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Tech Talk

Embracing the blogosphere

All business blogs are based on the fundamental premise: the nature of the customer communications has changed. Customers now have a channel to express their feelings and attitudes towards your company, your competition and your industry in general, in real time. The best hope you have of influencing opinion is by engaging in the conversation. At the same time you will:

- create a new marketing channel for products and services
- raise awareness of the your brand
- improve customer service and support
- create a channel to impart important news directly to customers

The creation of a company blog is an excellent place to start. But it's not enough to just post company announcements. To get the full benefit of social media, you have to fully embrace the "blogosphere" and become an important member of community.

This starts with monitoring the blogosphere to find out what's going on. By using RSS (real simple syndication) tools you can keep an eye out for mentions of company, your competitors and issues that affect your business. In fact, important news is often reported in blogs long before the mainstream media.

Another reason to monitor blogs is to know what your competitors, customers and other important people are saying. And this information can be used to inform future marketing and communications strategies and tactics. It also identifies opportunities to contact people directly. For example if someone mentions a particular challenge they are facing on a blog, you can provide a quick response that might lead to a sales opportunity.

Of course it's important to remember that the door swings both ways. Your competition, customers, suppliers, anyone really, can monitor your blog too. So it is important to control what information is released, the tone and style of communication used and especially the quality of the content posted.

Search engines, social networks and bookmarking Web sites are vital to the success of any blogging strategy. Google, Yahoo! and MSN all have specialist blog search engines. CoComment, Delicious, Digg are just some examples of social networks where you can use strategic tagging to raise your blog's profile and drive traffic to it. Technorati is the "Google" of the blogosphere and offers many tools and services to ensure blog content reaches target audiences and to get a handle on the content of more than 50 million blogs.

Keep your blogsite simple at the beginning. After you develop a significant quantity of quality content and you start to see its profile and readership grow, you can add enhancements like podcasts, vlogcasts, live chat, and more.

There are many widely-used software platforms you can use to create your site. TypePad and WordPress are both feature rich. WordPress, which can be downloaded and installed for free and

has an enthusiastic and loyal community of developers that offers patches and extensions and useful tools on a steady basis. TypePad is also highly regarded among bloggers although it incurs a monthly fee. Blogger and LiveJournal both involve hosting, which, can keep costs down, but you do sacrifice some control.

But the strength of any blogsite is the content. Create useful, compelling content that will keep readers coming back. Start by reviewing your recent milestones and achievements. Draft simple stories of about 200 – 250 words and back date them in the blog. This gives readers context going forward. Then, develop blog posts based on company news, product information along with informed comment on industry issues and the topical technology news of the day. Free downloadable visuals are a great way to illustrate stories too.

Blogging experts concur that it takes at least three weekly posts, minimum, to achieve any kind of success in blogging. Try keeping to the three-times-a-week formula for the first eight weeks to gauge progress then adjust the increase the frequency to meet your needs.

Social media engagement will never replace traditional marketing practices, but it adds a powerful dimension to corporate communications and its importance to businesses will continue to grow. Be among the first in your industry to get involved in the blogosphere to stay ahead of the competition.

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