrating multimedia into blogs (44%), followed by the image-sharing service Flickr (24%). Locally hosted media were less frequently used: Adobe Flash[5] was used in about 20% of the blogs, and Windows Media was only used in 4% of the blogs.

…for all the buzz surrounding podcasting, it is used relatively rarely in conjunction with blogs.

There are several advantages to the use of these multimedia sharing services. First, they provide an easy to use mechanism for posting content. It is simpler for an author to post a video to YouTube and let the service encode the video in a format that can be streamed to users than acquiring and using the software to perform the encoding itself. Second, multimedia require significantly more bandwidth than text-based content; posting content to YouTube shifts the network load away from the organization and onto the service. Third, these services are built to share information, and therefore it is easy to generate links back to that multimedia content independently from the blog itself.

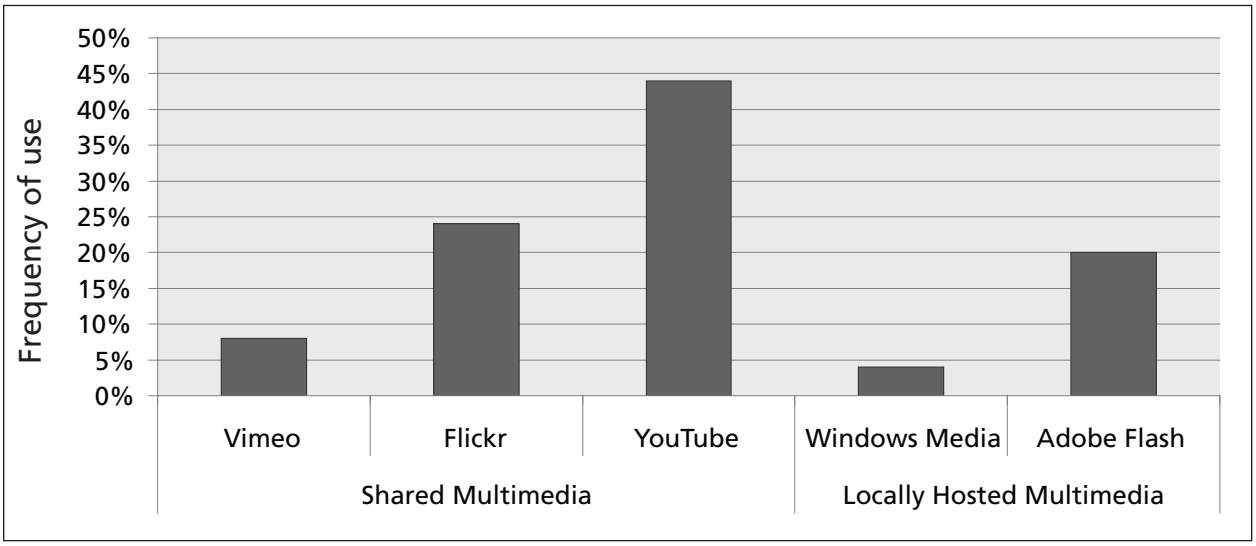

Figure 8: Use of multimedia in blogs

5. We are making a distinction here between YouTube, which delivers videos using an Adobe Flash application, and videos originally authored using Flash and deployed on the blog site itself.

Multimedia Technologies by Blog

	Shared Multimedia			Hosted Multimedia	
	Vimeo	Flickr	YouTube	Windows Media	Adobe Flash
Accenture				✓	
Alter Hall (TU)	✓				
Ask.com					
BBC News			✓		✓
Boeing					
Chrysler		✓	✓		
Cisco Systems					
CNBC News					✓
Dell			✓		
Delta Airlines		✓	✓		
General Motors		✓	✓		
Google			✓		
Hewlett-Packard					
IBM					
Johnson & Johnson			✓		
Lenovo		✓	✓		
NJ.Com			✓		
Pace University					
Philly.Com					
Princeton University	✓				
Southwest Airlines		✓			
Toyota			✓		✓
Wall Street Journal					✓
Wikimedia Foundation					
Yahoo!		✓	✓		✓
Total	**8%**	**24%**	**44%**	**4%**	**20%**

Implementing the ideas: Looking at Southwest Airlines

Highlights:

- A strategy that provides effective ongoing content is a key success factor for corporate blogging.
- Southwest Airlines incorporates several best practices into a single site.
- Their blog uses several types of reader feedback including comments, polling, and photo sharing.
- The site uses emerging Web 2.0 services such as Twitter to communicate with their customers in real-time, such as what flights that day will have Wi-Fi.

