

TALKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT:

The Rise of Employee Bloggers

Second in a series on new communications and word-of-mouth marketing

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of the blogosphere has the potential to empower employees in ways not unlike the rise of labor unions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although more subtle than those fundamental shifts in the labor-management dynamic, employee bloggers, in many cases, have tipped the balance of influence in their favor to establish levels of credibility that many CEOs can only dream of.

When trying to understand why bloggers have taken the communications reins and seem to be here to stay, one should consider the results of Edelman's 2005 Trust Survey. Edelman found that by a 3-to-1 margin, people are far more likely to trust "average people like me" than to trust authority figures such as CEOs. Employees at all levels have suddenly found themselves in powerful positions to advocate either for or against their companies' products, policies and stances – and have found that people are listening to what they have to say.

Indeed, a 2003 study by McKinsey & Co. found that 67 percent of consumer goods sales are based on word-of-mouth, highlighting the role that a company's employees can play to promote sales or discourage them through online comments. And a 2004 Intelliseek/Forrester study revealed that consumers trust word-of-mouth recommendations far more than they trust traditional marketing/advertising. Word-of-mouth recommendations represent the most trusted form of advertising with the highest impact,¹ suggesting that people would rather hear about real experiences and perspectives than marketing speak.

Employee blogs have helped enhance the reputation of their employers (as in the cases of Microsoft, Sun Microsystems and Stonyfield Farms). Conversely, companies have seen their reputations damaged by high-profile firings of employee bloggers (as in the cases of Google, Delta Air Lines, Waterstone's and Friendster). CEO blogs are growing in frequency² as a credible way to reach both internal and external audiences. Blogs are establishing in the online world much of the value that public relations has brought traditionally.

As the potential assets of employee bloggers become apparent, so do the corresponding liabilities. Blogs can influence news, analysts and regulators. Blog information also rises with alarming speed to the top of search engine placements due to sites' frequent updates and concentration of similar keywords. Organizations need to have a well-formed point of view on how employee blogging and CEO blogging fit into their communications mix, and need to put policies or guidelines in place to enable blogging to happen in a more controlled – and ultimately productive – way.

This white paper seeks to explore the phenomenon of employee blogging, how companies are coping with this new form of internal and external communication, and how organizations can harness the power of employee blogging to their benefit. We'll also review blogs that communicators should be interacting with regularly, commonly used terms of the blogosphere and resources for instituting blogging policies, guidelines and platforms.

¹ Forrester Research, Inc. and Intelliseek

² Edelman 2005 New Frontiers in Employee Communications Survey

WHY BLOG?

An estimated 34 million blogs will exist by the end of 2005³, many of them in developed countries where the number of blogs is doubling nearly each year. The Japanese government estimates 3.35 million blogs currently exist in Japan and that the number will double by 2007. France is estimated to have somewhere between 3 to 4 million blogs and Germany has an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 and is growing quickly. This phenomenon is clearly no longer limited to the United States, which was long the leader in blog innovation and growth.

As one might expect, the millions of blogs around the world cover every topic imaginable (and even some unimaginable!). This white paper focuses on the narrow slice of the blogosphere created by employee and CEO bloggers, most of whom are blogging for one or more of these reasons⁴:

- **Become the Expert**

Position themselves and their company as the thought leader of their industry.

- **Personalize Customer Relationships**

In a forum where the main objective is not to sell, they'll have a more personal relationship with their customers. Blogs are a fast way to join the customers' discussions, provide tips and insights or receive feedback.

- **Provide Trusted Context When There is News — Good or Bad**

By having public-facing blogs, a company develops a trusting relationship with its customers. When the company has good news, customers will turn to the bloggers they already trust for interpretation. When there is bad news, nothing can better aid crisis management than already having trusting relationships with customers.

- **Improve Media Relations**

It's every PR consultant's dream to create a channel where media regularly check what a company has to say, instead of media just being passive – sometimes indifferent – recipients of press releases.

³ Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2005

⁴ CorporateBlogging.Info, 2005 (<http://www.corporateblogging.info/basics/why/>)

