

Unclogging Blogging!

As the new flag-bearers of the Internet, Blogs truly bring alive the collaborative nature of the online medium. Conceived by www.BlogWorks.in, the Blog\Works - Blog the Talk series seeks to feature the best of learning from blogosphere and otherwise, through panel discussions, talks and one-on-ones – mostly conducted online.

Edition one of the series discusses the impact of blogging and social media on Indian business and marketing, and was conducted entirely over Instant Messenger (IM).

The Panelists included **Toby Bloomberg**, President, Bloomberg Marketing, US, **Govindraj Ethiraj**, New Media Editor, Business-Standard, **Anurag Batra**, Editor in Chief & Managing Director of the exchange4media Group, and **Rajesh Lalwani** (Moderator), Blog\Works- Scenario Communication Partners.

Excerpts from the discussion:

Rajesh: Toby, welcome, let me begin by asking you a general question. You have been offering advice to organizations in a relatively mature US market. What are the trends and impact of blogs on businesses based upon what you have seen?

Toby: Good question.

i. Let's take Impact first. The standard response to what is the impact of blogs on business is, "It humanizes the organization." I like to say, it pulls away the 'Wizard of Oz' curtain and allows your customers, prospects, and well, the world at-large, to see the real you... through the eyes of the people who work for the company.

Now that sometimes scares an organization down to its toes. However, like the Wizard in Oz who hid because he didn't want the people to see that he was "just a man". Once however, Dorothy and her pals met and got to know the real Wizard, they liked him - they were no longer afraid of him. The Wizard got to know them better too and was able to really understand their problems and offer solutions. That's the long-range impact of business blogs: to help both sides, the company and the customer know each other better.

ii. In regard to trends – Companies who understand the benefits and 'get' that blogs/social media (podcasts, vlogs (video) and whatever the future holds) are credible, marketing/business

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strategies will begin to integrate them into their master marketing plans. Blogs will also become a standard part of most websites - rather like the 'About' page.

I also see more 'mash-up' niche communities being developed. It seems the more technology plays a role in our lives the more we want to connect with *people*. Communities that allow for profiles and thus deeper interaction with members are developed faster.

Ethics will continue to be a critical point in the discussions as new business models are developed around social media. For example, is pay of a post ethical if a blogger does not disclose or is not transparent about the activity? Last week a client asked me how to 'buy links' on high profiled blogs. Pay-per-post is the closest to 'buying a link', that I've seen thus far.

Companies will offer more than one kind of a blog. Traditional blogs, Sponsored blogs and Topic blogs that are written by copywriters.

Rajesh: Could you elaborate what these terms mean?

Toby: **i.** Traditional Blog - The type of blogs that we've been talking about. Blogs written by a person within the organization to help bring a human side to life. People talking to people

ii. Sponsored Blogs - Blogs that are paid for by an organization but not written by the organization. Think of a football sponsorship - the logo is on the field for awareness, branding, etc. chances are although the company is paying, the company may or may not own the content.

Rajesh: Something like vespaway.com?

Toby: Yes. Then there is Topic Blog - Could be a subset of traditional or sponsored. However, I think of it as an online e-letter. The style is conversational, but there is little insight into the organization. Topic blogs are often a safe way for an organisation to step a toe into social media

Rajesh: Could you give an example?

Toby: Wells Fargo Bank began with a blog on earthquake history. It made sense since it was some anniversary of the SF earthquake and the Bank is based in San Francisco. They recently launch a blog about student loans. About four employees are authoring that blog and providing different insights

Rajesh: I wanted to ask you a few questions based on your reply to the first one. Would it not be a good beginning that the CEO starts writing a blog and then encourages employees to participate? We are yet to cross the bridge here in India, in terms of CEOs writing a blog themselves. What do you think?

Toby: Could be ...

The CEO must first and foremost see the value in the initiative. Then if a company agrees blogs are credible marketing tools or strategies, the first step is to analyze if blogs will help solve a business challenge or support a marketing goal. If the answer is yes, then as with any strategy, the next step is to set goals and objectives. The exercise then becomes a cost-benefit analysis. Do the rewards justify the resource output?

Jonathan Schwartz, CEO of Sun Microsystems talks about his ability to reach millions of people with his blog, versus a few or even a few thousand, giving a face-to-face speech. For Merrill Dubrow, a new CEO of a large U.S. based marketing research company - M/A/R/C - his blog is building his reputation as a thought leader in the industry while providing a way to help clients and prospective clients find out 'what makes him tick'.

Anurag: Toby, It's easy to start a blog difficult to maintain, are they really ghost written?

Toby: Good question!

Anurag: Also, culturally, in India we are a face-to-face society meet, touch and feel - blogs cannot duplicate the chat over coffee.

Toby: Nope, but they can begin and extend that relationship.

Anurag: How does one address the culture issue?

Rajesh: Also, Anurag, the CEO doesn't always get the opportunity to meet everyone, blog promote the concept of mass intimacy.

Toby: Exactly!

Toby: For example, when you read a blogger, over time you begin to "know that person".

Anurag: Ok, I agree. However, that might be regarded as superficial in India.

Rajesh: Also, some people are difficult to reach - policy makers - blogs can help you to reach them, if you have a credible voice.

Toby: When you do meet in person the relationship begins several levels above "who are you?"

Anurag: Sure.

Toby: Ah, and there is a challenge – authenticity.

Anurag: Also organizations are not really democracies.

Rajesh: I agree with Anurag there.

Anurag: Blogs can bring incoherence in the philosophy.



Rajesh Lalwani



Anurag Batra