

Social Media

or, “How I learned to stop
worrying and love
communication”

An introduction to the power of “Web2.0”

Edition 1.0.1

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"Markets are conversations.

Markets consist of human beings,
not demographic sectors.

Conversations among human beings
sound human. They are conducted in
a human voice.

The internet is enabling
conversations among human beings
that were simply not possible in
the era of mass media."

The Cluetrain Manifesto

"The internet is a powerful tool. But most attention seems to focus on its use as a means of vertical communications: from one to many.

"...But as important as this is – and it's very important indeed – it's probably dwarfed by the much more numerous horizontal communications that the internet, and related technologies like cell phones, text message and the like permit. They allow a kind of horizontal knowledge that is often less obvious, but in many ways at least as powerful, as the vertical kind.

"Horizontal knowledge is communication among individuals, who may or may not know each other, but who are loosely coordinated by their involvement with something, or someone, of mutual interest. And it's extremely powerful, because it makes people much smarter."

Prof. Glenn Reynolds

It's all about disruption and the
people taking back control of what
they pay attention to

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"Your brand is no stronger than
your reputation – and will
increasingly depend on what comes
up when you are Googled"

Allan Jenkins

Introduction

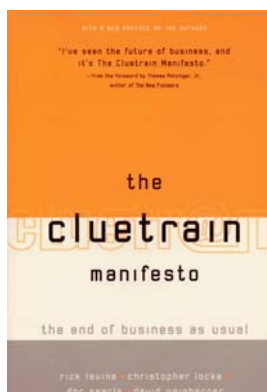
The traditional means of communicating with audiences — such as employees, customers, investment communities and the like — have relied on print-based documents, email or static internet websites.

However, these tools are giving way to a new generation of internet-based tools that allow for far greater levels of two-way interaction, discussion and conversation.

These tools revolutionise the web partly because they are cheap (often free), easy to use and fast to produce. Effectively, for the first time, communicating with your audiences can become seamlessly integrated with your regular workload.

That immediacy and integration can energise your communications releasing the full relationship building power that has been absent from more traditional corporate communication tools.

Indeed, so fundamental has been the shift from 'static', 'brochure-ware' websites to the new 'conversational' internet that many pundits are calling the 'old' internet "Web1.0" and this new web world "Web2.0", reflecting its dramatic improvement based in large part on improvements in software coding and functionality.



A key pointer to this shift towards a 'conversational web' is the book "The Cluetrain Manifesto". As far as the authors of this paper are aware, the 'Cluetrain,' as it is affectionately known by many, was the first website to be made into a book. You can find the original Manifesto at <http://www.cluetrain.com>; however the hard backed book offers further insights into what the authors meant.

Key to the Manifesto is the concept that markets are now 'conversations' and that unless companies are willing to enter into that 'conversation' they will be left behind. The conversation is happening anyway, the authors contend, so better to 'join in' than risk having lies and distortions go unchallenged in the conversations that are happening

every day — around the proverbial 'water cooler', over coffee, in phone calls and emails.

The tools that allow companies to 'join in' the conversations happening in their industries and marketplaces have been called 'Social Media' tools, in reflection of the new 'social' nature of the medium of the internet. Whereas mainstream media ("MSM") such as newspapers, TV and radio, and magazines are traditionally one-way media devices ('experts' pontificate and readers have little opportunity to contribute to or start any discussion with the author), the new Social Media allows players, protagonists, pundits and publics to interact, engage, and build rapport more easily than ever before.

The two biggest and most widely-used Social Media tools are blogging and podcasting. There are currently 58 million blogs, a new blog site is created every second of the day, and 50,000 blogposts (think of a blogpost as an article published by someone on their own website) are published every hour, day and night. The total number of blogs in the world doubles every five months.

There are currently in excess of 50,000 podcasts and the number is growing fast, though not as fast as blogs. But podcasts are a powerful communication tool in any company's communication distribution and public relations toolbox, and more and more companies and organizations are turning to them to engage with jaded audiences who are turning away from traditional mainstream media outlets in ever greater numbers. A good local example is CSIROpod¹

In this white paper we aim to give you a gentle introduction to this new communication world, show you the benefits and offer advice about possible pitfalls.