Blogs 101

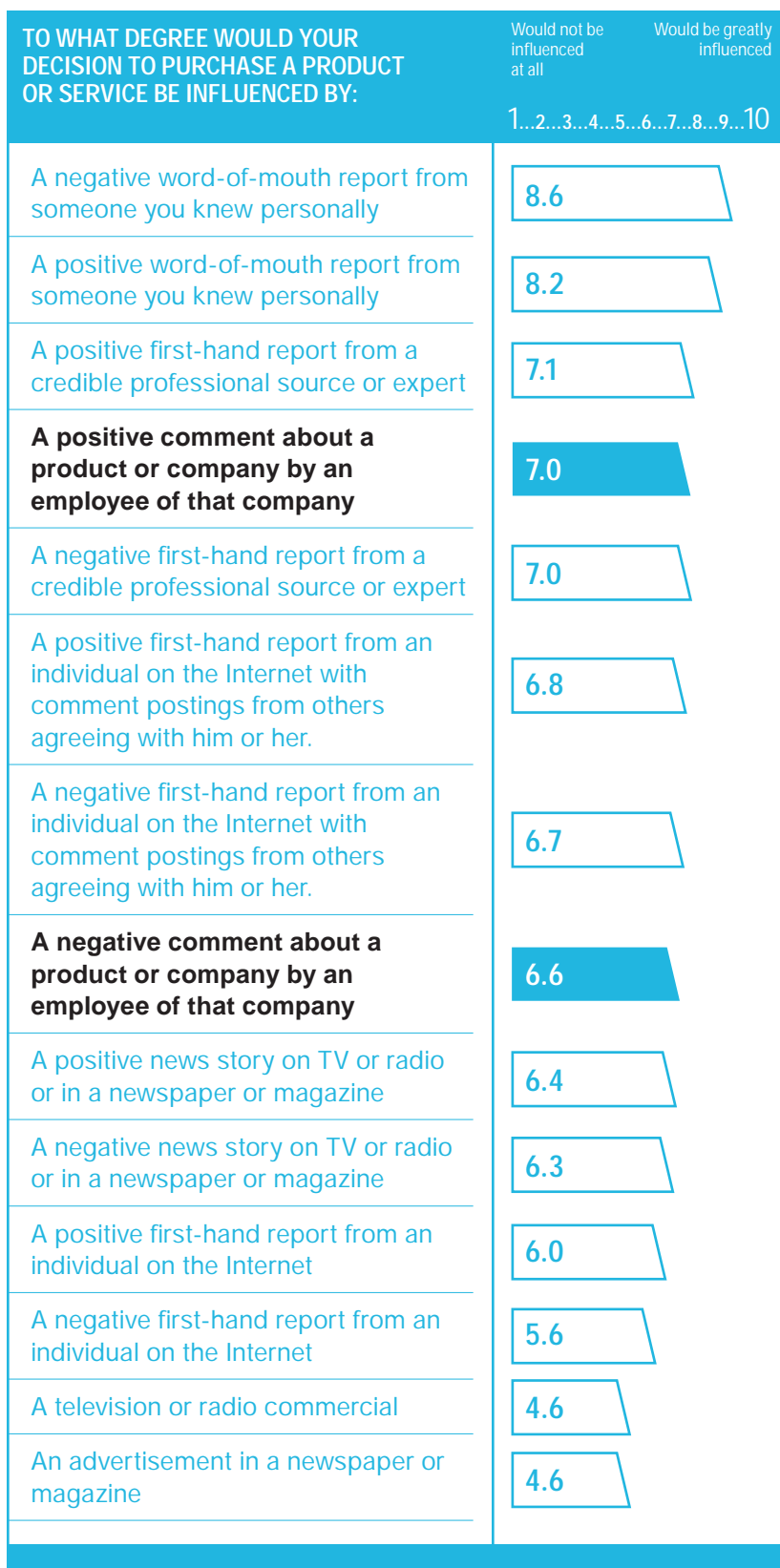
Weblogs, or blogs for short, are easily published, personal Web sites that serve as sources of commentary, opinion and uncensored, unfiltered sources of information on a variety of topics. Each new entry is called a "post," and posts appear on a blog page in reverse chronological order. Blog posts typically are characterized by numerous links to other pieces of information, including other blogs, news stories, images/photos, commentaries, videos and audio clips. Blogs also have other distinguishing characteristics, including a calendar or archives and a permanent Web address for each post (called a permalink). While primarily a one-way communications channel, many blogs do allow

readers to post comments and many blogs expand their reach by being linked to other blogs on related topics. This collective conversation is called the blogosphere and it's one of the fastest growing areas of new content on the Internet. The term Web log was coined in 1997 by Internet writer Jorn Barger, with the shorter term "blog" first appearing in 1999.

For more information on blogs and influence on the media landscape, go to [//www.edelman.com/insights](http://www.edelman.com/insights) to download our first white paper called "Trust 'Media': How Real People Are Finally Being Heard."

- **Foster Internal Collaboration**
Use blogs as a workspace where project members keep each other updated without wasting time writing reports or searching the Outlook inbox.
- **Bolster Knowledge Management**
Blogs work in two ways. First of all, they're an easy way for the readers to find information and resources they want or need. That's obvious and is used internally in many organizations. Second, blogs are a kind of "university lite" for the blogger, because blog posts engender conversation in which knowledge is developed and shared. Blogging is community on-the-job learning.
- **Enhance Recruitment**
If blogs establish a company as a thought leader, people in that business will pay attention. They'll read and discuss what you have to say. Chances are good they'll see the company as an attractive employer.
- **Test ideas or products**
A blog is informal. It's part of a conversation where people (often) can comment, and the blog can provide a measure of value. Publish an idea and see if it generates interest. Does anyone link to it? What do they say?
- **Rank high in search engines**
Google and other search engines reward sites that are updated often, that link to other sites and most importantly, that have many inbound links. Start a blog at a regular Web site and the ranking should improve.

A 2005 survey by Backbone Media (blogsurvey.backbonemedia.com/archives/2005/06/_not_a_factor.html) confirmed many of the reasons on this list. Their survey showed the top five reasons employees blogged were: To publish content and ideas (52 percent), build a community (47 percent), promote thought leadership (44 percent), get information quickly to customers (36 percent) and get feedback from customers (23 percent).



Source: Intelliseek

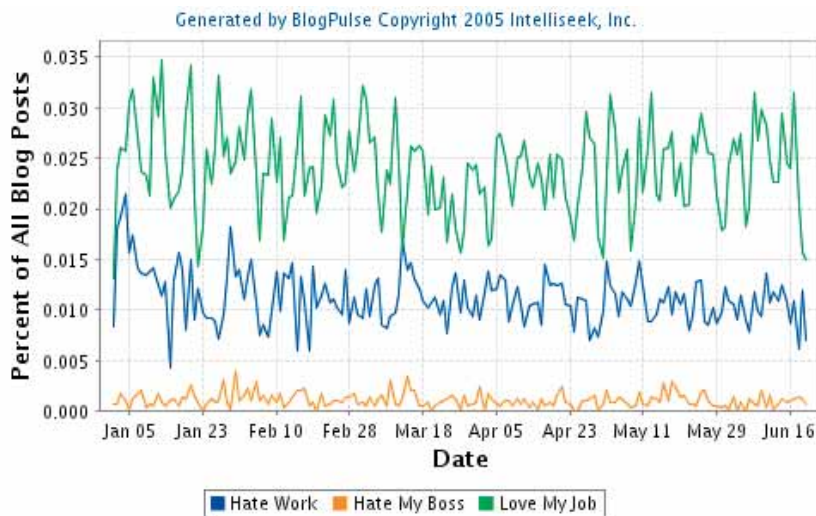
EMPLOYEE BLOGS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS

While it is extremely difficult to determine precisely what percentages of blogs are written by employees with mention of their employer by name, a recent Intelliseek study of consumer-generated media behavior revealed that up to 9 percent of people posted to blogs (others or their own) to comment on or defend their employer. The power of that phenomenon is made clear by considering another finding of the Intelliseek study, which is that comments by employees are more influential in determining consumer intent to purchase than news stories or advertising about the product (see chart). Employees' emerging role as potential ambassadors of their companies and companies' products or services now trumps the effectiveness of traditional media and public relations tactics.

