



ENTREPRENEUR

[Print this article](#) | [Close this window](#)

Business of blogging: How to make it work

11:34 ET, Mon 14 Jan 2008

Blogging is one of the most effective ways for small companies to create credibility, marketing experts now think.

It's a development that probably surprises more than a few executives accustomed to dread the flow of misinformation and mischief that the blogosphere can incubate.

But it has to be done right, in the spirit of blogging and not of advertising, and you can't just task the intern with the job.

Successful company blogs involve high level staffers and the company itself has to have a commitment to an open, two-way conversation with its audience of employees, product users and customers, rivals and the curious who are just passing through.

Trust, it seems, is the dominant theme on the "[Conception Connections](#)" blog run by Alternative Reproductive Services, a Chicago-based firm dedicated to matching egg donors and surrogates with interested families.

The blog illustrates what works to build interest that potentially leads to new business.

Conception Connections is transparent, making clear that it is run by the company. It engages the reader in a dialogue about issues they will find important, like compensation, ethics, legal concerns and pregnancy. It's also added useful links to other blogs related to infertility.

A successful blog "kind of opens the kimono and from a brand point of view lets people know who you are," says Rob Frankel, a Los Angeles-based branding consultant who has advised clients ranging from Re/Max to Honda Motorcycles and Sea World.

Regardless of company size, what a corporate blog should not be, he says, is a dumping ground for press releases and other promotional materials hyping the company and its products. Reserve that for the company's web site.

"That's all the stuff that nobody wants to read," cautions Frankel and other marketing professionals.

Indeed, one of the best ways to achieve credibility when your business is small is through an informative and educational blog, say veteran business bloggers. Let key debates and other important topics affecting your industry drive the content, and always provide a way for readers to become part of the discussion. Post frequently and monitor your traffic.

"It's really just information and talking about all areas of the process," says Robin von Halle, Conception Connection's president. The blog "does foster a sense of community and enlist people in every facet that we work with - parents or people waiting to be a gestational surrogate."

Tom Goldstein, a partner with the law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer Feld LLP, has gained a reputation as one of the leading Supreme Court litigators, helped in part by [SCOTUSBLOG](#), short for Supreme Court of the United States Blog. He and his wife, Amy Howe, founded the blog more than five years ago when they were running a small, Washington, D.C.-based firm.

Today SCOTUSBLOG, which is now sponsored by Akin Gump and managed by Howe and her small firm, attracts a readership of up to 100,000 on days when the Supreme Court makes big news. The blog includes commentary, analysis, links to court filings and related information on the nation's top court.

"The blog has always had a singular focus," says Goldstein. Recalling his days at his former firm, he says: "It was an important part of our credibility; it was something we could point to in our effort to get hired."

Along with useful content, authorship of blog postings by top management is important because it give readers a chance to see the company's guiding personalities in an informal way. In some cases, in an effort to maintain a healthy distance from a company's products and services, management-level bloggers operate their blogs separately from their companies.

Such is the case with Alec Saunders, chief executive of Ottawa, Canada-based iotum, which develops software for telephone networks. Saunders maintains a personal [blog](#), which he bills as "Alec Saunders' Personal Soapbox, an explosive mix of VOIP, technology and the Web." Saunders makes clear that the opinions are his own.

"It's my personal blog and you'll find me commenting on telephony things, what's going on the Web... and you'll see my vacation," he says. The blog, which sometimes mentions iotum, helps generate interest in the company because of Saunders' reputation in the software industry, where he spent a good portion of his career at Microsoft Corp.

Methods to generate blog traffic are varied. Some companies like to send proactive "push" e-mails to their existing customers and blog subscribers every time a new posting goes up. Others are less aggressive. But most agree that it's important to blog with links to keywords and phrases that anyone searching that particular industry would use.

"Your blog is going to rise in popularity with search engines," says Caroline Melberg, who runs a small marketing communications firm in suburban Minneapolis, who describes the process as "link love."

Whatever your time and budget, honesty remains the best policy, say business bloggers. Make your blog self-serving and your readers will lose interest in a heartbeat.

Says Shelley Symonds, chief marketing officer and regular blogger for Etelos Inc., a San Mateo, California-based developer Web based applications for business: "The trick is to balance the investment you make in time and money with the connection to your company - without being repellently self-promoting."

Deborah Cohen covers small business for Reuters.com. She can be reached at smallbusinessbigissues@yahoo.com

© Reuters 2007. All rights reserved.