Southwest Airlines' "Nuts about Southwest" is a good example of how many of the suggestions and technologies described in this report can be implemented to increase site activity, create a community, improve public relations, and convey the corporate message. The blog integrates text postings with several forms of multimedia, well-developed processes for eliciting comments, and mechanisms for sharing the content beyond the blog. Their efforts have been recognized by the industry — in 2007 the blog won the "Platinum PR Award" by PRNews.[6] Figure 9 is an image of the front page of the blog, and features several key elements:

Use of multimedia. The site makes extensive use of external multimedia sites: images are hosted

Figure 9: Nuts About Southwest Front Page

6. www.prnewsonline.com/awards/platinumpr/event_info.htmland videos originally authored using Flash and deployed on the blog site itself.

on Flickr and videos are hosted on YouTube. Users are encouraged to comment on image and video content, and they can contribute their own photos to the Southwest-branded Flickr pool. These photos are displayed on the front page of the blog.

Prominent display of comments. Each blog post has the number of comments displayed underneath the post title. This is more effective than putting the number of comments at the end of the post, because readers can get an immediate sense of the popularity of that post. The display of the number of comments is also a clickable link, which takes the reader directly to the comments section of that post. By prominently displaying the number of comments, the message is that the comments are at least as important as the post itself, and is in line with building a community around the blog.

Sharing and publishing of content. Each text and video blog post has a "ShareThis" option. Clicking on the link displays a list of content aggregation services (see Figure 10) to which a direct link to the content can be posted. This essentially allows the users of the site to become its promoters, because they are the ones posting the links and "voting them up" in popularity.

Southwest also shares its own content through various social networking sites, links to which are available at the bottom of the blog's page (see Figure 11). Southwest is also experimenting with Twitter, which allows them to post short messages, called "microblogging." The content is diverse, ranging from corporate news to which flights are delayed. (see Figure 12). These messages are hosted on Twitter and can also be subscribed to using RSS.