Additionally, many companies and employee bloggers have discovered the hard way that it takes only a few negative or inappropriate postings for a termination to occur or for doubts to be raised about a product before a snowball effect occurs.

CHARACTERIZING THE NATURE OF EMPLOYEE BLOGS

Perhaps surprisingly, the overall tone expressed in employee blogs is generally positive as illustrated in the chart below that tracks mentions of “hate work,” “hate my boss,” and “love my job.” Over the six-month period analyzed, blog postings with a phrase or derivative of “love my job” outnumbered those with “hate work” by about 2-to-1 and outnumbered those with “hate my boss” by about 4-to-1.



In fact, in an August *BlogPulse* analysis, postings related to “my job,” “my work,” and “my boss” far outweighed postings on the topics of food, sex, sports and dating. Only the topics of “kids” and “family” began to approach work-related topics in frequency of mention.

The majority of employee blogs fall into two categories: blogs written by employees intended for other employees, and blogs written by employees intended for external audiences, such as customers or potential customers. The common thread for employee blogs, regardless of the intended reader, is that the employer has most

likely little to no oversight or control over the content, especially in the case of blogs created on employees’ own time and equipment. “The blog...can indeed be... fabulous for relationships,” says David Kirkpatrick and Daniel Roth of *Fortune* magazine. “But it can also be much more: a company’s worst PR nightmare, its best chance to talk with new and old customers, an ideal way to send out information, and the hardest way to control it... suddenly, everyone’s a publisher and everyone’s a critic.”⁵

Organizations also must consider that some employees may have personal blogs not related solely to their company or jobs, but that may nonetheless mention who they work for only in passing. While these references to the company can be difficult to monitor and nearly impossible to control, they can have just as much impact on a company’s reputation.

For any blog to be credible, it should deal with both positive and negative comments, be transparent and not be “messed.” In other words, it must be completely genuine and unscripted. Companies must have the fortitude to stomach their own employees’ opinions about the company’s products or services, whether those opinions are negative or respectful. If that fortitude can be mustered, the results are handsome.

“Many corporations are afraid of Weblogs because they’re afraid of the sound of the human voice,” says David Weinberger of Harvard’s Berkman Center. “But that voice — the unfiltered sound of an actual person writing about what she cares about, sounding like herself — is actually the most important way of connecting with customers and partners.”

⁵ *Fortune*, December 27, 2004

USE OF EMPLOYEE BLOGGERS TO REGAIN LOST CREDIBILITY

Take the example of an often-cited employee blogger, Robert Scoble of **Microsoft**, who maintains the blog called Scobleizer (scoble.weblogs.com). Scoble's blog receives an estimated 10,000 hits a day and is linked to by more than 4,000 other blogs. In December 2004 his negative postings about the recently launched and widely panned MSN Spaces product actually shifted the blogosphere discourse to a more positive note for Microsoft. Readers of his blog were impressed that someone blogging on behalf of the company would express an opinion other than the party line. "I get comments on my blog saying 'I didn't like Microsoft before, but at least they're listening to us,'" says Scoble. "I need to be credible," he adds. "If I'm only saying, 'Use Microsoft products, rah rah rah,' it sounds like a press release and I lose all ability to have a conversation with the world-at-large."

Technology Platforms to Enable Employee Blogging

Technology plays a large role in ensuring employee blogs are accessible and successful, and many of the platforms available can be piloted quickly and with little cost. Some services (such as TypePad at www.typepad.com) require only a Web browser and connection to the Internet. Server-based blogging software, such as Movable Type (www.moveabletype.org) or the open-source WordPress (www.wordpress.org), is probably more useful to an organization seeking to create a wide platform for multiple employee blogs.

Scoble's freedom to criticize his employer was tested more recently when Microsoft CEO Steve Balmer announced a change in Microsoft's support of a Washington State bill outlawing discrimination against gays and lesbians. Scoble disagreed with the

decision in a posting to his blog, yet said he didn't get pushback from anyone at Microsoft, including Balmer, for disagreeing with him publicly.

"Weblogs are going to eat home pages. Within five years, corporate sites that don't feature blogs are going to look like nothing but brochureware."

— David Weinberger, co-author, *The Cluetrain Manifesto*

Employee blogs can also serve as a lifeline to customers and a way to cut down on call center loads. **Macromedia** started a few employee blogs in 2003 to give customers a single source for information and technical support (www.macromedia.com/community/#blogs). When it released software later that year that had significant bugs, Macromedia's company bloggers quickly acknowledged the need for fixes and helped diffuse the tension building in the blogosphere.

One of the most widely publicized incidents that illustrated the power of blogging to disseminate information took place in 2004 when it was revealed that **Kryptonite** bicycle locks could be opened using an ordinary Bic pen. As amateur videos and testimonials from pen-wielding lock pickers spread across the blogosphere, the company was slow to react. Its initial statements on the product's integrity were openly mocked by bloggers and by the time the dust settled, the cost of replacing faulty locks exceeded \$10 million. In contrast to the Microsoft and Macromedia examples, however, Kryptonite did not have an existing arsenal of employee bloggers to put a human face on the problem and provide a lifeline for skeptical customers.

EMPLOYEE BLOGS AS INTERNAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

While the majority of attention to the topic of employee blogging has been directed at employees blogging to external audiences, many companies have encouraged blogging directed inward at fellow employees for a variety of reasons.

