

A Guide to Blogging

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A quick background to blogging

- Definition: Short for web logs, blogs are easily published online diaries that provide comment, opinion and unfiltered and uncensored information on a variety of topics. See [Wikipedia](#) for an excellent introduction to the subject of blogging.
- The most popular blogs are characterised by their author's passion for a specific topic or issue.
- A new blog is created every two seconds. There are around 15 million blogs with about 40,000 being created daily. 27% of US Internet users read a blog on a daily basis.
But, according to Marketing Week, on average each blog is only read by one person per day.
- Forrester Research shows that young consumers in particular are influenced by blogs and predicts that by 2010 they will be a key component of corporate communications strategies.
But research in September 2007 showed that only 1% of blog readers actually [trusted](#) a blog as a reliable source of information.
- If you search for a brand on Google, you may find that a lot of the top spots are dominated by unauthorised and often negative blogs.
Of the top 50 UK grocery brands, 20 have problems with detractor's comments appearing high up on Google's searches.
- Blogs perform particularly well on search engines because they are frequently updated and use RSS (Really Simple Software).
This makes it easy to track new blogs. Corporate websites more rarely change their content and as a result do not as easily appear at the top of a search for their brand name.

Some blog reality

1. Don't expect to be able to control what is written. Many big brands have tried, failed and been abused by the bloggers for doing so.
2. Don't assume that the customer is interested in a dialogue with the brand. What they are interested in is a dialogue with each other.
3. Don't create a blog for blogs' sake. Ask yourself who the audience is? What benefit will it deliver? What your end game is? Blogs are meant to be devoid of marketing, spin and selling.
4. Don't fake it. McDonalds produced a blog that claimed to be written by an enthusiastic customer, but was caught out. It stood out primarily because it was trying too hard to be positive.
5. Don't blog:
 - If your brand has anything to hide.
 - If you haven't anything really interesting to say - that'll get a response. Blogs aren't the place for press release content.
 - If you're not a naturally transparent organisation.
 - If every piece of communication has to pass through the PR and Legal dept.
 - If you are wary of stockholder perceptions.
 - If you can't commit to keeping the blog updated.
6. Do consider blogging:
 - For research.
 - As a networking tool. This is a social medium, and must be used that way to be a success.

- For customer insight.
 - If you are prepared to be completely transparent in your customer communications. To be completely open and honest.
 - If you want to give the brand a human interface.
 - If you want a route to quickly announce information or provide thought leadership.
 - If you want to fan the flames of customer evangelism or spread a buzz – and you want lots of feedback.
7. Ensure you have a PR strategy in place to monitor and manage blogs that are covering your brand. Consider how to build a relationship with them – and if, when and how you might contribute.
 8. If you can get them to strike up a dialogue with the brand it is an excellent way to find out who your Internet savvy customers are – and what they want from the brand.
 9. If you are planning a blog, start small with a pilot, perhaps by using a blog to support an ad campaign.
 10. Consider promoting it on your main website. Keep it dynamic. Consider how to integrate it so that people can own their own page on the site. If you allow a community to create content, that's an extremely powerful way to communicate with an audience.

6 steps to your perfect corporate blog

These days, simply having a blog isn't enough. To succeed it has to be compelling. But what makes a blog compelling? Answer: talking to your audience in an approachable way.

But using an approachable, less formal voice isn't easy, and striking a balance between a casual discussion and a brand message is always a challenge.

1. **Smile for your audience** - Post pictures of the blogger with each post so that users know who's talking to them. Here's [a great example](#) from Kodak where the faces of the authors of each section give a great personal touch.

While the tone of the blog may best be described as corporate/friendly, the pictures of the bloggers (members of Kodak's marketing team) don't wreak of the standard sales pitch. An added touch is that the bloggers often share personal stories and photos, giving the site a feeling of community.

2. **Make it a team effort** - Not everyone in your organization may be cut out for blogging, but marketers shouldn't rely on a single blogger to disseminate the brand's message. People go sick. They go on holiday. They change jobs. So spread authorship among a number of people within your organization.
3. **Feed your blog on links** - Links aren't just about SEO; they also play a valuable role in any blog. Using links is a quick way to build an audience for any blog, corporate or otherwise.
4. **Have a bit of fun** - Don't hide your personality behind a wall of branded messaging. While that might be best practice for TV or your press campaign, it's no good on a company blog.
5. **Own up to your mistakes** - The Companies that are worth knowing are those who admit their mistakes and move on, and the corporate blog is the ideal way to achieve this.

Brands that use their blogs as a way of letting customers know that they've made an error do a tremendous service to themselves because people often appreciate the honesty and integrity.

In your blog, where you're likely to reach highly enthusiastic customers, many of whom could be considered brand evangelists, a more direct and if necessary humble message can go a long way toward turning a negative into a positive.

6. **Have a conversation** - Screen out overly polished messages by asking yourself a simple question: Am I writing this the way I would say it in conversation? If the answer is "no," it's probably too polished.

Read what you are writing out loud if they have trouble gauging tone. And ask for input and ideas. Starbucks does this very well on their corporate [blog](#). Note how they use their blog to allow users to weigh in on the ideas of fellow customers.