Figure 10: Clicking the ShareThis option on a post

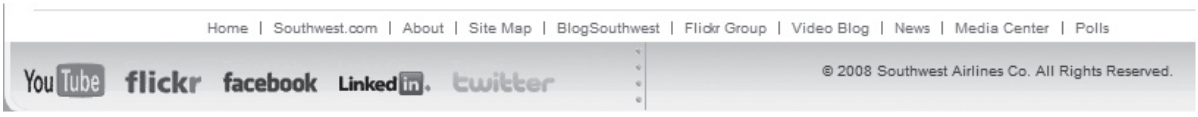

Figure 11: Bottom banner of Southwest Airlines' Blog

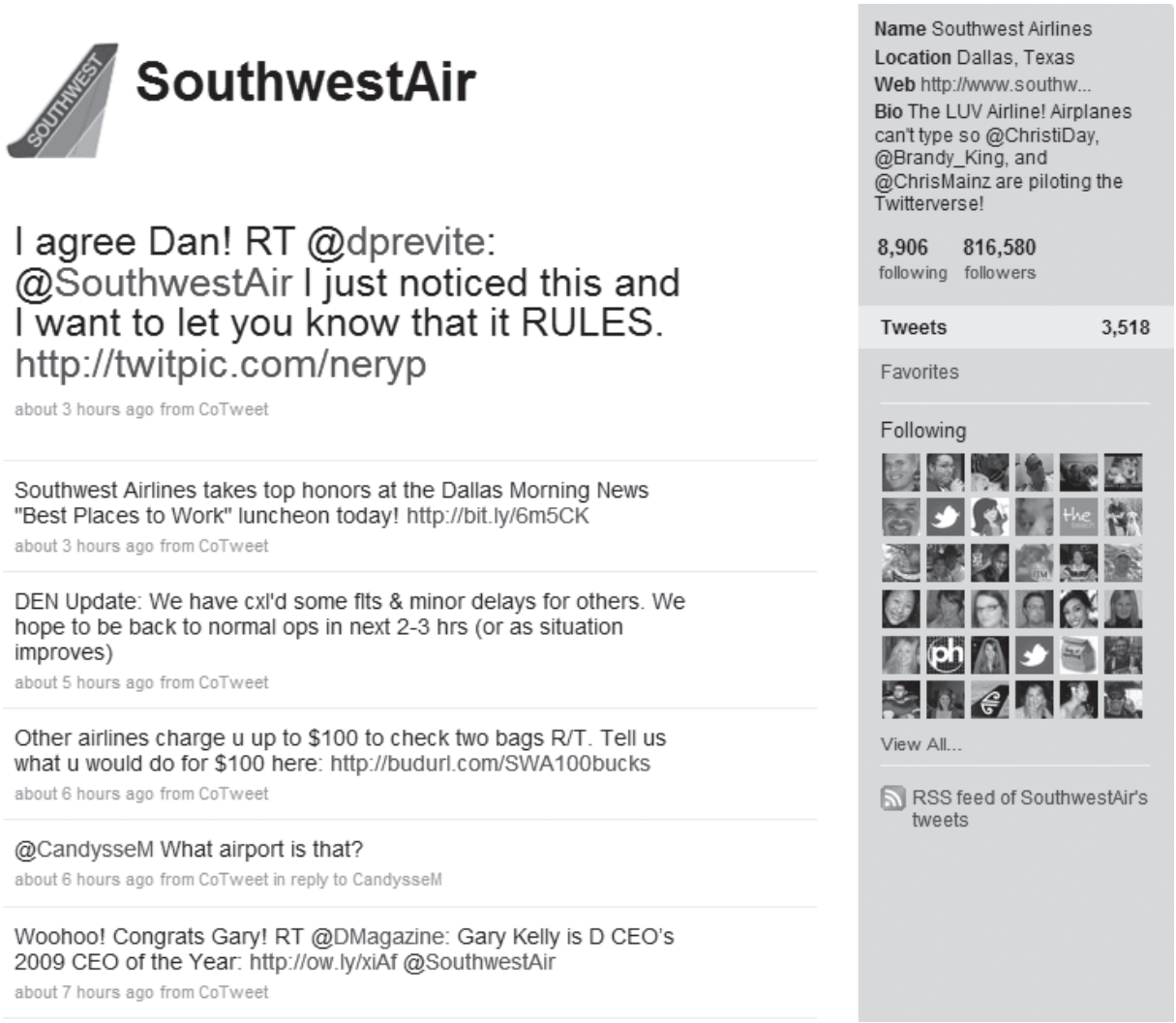

Figure 12: Southwest Airlines' Twitter Feed

Rating and Polling. While blog comments can be effective in creating a community, not all readers may want to put that level of effort into writing their own content. Southwest's blog has two ways to elicit "one click" feedback. First, users can rate each post by clicking on a row of stars at the end of the post (see Figure 13).

Second, the blog also makes frequent use of polls. These polls serve multiple purposes. They provide a way for readers to contribute to the site with minimal effort, and they also provide useful customer data to the company. For example, the poll in Figure 14 provides Southwest with information regarding how successful a fare sale is likely to be.

Southwest's blog exemplifies many of the concepts we've discussed in this report. They are clearly attempting to build a community among its customers – they state that the purpose of the blog is to "build a personal relationship between our Team and you."[7] They encourage comments by not requiring users to register, and provide multiple ways for people to participate and contribute content.

Figure 13: Rating a blog post

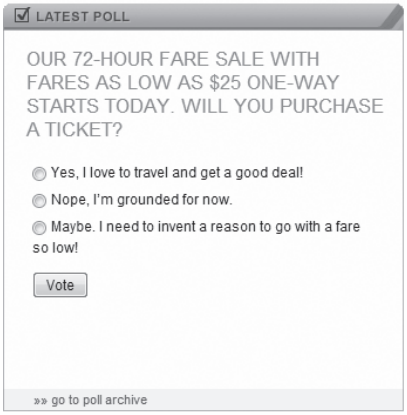

Figure 14: A reader poll

7. www.blogsouthwest.com/about

Internal Blogging Strategies

While blogging is primarily used by companies to reach external constituents, their potential to be used internally should not be ignored. Internally focused blogs can provide a way of communicating with employees and creating a consistent knowledge base throughout the organization. In many ways, it is an update to the concept of an "Intranet," but blogging's emphasis on two-way interaction makes it a potentially transformative technology. Key elements of an internally-focused blog are pictured in Figure 15.