Google uses its own blogging product, blogger.com (www.blogger.com) to create and manage several hundred internal blogs. Many are used for project collaboration, while others are used for social interaction at work, such as selling extra concert tickets or finding partners for after-work sports activities. Some of the blogs spill over into the public domain, such as blogs for the public relations, quality control and advertising departments. Google is also using these blogs for another unique reason: it helps the company document its rapidly evolving organizational history. "Our legal department loves the blogs," says Marissa Mayer, who oversees all of Google's consumer web products, "because it basically is a written-down, backed-up, permanent time-stamped version of the scientist's notebook. When you want to file a patent, you can now show in blogs where this idea happened."

Yogurt maker **Stonyfield Farms** maintains five internal blogs for various purposes, one of them called "Baby Babble" that's intended to allow employees who are also parents to share information and tips for other parents (www.stonyfield.com/weblog/BabyBabble/index.html). All of Stonyfield Farms' blogs are run by Christine Halvorson, who has the title Chief Blogger. In the case of the "Baby Babble" blog, posts that benefit employees also have relevance for consumers.

Sun Microsystems has created a master blog for employee musings that also serves as an internal knowledge management tool (www.blogs.sun.com/roller/opensolaris.do). While the general site is publicly accessible, certain sections of the site and certain blogs dealing with product development require login as a Sun employee. Sun is also well-known for the blog of its President and COO, Jonathan Schwartz (blogs.sun.com/roller/page/jonathan), who blogs on a weekly basis on a variety of topics facing his company's industry and the company itself. His topics also serve to educate employees about those issues, one excellent example being a post explaining why a recent acquisition made sense for Sun.

Blogs are also being used at some of **DaimlerChrysler's** U.S. plants for managers to discuss problems, share information and keep a record of their solutions for others to view in the future. Blogs have found a similar use at IBM, where, according to David Berger, manager of communications strategy, employees have registered over 11,000 blogs. Internal blogging started in 2003 very organically, Berger says, and bloggers themselves developed IBM's blog policy by collaborating on a wiki. Today's blogs are used for problem solving, collaboration, open discussion and venting, he adds.

At the Dutch technology company **Macaw**, 90 percent of its 110 employees blog internally to share knowledge about technical issues or solutions, as well as personal comments, photos and jokes. Lisette Hoogstrate, a marketing manager at Macaw, says "I'd say the time spent [creating blog posts] and the time gained [from more effective knowledge

management] balance out pretty evenly...I know that everyone appreciates the blogs and the possibility to share thoughts and ideas with colleagues."

CEO BLOGS

An interesting aspect of the rise of employee bloggers is that still relatively few of them are C-level executives. While the number of senior executives who blog has risen from nearly zero in 2004 to a bit less than 10 percent of companies surveyed in a 2005 study done by Edelman⁶, they still comprise a very small part of the blogosphere. Those CEOs who have dipped their toes into the blogosphere waters have done so for a variety of reasons, including creating a new marketing channel to customers and potential customers, and providing a platform for thought leadership.

In addition to Jonathan Schwartz at Sun Microsystems, others are making their voices heard in the blogosphere.

Alan M. Meckler of **Jupitermedia** (weblogs.jupitermedia.com/meckler) is a pioneer in the area of CEO blogs. Since early 2003, he has been blogging on technology marketing in general, and his firm's endeavors in this area in particular. He said he views blogging as a marketing opportunity. "But it doesn't work unless you have some personality in it," he says.

Closer to home, **Edelman** CEO Richard Edelman was among the first CEOs of a prominent firm to launch a blog (www.edelman.com/speak_up/blog). He uses it to articulate industry-wide positions, to discuss his company's objectives, to surface issues the company is discussing, and to talk about personal passions such

as Civil War history. His blog, which currently receives over 2,500 hits daily, is read by numerous audiences, including employees of the firm.

One of the few CEO blogs that is restricted to employee-only audiences is that of Paul Otellini, CEO of **Intel**. Blogging behind Intel's firewall, his posts candidly discuss developments at Intel and comment on competitors and industry trends. While Otellini doesn't talk about his internal blog to external audiences or release its content, parts of posts have made their way into the blogosphere. One post from January 2005 characterized his candor: "While I hate losing share, the reality is that our competitor has a very strong product offering."

Even more traditional companies such as **General Motors** are getting in the game of blogging. Its vice chairman Bob Lutz blogs regularly at fastlane.gmblogs.com in a blog called "Fast Lane." His posts deal with major issues facing the automaker, offer sneak peeks at new designs and products, and feature a good mix of corporate and consumer news. His blog puts a human personality to an otherwise faceless huge company.

Sprint Nextel Business Solutions recently launched a blog (businessblog.sprint.com) that's also authored by a prominent senior executive, Vicki Warker, vice president of product management and marketing. The site, entitled "Things that make you go Wireless," is designed to "discuss the development and applications of Sprint wireless products and services." After witnessing a very active blogging community of Sprint consumers, Warker elected to participate with a blog of her own that allows for comments and includes

⁶ Edelman 2004 and 2005 New Frontiers in Employee Communications Survey

syndication links. Makaela Meadows, the project manager who brought the blog to fruition, says “Our goal at Sprint Nextel Business Solutions is to find new ways to connect and bond with our target audience. We’re eager to initiate a powerful new conversation with our customers, and we realize we won’t get it all right from the get-go.”

Boeing’s vice president of marketing for commercial airplanes, Randy Baseler, blogs at www.boeing.com/randy. His blog, called “Randy’s Journal,” covers aspects of product development, Boeing history, industry issues and news about the competition.

In Europe, several high-profile French CEOs have begun blogging, including Michel-Edouard Leclerc, president of **Association des Centres Distributeurs E. Leclerc**, a co-op association of about 600 small and large retailers throughout Europe (www.michel-edouard-leclerc.com/blog/m.e.l). Leclerc gives his opinions on a wide range of political, social and economic topics in his regular blog postings. He has campaigned effectively on behalf of consumer rights, playing the driving role in several acts of consumer legislation. The popular Leclerc was mentioned so often as a candidate in the last presidential election that he had to go on television to declare he would not run.

