

**Rajesh :** This leads me to my next question for you, Toby. CEOs are busy people and writing a blog means investing time. What is your advice to make it worthwhile for the organization whose CEO blogs? Should every company blog? What should be the approach?

**Toby:** Yes Rajesh, as we discussed earlier, it goes back to strategy and value. About should every company blog? I ask 2 questions of companies:  
**i.** Will blogs solve a business challenge or support a marketing goal/initiative  
**ii.** Will the company culture support this type of open communication  
 If answers to both questions are, yes, then it's time to explore blogs!  
 If even one is, no, the company is not ready and the blog initiative will fail.

**Rajesh :** True and both valid.  
 Toby, listed companies have guidelines to follow, any tips for CEOs to ensure that they don't get into any issues around that with the regulator

**Toby:** If a corporation takes the time to carefully craft guidelines for bloggers, the CEO should follow those as well. The CEO may sometimes have reasons to color outside of those lines but the reasons should be carefully considered. In addition to guidelines (what to write about, how often to post, linking strategies, etc.) companies should develop a code of ethics that addresses the issue of transparency. Of course 'honesty' should be at the heart of guidelines and code of ethics.

**Rajesh :** I believe, the same rules that an organization would follow for other outreach programmes, to adhere to the regulator's guidelines, should guide its blog programme too.

Govind, blogs and social media give the consumer a voice. Similarly the activist groups on human rights, environment etc. - do you think the organizations are listening and acting? For example, your Mumbai blog?

**Govind:** Ye, some people are listening. I am still not sure whether I have achieved what I wanted to achieve. Okay, so 1,000 people who can do something have perhaps read my blog or similar blogs on similar topics, but will they do what I think they should? Or is a mass media attack better- where maybe 500 will be touched but they may act, or be influenced? These are questions, I have no answers for!!

**Toby:** The minds of the public and consumers! Guess it depends on the people who are the influencers and the issue.

**Govind:** Or the other way round, maybe 100 really interested people, capable of some follow up will read the blog, as opposed to a 100,000 who will read a newspaper or watch a TV show. Which one has more impact? I guess you've answered it somewhat!

**Toby:** The credibility would be a function of the credibility of the blogger/s and of the extent of buzz and impact. For example, if many bloggers posted on an issue and to the extent that mainstream media picked it up and the concern went from the blogosphere to 'real world' word of mouth buzz, I should think that would get the attention of any politician or government bureaucratic.

A few months ago I initiated a post that ended up changing the way a major company does business.

Jupiter Research is a well-known marketing research company based in NYC. They are known for conducting research and selling the results as a product to clients.

Jupiter issued a press release, through their PR agency, stating that by the end of 2006 most companies would be blogging! I thought that was a little odd- I've been speaking to marketers all over the US for the past 2 years and most of the people are just beginning to understand social media.

I sent the PR firm an email with my concerns about their statistics and asked for the methodology behind the question- that was all I wanted. Not the research; not the report.

The response from the agency was that Jupiter only released methodology to paying clients and not to competitors - that one gave me a chuckle.

Anyway, I sent back an email and told the agency that I was going to post, but would include my concerns. I never heard back and I posted. Within a very short time, my post was linked and the conversation extended on some very high traffic blogs in the PR blogosphere and in the healthcare community.

Fard Johnmar, Healthcare Vox blog actually bought the (I think) \$750 report. He posted that the report wasn't worth the paper it was written on and cautioned his readers not to buy it.

A blogger challenged me to contact Jupiter directly, which I did, and left a voice mail on what was, the President of Jupiter Kagan, David Schatsky's, mail. I offered him an opportunity to tell Jupiter's side of the story on Diva Marketing (my blog).

Keep in mind that Jupiter's analysts have blogs, including this guy.

However, no one was talking about this issue. He sent me an email and pretty much said that not revealing the methodology was a new business tactic; that I got my facts wrong and I owed my readers an apology.

With his permission, I posted the entire email. And as you might imagine, it sent off a flurry of new posts.

David Schatsky eventually posted on Jupiter Research's blog that Jupiter would handle blogger relations differently and they would advise their PR agency to do the same. In addition, if people asked for methodology behind their studies, they would provide that information. The WSJ Online had reported on the story and they picked up a quote from my blog.

So, the lessons learned really are... that it was not one blogger (me), but a community of bloggers who influenced a major company to change its business practices. By the way, it is industry standard in the marketing research community to publish methodology when providing the public with results.

**Rajesh :** Wonderful effort.

**Rajesh :** Moving on...  
 Govind, are Indian brands & organisations ready for blogs?

**Govind:** Can you expand on that a little Rajesh?

**Rajesh :** That blogs can have an impact, CEOs can showcase thought leadership, reach policy makers and prospective employees - whom everyone wants to reach these days. Similarly, marketers can share their passion, gain feedback and comments and all that and yet India has been behind on using the tool!

**Govind:** Okay, are we ready? I don't think so! Should we be ready? I think so!

I think we are in the relatively early stages of consumerism and consumption and everything that goes with it. Companies are yet to build strong customer relationships and connect, so the compulsion to go to the next level where there is closer more intimate engagement may not be there.

It's also to do with how many internet users you have, around 38 million, how many of them are active consumers, the products and services that lend themselves to connecting etc.

If you were to take the example of a popular car like Tata Indica, I would argue that most of its owners will not know English, or even access the internet. I wouldn't be surprised even if there are Mercedes owners who fit in the same category.

So you have the internet and all its potential on one side and your consumers on the other. Am not sure at how many points the two connect as of now?

**Govind:** Except of course for some demographics, like very urban, English speaking audiences etc.

**Govind:** I would guess most internet users are consumers of some sort... Rajesh?

**Rajesh :** Meanwhile, what I have been saying is... there will of course be reactive blogging by brands, companies and business leaders in response to being spoken about on the blogosphere, but I think marketers and corporates who adopt blogging proactively will benefit most.

Blogs are an opportunity for marketers to engage with the consumers first-hand, to establish context - by sharing and seeking perspective - in a two-way communication process that is closest to word-of-mouth and yet broad-based. Similarly, corporates can establish thought leadership, influence policy, engage with prospective employees and more through proactive blogging.

**Rajesh :** Toby, you and I are trying to say, need to build a strategic approach to blogging. Do share your take and experience on this subject.

**Toby:** I think blog strategy should be considered as any other marketing initiative. That means setting goals and objectives, and yes, measures of success. Blog success measures should tie back into the goals/objectives. As with many other marketing strategies e.g., branding initiatives, there are soft and hard 'success measures'.

**Rajesh :** what has been the response?

**Toby:** People are just beginning to understand that ROI can be measured - the first bloggers were dead against that; they felt that building relationships and showing the human side of an organization should be sufficient.

However, in order for corporations to accept social media as a credible marketing tool it must be held accountable for some sort of result.