Components of an Internal Blog

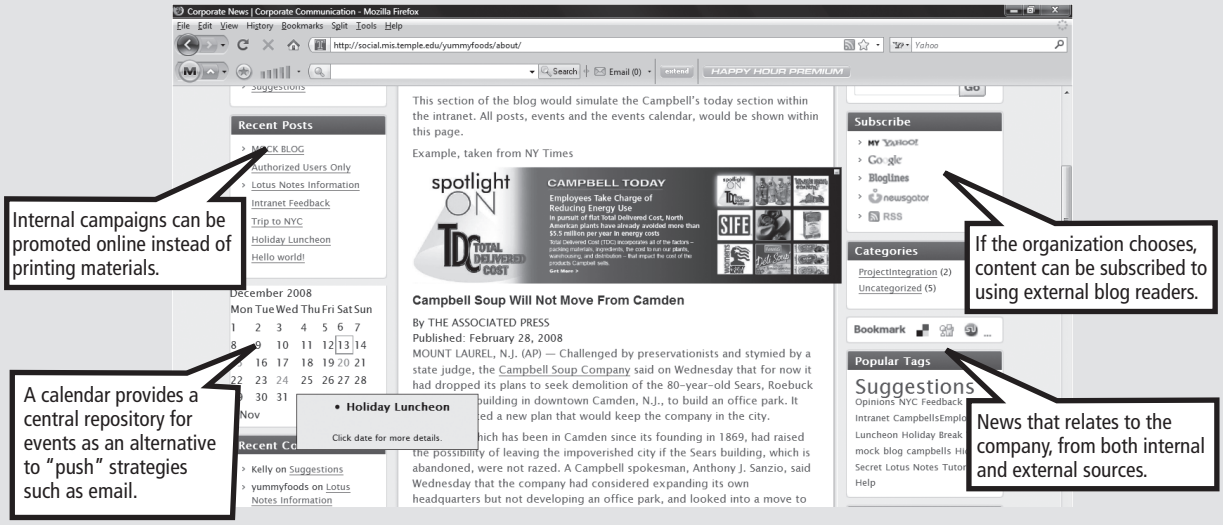

Figure 15: Key elements of an internally focused blog

The following are some internal blogging "best practices":

Use posts to disseminate information – The post-based format of a blog is particularly well-suited for communicating news and events. The news can come from internal sources (such as a corporate communication groups) or from external sources (such as the media).

Encourage communication and knowledge sharing – The comment facility in blogs facilitate the sharing of information and ideas among employees. A thoughtful posting and comment policy that strikes a balance between encouraging people to contribute while limiting exposure to the company is essential to get employee buy-in. Examples of policies include allowing certain employees to post and comment without approval, while others are screened before they are published.

Use private posts when necessary – Blogs are an inherently open medium. In situations where sensitive information is to be shared, access to posts can be password-protected. These posts can be placed alongside unrestricted posts. This allows for the benefits of information sharing while limiting risk.

Build a community – A key goal of an internal blog should be to facilitate interaction among employees. Employees should be registered users and their posts and comments should be identified with them. The name attached to the post should be linked back to an employee directory in order to connect employees with shared interests in a topic. This will facilitate interactions that previously might not have occurred, bringing together employees in different physical locations or divisions.

Conclusions

Corporate blogging is just one of the many tools organizations can use as they begin to embrace social computing. We believe blogging offers significant opportunities for companies as they look for new ways to reach both external and internal audiences. This report presents a high-level view of what is occurring in this space:

1. There are three main uses of blogging in a corporate setting: community building, public relations, and conveying a message. Community building was the most prominent use of corporate blogs because it most directly leverages the interactive nature of this technology. Creating a community around an area of interest and encouraging users to generate content through comments are ways of driving people to the blog.

2. The key to getting users to leave comments is to make the commenting policies as unrestrictive as possible. This includes allowing anonymous comments and not requiring registration. Organizations can minimize their exposure by screening comments before they appear on the blog. We also recommend clearly stating these policies on the site, along with a description of what constitutes acceptable and appropriate content.

3. An organization's own employees were the least frequently targeted audience for corporate blogs. This indicates a reluctance to embrace "internal blogging," as there are many security, privacy, and workplace issues surrounding this type of open forum. Nevertheless, blogging could also represent an important mechanism for knowledge sharing in an organization, and carefully designed controls may be able to circumvent some of the potential issues.

4. Corporate bloggers cannot rely on their visitors coming directly to their site. Instead, establishing an RSS feed allows readers to subscribe to the blog and facilitates integration with news aggregators. Similarly, blog authors should place links on their sites that make it easy for readers to submit the content to sites such as Digg and Del.icio.us. These sites are where many potential readers will start, and they can reach new audiences.5. Use of multimedia will enhance the appeal of a blog and increase the level of reader interest. Bloggers can leverage external media sharing sites (such as YouTube and Flickr) to push the server load off of the blog site itself while still maintaining tight integration of multimedia with the textual content. Furthermore, this multimedia content can be shared independently of the original blog, creating additional opportunities for the "viral" spread of content.

References

Cayzer, S. (2004). Semantic Blogging and Decentralized Knowledge Management. *Communications of the ACM* 47(12), 47-52.