CEOs looking to pick up tips on effective blogging or share blogging experiences can do so at a blog aimed squarely at them: www.ceobloggers.com. This blog is run by Guillaume du Gardier, cofounder and coproducer of the **New Communications Forum**, a conference series designed to bring together journalists and marketing and public relations professionals to learn

how to use participatory tools like blogs. On www.ceobloggers.com, readers can view lists of CEO bloggers, review posts about blogging experiences and submit their own name for inclusion in the club. The NewPRWiki (www.thenewpr.com/wiki/pmwiki.php/Resources/CEOBlogsList) is another good resource for communicators and also maintains a current list of senior leaders around the world who are blogging. (See the vocabulary guide on page 17 if you’re not sure what a wiki is.)

While the number of CEOs and other senior executives who blog is rising slowly, relatively few examples exist of CEOs whose blogs are geared primarily for employee audiences. We attribute some of this to the general lack of understanding among CEOs’ communications advisors of blogs and their power to influence internal discussions in an organization. While awareness of blogs among communicators is high – 96 percent in the United States (up 60 percent from 2004) and 69 percent in the rest of the world – only about 28 percent had posted to a blog.⁷ Communicators – especially those responsible for internal communications and CEO communications – must better understand this tool and evaluate its potential place in the overall mix of how an organization communicates with and engages its employees.

CREATING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR EMPLOYEE BLOGGING

Organizations contemplating creation of a platform for employee blogging on their intranets should keep in mind that blogs should be treated as a communications resource, not a technology platform, says Shel Holtz of Holtz Communication+Technology. “The idea that employees can write what they

⁷ Edelman 2004 and 2005 New Frontiers in Employee Communications Survey

want runs counter to the command-and-control structure of most intranets, which are characterized by authorized contributors and approval processes. Executives also dismiss intranet blogs as a waste of time, something employees can do for hours on end that contributes nothing to the organization but keeps them from doing their jobs," he says.

In building the business case for blogging, consider (and try to quantify) the cost savings resulting from streamlining e-mail communication by moving certain items onto a group blog, the value in recording and sharing how certain problems were dealt with in the past, and the impact on corporate reputation of having employee bloggers talking candidly about your company. Employees can more easily share their experiences while on the road, detail customer interactions and reactions, and recognize coworkers for their accomplishments. Also, familiarizing employees with blogs and related technology such as RSS feeds from blogs on industry or competitor news allows employees to be better informed than if they were just limited to what's posted on the intranet by corporate groups.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BLOGGING GUIDELINES

Nearly 70 percent of companies have no policies or guidelines in place for employee bloggers,⁸ a clear liability for both companies and bloggers themselves. Without a set of guiding principles in place, each blogger interprets what is proper according to his or her set of values. In turn, a company's HR department may apply different standards to different bloggers and thereby open the company to potential discrimination issues.

Employees who are fired (or "dooiced" – see the "Get Smart" vocabulary guide on page 17) for blogging typically fall into two categories: those who violated clear company guidelines or policies that govern blogging, and those who blogged for companies that had vague or non-existent blog guidelines. And although circumstances vary from company to company, most of the fired bloggers were let go for similar reasons, including:

- Crossing the line of employee behavior, including badmouthing colleagues and violating existing company policies
- Divulging trade secrets or private company information
- Not thinking through the consequences of blogging
- Personal blogging on company time
- Posting of "inappropriate" content, including information that's in poor taste or controversial

Recent crackdowns on employee blogging have garnered the companies little but negative publicity, especially when they involved high-tech companies like Friendster and Google. In fact, several blogs keep track of companies that have fired employees for blogging (and the reasons why), including The Papal Bull (homepage.mac.com/popemark/iblog/C2041067432/E372054822). In a recent survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, 3 percent of human resource professionals reported disciplining an employee for blogging, although none reported dismissing an employee for such behavior. However, some high-profile dismissals are still reverberating in the blogosphere.

⁸ Edelman 2005 New Frontiers in Employee Communications Survey

Friendster, an online social networking enabler, dismissed an employee in August 2004 for criticizing her employer on her personal blog. "I only made three posts about Friendster on my blog before they decided to fire me, and it was all publicly available information. They did not have any policy, didn't give me any warning" says former employee Joyce Park. Friendster would not comment. "Especially for a social networking company, it seems to reflect a particularly poor understanding of the medium," says Wendy Seltzer, staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation. One blogger even urged Friendster users to terminate their accounts to show support for Park.

Former **Google** employee Mark Jen was terminated in January 2005 over a blog (99zeros.blogspot.com) that discussed life at the company, even though he said "it's all publicly available information and my personal thoughts and experiences." Somewhat ironically, Jen has since parlayed his misfortune into a new gig at Plaxo, an Internet contact management company, where he is helping craft the company's public communication policy, which includes the use of corporate blogs by employees.

Former **Delta Air Lines** flight attendant Ellen Simonetti was dismissed in fall of 2004 after posting photographs of herself to her blog (queenofsky.journalspace.com); in the photo, she posed in uniform inside a Delta plane with her blouse unbuttoned far wider than the company's dress code specified. She's since filed a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission because, she contends, the company took no action against male employees with similarly revealing blog photos.

Waterstone's, the UK's largest book retailer, came under criticism in early 2005 for firing an 11-year employee who posted satirical comments about his boss on his personal blog. The company fired him despite other postings on the blog discussing new works of science fiction and other new releases that drove traffic to Waterstone's itself. At the time of the firing, the company had no blogging guidelines.

Companies that have successfully implemented blogging guidelines have realized that the guidelines must shape the activity, rather than prohibit it. "Blogging is like anything else in human nature; the more you try to restrict it, the some more people want to do it," says Christopher Hannegan, director of Edelman's Employee Engagement Practice. It's for this reason that Hannegan advises companies to choose the less-restrictive route of publishing guidelines on employee blogging, rather than more restrictive and formal policies.

Somewhat paradoxically, **Apple Computer** has taken a harder line on employee blogging than its rival Microsoft. While Apple employees are granted permission to create their own personal Web pages and blogs, they are not allowed to comment on anything related to Apple on such pages. Furthermore, they are prohibited from posting in any capacity on any Mac-related Websites or forums, whether they identify themselves as working for Apple or not. The strictness of this policy stands in interesting juxtaposition to the fact that Apple is a leader in creating and promoting consumer-generated media tools like iMovie, Podcasts on iTunes, RSS and now blogs.

At **Sun Microsystems**, COO and president Jonathan Schwartz says, “Well over 1,000 [Sun employees] have been given space for blogging. There’s no restraint on what they can blog about. We provide tools and expect them to be used responsibly. Restricting what you can write on a blog is the same as restricting what you can say in an email or a phone call. And if they are speaking as an employee, well, we live in a country that values free speech.” Sun Microsystems does warn bloggers not to reveal secrets or make financial disclosures that might violate securities laws (see the following section for more information on Sun’s policy).

Such a liberal blogging guideline as Sun’s can only be successful within the context of a comprehensive employee engagement strategy, says Hannegan. “If a company is already doing a good job engaging its employees and giving them multiple outlets to express opinions and frustrations, those employees are less likely to see (and use) blogging as their last resort,” he explains.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYEE BLOGGING GUIDELINES

Before crafting guidelines on employee blogging, organizations should first contemplate aspects of their internal culture and assess their vulnerability in the blogosphere. Questions to ask include:

- Are we a “listening” culture?
- Are we open and comfortable with honest feedback, and can we actually handle and manage it?

- How critical is stakeholder management to brand building and corporate reputation?
- Is our company or brand committed to transparency?
- Is our category disproportionately being shaped by external perceptions on the Internet?
- What is the morale, motivation and commitment of our employees?
- Are employees already blogging and what are they saying?

This last question, while perhaps obvious, is an important one. Many an organization has been surprised to learn what’s being said about them in general in the blogosphere, but even more surprised to learn how many of those comments are coming from their own employees. Conversely, companies that deploy some kind of Internet-monitoring services typically have a better handle on the real-time pulse of what’s being said about them, both in content, tone and source, in public areas of the Internet. As a result, they’re also in far better positions to respond intelligently rather than react on the fly.

Each company should develop policies or guidelines that are specific to its mission, its employee base and its company goals. “Companies should not micromanage the process, but rather nurture it and let it happen to naturally to the extent possible,” says Edelman’s Christopher Hannegan. Some commonsense rules should apply, as captured in Yahoo!’s blogging guidelines (more detail on their guidelines follows on page 19). Boiled down, they spell out some simple rules of the road:

1. Employees are responsible for their own commentary
2. Employees blog at their own risk (including the risk of being sued for obscenity, libel, defamation, trade secrets, etc.)
3. All company proprietary information is off-limits and grounds for dismissal
4. Media coverage, if any, is to be routed through normal PR channels
5. Employees should blog on their own time, unless their job responsibilities include maintaining a company-encouraged blog.

Companies also might want to consider other provisions, especially those governing privacy and existing privacy policies, under-13 Internet users, copyright laws and the like. And in general, the admonishment to "think before you hit the publish button" is a wise approach, as well.

After contemplating the questions above and deciding what parameters to put around employee blogging, organizations can benefit from a number of insightful blog guidelines already in existence. See the appendix on page 19 for selections from publicly available blog guidelines and examples of language and tone.

In addition to guidelines that support blogging, many companies attach disclosure statements to the blogs themselves that lay out presuppositions, business relationships or political orientations. If a personal blog is going to talk about work even occasionally, the organization should encourage the blogger to add a disclaimer such as those listed above or this one from the Scobleizer blog:

"Robert Scoble works at Microsoft (title: technical evangelist). Everything here, though, is his personal opinion and is not read or approved before it is posted. No warranties or other guarantees will be offered as to the quality of the opinions or anything else offered here."

If a CEO or other member of senior management is blogging, companies need to be mindful of not running afoul of fair disclosure laws by posting "safe harbor" language somewhere on the blog to warn readers about forward-looking statements. While some may argue that this introduction of legal language may run counter to the informal nature of blogs, the potential legal implications of not doing so cannot be avoided. Sun Microsystems takes a bit of the legal edge off in their safe harbor language by referring to Jonathan Schwartz's blog simply as "Jonathan's blog."

CLOSING THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATORS

There's no question that blogs are here to stay and are becoming a more credible source of information for many people. While employee and CEO blogs are not silver-bullet solutions, they are viable communications channels for many purposes (including internal knowledge management, enhancement of external reputation and information sharing) and should be considered in the mix of tactics that communicators deploy. Communicators should also consider the blogosphere as a real-time gauge of how effective internal communications and employee engagement are, as well as of employee sentiment in general. While it does not provide the statistically valid sample provided by a more formal

employee survey, monitoring the blogosphere can provide an important additional qualitative perspective for communicators and human resource professionals.

Companies can't lose sight, however, of the fact that 62 percent of communicators still say in-person communications are most effective for general employee communications.⁹ Blogs can build virtual relationships among employees and leaders with great impact, but only when they are viewed as complements to, rather than replacements for, face-to-face communications and more traditional employee communications methodology.

Communicators themselves should be conversant in blogs and related technology, and able to provide adept counsel on the development of blogging guidelines, whether or not a CEO or senior leader should blog, and how to manage employee blogs as a reputation-enhancing tool.

They should also be leading the charge to understand their organizations' current standing in the blogosphere and who is feeding the positive and negative conversations. Lastly, communicators need to stay alert for the next technological development that may someday take up residence next to email, intranets and blogs; the ability to anticipate future trends and create communications and engagement programs that leverage them is a hallmark of the business-savvy communicator.

⁹ Edelman 2005 New Frontiers in Employee Communications Survey

Recommended Blogs for Communicators

Practitioners of employee and corporate communications have an increasing number of blogs covering their disciplines from a variety of perspectives. Following is a list of some of our favorites:

A Shel of My Former Self: (blog.holtz.com) Run by Shel Holtz, principle of Holtz Communication+Technology, it contains one of the best list of hot blogs for communicators, as well as a weekly podcast on communications issues that he co-produces with Neville Hobson of the Nev On blog (see below).