O'Reilly, T. (2005) What is Web 2.0? Retrieved 30 June, 2009 from http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Gboyega Adenaike, Nana Kow Essuman, and Dickson Ozobia for their work on the research and analysis that served as the basis for this report. We would also like to thank Kalpana Sampale and John Altland of GlaxoSmithKline, and Donna Braunschweig of Campbell Soup Company, for their guidance during this project.

About the authors

David Schuff is Associate Professor of Management Information Systems in the Fox School of Business and Management at Temple University. He holds a BA in Economics from the University of Pittsburgh, an MBA from Villanova University, an MS in Information Management from Arizona State University, and a Ph.D. in Business Administration from Arizona State University. His research interests include the application of information visualization to decision support systems, data warehousing, the use of Web 2.0 media by organizations as a communications tool, and the assessment of total cost of ownership. His work has been published in Decision Support Systems, Information & Management, Communications of the ACM, and Information Systems Journal.

Contact information:

David Schuff
207G Speakman Hall
1810 North 13th Street
Department of Management Information Systems
Fox School of Business, Temple University
Philadelphia, PA 19122-6083
David.Schuff@temple.edu

About the authors

Joseph DeLuca is a Junior Underwriting Consultant at Capital Management Enterprises. His interests include social media and Web 2.0 in addition to Risk and Project Management. While studying at Temple University, he participated on a MIS committee for the Gamma Iota Sigma Professional Risk Management, Insurance and Actuarial Science Fraternity. In 2008, he was the recipient of the Spencer Educational Foundation, Inc. Scholarship for his outstanding achievements in risk management studies. He is also a member of the Beta Gamma Sigma Honor Society, an international honor society recognizing the most elite group of business students in the world. Joseph graduated Summa Cum Laude from the Fox School of Business Honors Program in 2008. He holds a BBA in Management Information Systems and Risk Management and Insurance from Temple University. Joseph's passion and determination for exploring business opportunities will lead him in developing valuable entrepreneurial skills. He hopes to one day establish his own project management consulting business.

Contact information:

Joseph DeLuca
1111 W. DeKalb Pike
Wayne, PA 19087
JDeLuca@cme-group.com

About the authors

Brian Hamilton is currently a student at the Fox School of Business within Temple University. His interests include web development, application development, virtualization technology, and personal blogging. Brian is enrolled as a Business Honors student and has been on the Dean's List from Spring 2008 to Spring 2009.

Brian has built his academic foundation through the Management Information Systems program at Temple University and also throughout various IT based internships in corporations such as CIGNA, Campbell Soup Company, and Comcast Spectacor. As an avid blogger, Brian sees the potential in the use and development of corporate blogging as a way to reach out to a larger audience and maintain their loyalty as customers. He believes that the advantage corporate blogs brings can be continuously expanded with the ever growing technological advancements. Brian is expected to graduate with a BBA in Management Information Systems from Temple University in Spring 2010.

Contact information:

Brian Hamilton
brian.w.hamilton@gmail.com

Fox School of Business and Management

Established in 1918, Temple University's Fox School of Business is the largest, most comprehensive business school in the greater Philadelphia region and among the largest in the world, with more than 6,000 students, 150 faculty, and 51,000 alumni. In 2008, *Academic Analytics* ranked Fox School management information systems faculty in the top 10 for research productivity while *TechRepublic.com* selected the Fox School's bachelors degree in information systems as one of the top ten programs in the U.S. The Fox School's programs are among the best in the world and are highly ranked by the *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *U.S. News and World Reports*, *Princeton Review*, and *Computerworld*.

Institute for Business and Information Technology

The Fox School's Institute for Business and Information Technology (IBIT) provides the cutting-edge knowledge and people to create and sustain excellence in information technology. IBIT offers participating corporations a membership structure so that they can leverage and influence our knowledge, human capital, and established network. IBIT leverages The Fox School's research expertise, educational resources, global presence, and entrepreneurial spirit to prepare business leaders and create industry relevant knowledge. IBIT offers the following programs:

Fox IT Symposium
The Fox IT symposium is an exclusive highly interactive forum of noted practitioners addressing current topics.

Distinguished Speaker Series
The series features talks by leading professionals on important business technology topics.

Fox IT Awards
The Fox IT Innovator, Leader, and Distinguished Alumni awards are presented to i ndustry leaders at the IT Awards Reception.

Research
IBIT affiliated researchers publish in top academic journals, conduct workshops, and release The IBIT Report on important industry relevant topics.

Scholarships and Fellowships
IBIT recognizes exceptional students with scholarships and awards.

Industry Projects
IBIT affiliated faculty and students work with local organizations on joint business technology projects.

Workshops and Special Events
IBIT organizes special workshops and forums that allow academics and industry leaders to exchange ideas and produce knowledge.