BlogsCanada: (www.blogscanada.ca) Promoted as “Canada’s blog site,” it contains comprehensive listings of Canadian-based blogs and good lists of reference books and sites.

BNET: (www.bnet.com) A compelling collection of blog links, white papers and perspectives on business issues. Content is organized by interest to particular job function or industry.

ConsumerGeneratedMedia: (www.consumergeneratedmedia.com) Hosted by Intelliseek Chief Marketing and Client Satisfaction Officer Pete Blackshaw, this blog provides thought leadership on the phenomenon of consumer-generated media, including measurement and analysis, and offers tips, advice and insights for communicators who are struggling to keep up with a rapidly changing “media” environment.

CorporatePR: (ringblog.typepad.com/corporatepr) Covers a wide variety of communications issues as surfaced by Elizabeth Albrycht, a 15-year veteran of high-tech public relations.

Diva Marketing: (bloombergmarketing.blogs.com/bloomberg_marketing/2004/12/the_diva_market.html) Authored by Toby Bloomberg of Bloomberg Marketing, it contains a rich mix of links to other blogs and insights into how high-profile blogs were created and are maintained.

Elanceur: (elanceur.weblogger.com) Written by Christophe Ducamp and focused on wikis, cooperation, e-talking, e-writing, tribal marketing, e-influence and online communities. Ducamp is co-author of the book *Les Blogs* and co-founder of CraoWiki, one of the most influential French wikicommunities.

Employee Thinking: (www.employeeethinking.com) One of the few blogs to focus solely on issues of employee engagement and communications. It’s run by Christopher Hannegan, who leads Edelman’s Employee Engagement Practice.

Loïc Le Meur’s blog: (www.loiclemeur.com) Le Meur is a French entrepreneur considered a guru by blogging aficionados worldwide. Le Meur founded Ublog.com, a blogging services startup that was acquired in 2004 by Six Apart of the U.S., and he’s now Six Apart’s European chief. His site, in English as well as in French, provides a treasure trove of information on the spread of blogging and blogging technologies, as well as links to hundreds of other blogs.

Micropersuasion: (www.micropersuasion.com) Run by Steve Rubel, a vice president at Cooper Katz in New York City, this blog offers commentary and how-to resources for marketers, advertisers and communications professionals.

Musings from POP! Public Relations: (pop-pr.blogspot.com) A collection of insights, photos and interesting links from Jeremy Pepper, principle of POP! Public Relations.

Nev On: (nevon.typepad.com/nevon/investor_relations) Neville Hobson is an independent communicator based in the Netherlands who offers insights, links and commentary about a variety of business issues and who has a special interest in business communications and technology.

PROpinions: (www.natterjackpr.com) This site based in Dublin, Ireland, is run by Tom Murphy, a PR professional who has worn many hats over the years. The site has good original content and an exhaustive list of people blogging on communications topics.

Quality Service Marketing: (qualityservicemarketing.blogs.com/quality_service_marketing) Another one of the few blogs dealing with internal communications and internal branding issues, it includes good lists of other resources for communicators.

The Big Blog Company: (www.bigblogcompany.net) This UK-based blogging boutique has an interesting collection of articles and perspectives related to many aspects of blogging.

"GET SMART" VOCABULARY GUIDE

Aggregator: A piece of software, often free, that lets a user browse dozens or even hundreds of Weblogs in one place. It works by automatically gathering RSS-based summaries from a set of user-selected information sources.

Blog: Digital Weblog, or personal Web site.

Burst/bursty: The tendency of an issue, person or phrase to "burst" briefly into public awareness because of a mention in the blogosphere.

Buzz: The volume of "chatter" or "discussion" that takes place on publicly available sources about a brand, product, issue or company's reputation.

Dooce: To be fired for one's blog content. Coined by Heather Armstrong, who was fired for postings she made to her blog at www.dooce.com.

Groupblog: A blog written and maintained by a group of authors.

Message thread/thread: A back-and-forth discussion that emanates from an original posting on a discussion board, forum or blog.

Moblog: Short for "mobile log," a blog that contains posts made from a mobile device, typically a cell phone.

Phrase mining: The deployment of natural language processing technologies to extract phrases, based on grouping of words from large amounts of raw text.

Podcast: An audio (or occasionally video) recording posted on a blog and syndicated via RSS, often downloaded to a mobile phone or MP3 player.

RSS: "Really simple syndication," the technology by which blogs syndicate their postings throughout the internet community. An RSS feed encapsulates a blog's most recent posts for display in an aggregator.

Sentiment mining: The ability to identify polar expression (positive/negative, pro/con, like/dislike, angry/pleased) in raw text.

Share of search: A calculation of the specific key words, key phrases and words that Internet users type into search engines when looking for information on the Internet.

Trackback: A mechanism used in a blog that shows a list of items that refer to a single blog post. A trackback (sometimes written TrackBack) typically appears below a blog entry and shows a summary of what has been written on the target blog, together with a URL and the name of the blog.

Vlog: Short for "video blog," a publishing platform for the distribution of videos.

Wiki: A web site comprised of pages that any viewer can edit. The phrase "wiki wiki" means "super fast" in Hawaiian.

XML: Extensible Markup Language, a format that two computers use to share data on the World Wide Web.

APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF BLOGGING GUIDELINES

Harvard Law School:

blogs.law.harvard.edu/terms, <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/legalfaq>

We don't mean to turn you off from blogging by immediately inundating you with legalese, but we need to make clear our respective rights and responsibilities related to this service. So, the President and Fellows of Harvard College ("Harvard") offer these blogging services (the "Services") to you subject to the terms and conditions of use ("Terms") contained herein. By accessing, creating or contributing to any blogs hosted at <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/>, and in consideration for the Services we provide to you, you agree to abide by these Terms. Please read them carefully before posting to or creating any blog.

Hill & Knowlton:

weblogs.netcoms.com/blogs/niallcook/archive/2005/05/19/279.aspx

- Never disclose any information "including textual or visual material" that is confidential or proprietary to Hill & Knowlton, or any third party that has disclosed information to us (e.g. clients, journalists, suppliers, etc.). Your existing contract in any case prohibits this.
- There are many things that we cannot mention as a publicly-owned company. Talking about our revenue, future plans, or the WPP share price will get you and Hill & Knowlton in legal trouble, even if it is just your own personal view, and whether or not you directly identify yourself as an employee of Hill & Knowlton.
- You should make it clear that the views you express are yours alone. You may want to use the following form of words on your weblog, weblog posting, or website: The views expressed on this [blog; website] are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer.

Groove Technology:

www.ozzie.net/blog/2002/08/24.html

If you choose to identify yourself as a company employee or to discuss matters related to the company's technology or business on your website or weblog, please bear in mind that, although you and we view your website or weblog as a personal project and a medium of personal expression, some readers may nonetheless view you as a de facto spokesperson for the company.

IBM:

www.snellspace.com/IBM_Blogging_Policy_and_Guidelines.pdf

1. Know and follow IBM's Business Conduct Guidelines.
2. Blogs, wikis and other forms of online discourse are individual interactions, not corporate communications. IBMers are personally responsible for their posts. Be mindful that what you write will be public for a long time – protect your privacy.
3. Identify yourself – name and, when relevant, role at IBM – when you blog about IBM or IBM-related matters. And write in the first person. You must make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of IBM.
4. If you publish a blog or post to a blog and it has something to do with work you do or subjects associated with IBM, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent IBM's positions, strategies or opinions."
5. Respect copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws.
6. Don't provide IBM's or another's confidential or other proprietary information.
7. Don't cite or reference clients, partners or suppliers without their approval.
8. Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, etc., and

show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory – such as politics and religion.

9. *Find out who else is blogging on the topic, and cite them.*
10. *Don't pick fights, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so.*
11. *Try to add value. Provide worthwhile information and perspective.*

Plaxo:

blog.plaxoed.com/?p=41

Externally communicating about aspects of the company that are part of your non-disclosure agreement (partnership deals, earnings, upcoming unannounced features, etc.) is ALWAYS forbidden, however, and grounds for immediate termination and legal action.

In a nutshell, be prudent. Ask yourself: "Would this public expression regarding Plaxo impair my ability to work with my colleagues on a friendly basis? Would it give a leg up to our competition? Would it make our current or upcoming partners uncomfortable?" If you could answer yes to any of those questions, please avoid this communication.

Additionally, you should first express with your management and co-workers any Plaxo concerns you may have. Voicing concerns about Plaxo publicly without first communicating such concerns to your management and co-workers is counterproductive and inadvisable.

Sun Microsystems:

www.tbray.org/ongoing/When/200x/2004/05/02/Policy

It's a Two-Way Street: The real goal isn't to get everyone at Sun blogging, it's to become part of the industry conversation. So, whether or not you're going to write, and especially if you are, look around and do some reading, so you learn

where the conversation is and what people are saying.

If you start writing, remember the Web is all about links; when you see something interesting and relevant, link to it; you'll be doing your readers a service, and you'll also generate links back to you; a win-win.

Don't Tell Secrets: Common sense at work here; it's perfectly OK to talk about your work and have a dialog with the community, but it's not OK to publish the recipe for one of our secret sauces. There's an official policy on protecting Sun's proprietary and confidential information, but there are still going to be judgment calls.

Yahoo!:

jeremy.zawodny.com/yahoo/yahoo-blog-guidelines.pdf

Company Privileged Information:

Any confidential, proprietary, or trade secret information is obviously off-limits for your blog per the Proprietary Information Agreement you have signed with Yahoo!. To obtain a copy of your agreement, please contact your HR manager. The Yahoo! logo and trademarks are also off-limits per our brand guidelines. Anything related to Yahoo! policy, inventions, strategy, financials, products, etc. that has not been made public cannot appear in your blog under any circumstances. see Yahoo! Guides 2. Disclosing confidential or proprietary information can negatively impact our business and may result in regulatory violations for the company.

Press Inquiries:

Blog postings may generate media coverage. If a member of the media contacts you about a Yahoo!-related blog posting or requests Yahoo! information of any kind, contact PR (pr-corp@yahoo-inc.com or 415-318-4120) You should also reach out for PR for clarification on whether specific information has been publicly disclosed before you blog about it.

If you want to learn more about how blogs might or might not work for your company, brand and employees, contact:

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About Intelliseek

WWW.INTELISEEK.COM

Intelliseek is a marketing intelligence firm that measures and analyzes online “buzz” and word-of-mouth behavior to help marketers protect, promote and improve their products and brands. Intelliseek specializes in “consumer-generated media” (CGM): the millions of consumer opinions and experiences aired in Internet discussion boards, forums, communities, USENET newsgroups, blogs and direct company feedback. Intelliseek measures the “digital trail” of CGM—regardless of format or source—to provide critical and timely marketing intelligence. Its flagship BrandPulse™ solution identifies and analyzes online data, internal data or a combination of data sources for holistic insights, and its BlogPulse.com site analyzes data from the blogosphere daily. Intelliseek maintains headquarters in Cincinnati, with sales and support offices in New York and California and an Applied Research Center in Pittsburgh.

About Edelman

WWW.EDELMAN.COM

Edelman is the world’s largest independent communications firm with 1,900 employees in 43 offices worldwide and in 2005 was named “International Agency of the Year” by the Holmes Report. Edelman’s Employee Engagement Practice is a specialty offering within the global network and helps organizations communicate more effectively with all employee groups and increase overall levels of employee engagement. Edelman’s expertise in this area includes mergers and acquisitions, downsizing, culture transformations, communications infrastructure development, labor relations, and recruitment and retention. Edelman also has industry-leading expertise in word-of-mouth marketing and corporate reputation management and enhancement.

Edelman’s network includes four specialty firms: Blue (advertising), First&42nd (management consulting), StrategyOne (research) and BioScience Communications (medial education and publishing).



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