We hope you find it of value.

Trevor Cook

Director

Jackson Wells Morris

www.JacksonWells.com.au

Lee Hopkins

CCTO

Better Communication Results

www.LeeHopkins.net

¹ <http://www.csiro.gov.au>

Web2.0 and collaboration

The days of dial-up are rapidly coming to an end. Half of all internet connections in Australia are broadband and the number of new connections jumped 80 percent in the last 12 months.

Broadband brings with it the reality of an 'always on' web. That is, when your computer is on so too is your internet connection. The 'always on' web is a key part of the emergence of Web 2.0, as is the falling costs of data storage.

This opens the possibility of the integration of offline and online computing activity and with it the scope for much more online collaboration.

Google's strategy to challenge Microsoft's market dominance is said to be focused on this online/offline integration.

This is being done firstly through an extension of its search tools to the enterprise² and the individual desktop³

Google is also rolling out a series of web-based tools that have traditionally been associated with the individual computer - Gmail⁴, Google Calendar⁵ and Google spreadsheets⁶ (which allows online collaboration around data input).

One of the more interesting of Google's new online collaboration tools was its recent purchase of Writely.com⁷ which offers an online word processor and boasts 'real-time collaboration'.

² <http://google.com/enterprise>

³ <http://desktop.google.com>

⁴ <http://mail.google.com/mail/>

⁵ <http://www.google.com/calendar/>

⁶ <http://spreadsheets.google.com/>

⁷ <http://www.writely.com/>

Google also recently purchased personal video-sharing website YouTube⁸ for AUD\$2.2bn, valuing YouTube's contribution to the online 'conversation' at over USD\$1bn.

Writely, like many Web 2.0 services and tools, uses AJAX⁹ to give the user a smoother, more responsive feel when they are working directly into web pages.

Microsoft, not wanting to be left behind, is also moving in this direction with the rollout of Windows Live¹⁰, currently in Beta.

Microsoft Office 2007¹¹, recently released as a beta product, includes a feature which allows people to blog directly from inside their word processor - something that would have been irrelevant without the rise of the 'always on' web.

Another easy way to collaborate online, 'wikis', are also becoming increasingly popular. Wikis¹² are websites that users can edit directly into the browser. Wikis can be public or private and are ideal for collaborating because they are easy to build and edit. Wikispaces¹³ is a popular service which offers free and premium versions.

The NewPR wiki¹⁴ was created as a space for PR bloggers around the world to aggregate and share information and other resources.

Wikis are popular inside organisations for project management . It is easy to see who added/edited information and when, changes can be reversed if required, but everyone has access to the latest version all the time. That gets over a lot of version control issues, it also means that everyone is responsible for the document and not just one or two unlucky individuals. Each individual's contributions are more transparent as well - you can see more easily who did what.

⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/>

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AJAX>

¹⁰ <http://www.live.com/>

¹¹

<http://www.microsoft.com/office/preview/beta/download/en/default.mspx>

¹² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikis>

¹³ <http://blog.wikispaces.com/>

¹⁴ <http://www.thenewpr.com/wiki/prwiki.php>

Some software companies are already pushing the boundaries to see how much further integration can go.

IBM, like Microsoft, is pursuing the idea of software as a service, where users can create little bits of software themselves or download it from a site when they need it - rather than buying the big, heavy, all inclusive, expensive, soon-to-be-outdated shrinkwrap version.

IBM's QEDwiki¹⁵ product, still in trial, aims to allow corporates to mash up data from internal and external sources on their screen using a wiki and software they create themselves to solve business problems in real time, today, rather than waiting months for the formal report on what happened.

Similarly, social bookmarking sites like del.icio.us¹⁶ allow peers to share interesting links, snippets of information, articles and resources.

Online collaboration, courtesy of the new Web2.0 tools, doesn't end with just keyboard input.

Software such as Skype¹⁷ allows two or more people to talk with and share files in real time over the internet, using a protocol called 'Voice over IP', or 'VOIP' for short.

There are also 'virtual universes' such as [Second Life](http://www.secondlife.com)¹⁸ that allow businesses to interact with marketplaces they would normally get little chance to engage with. Originally a text-based communication and interaction 'universe', [Second Life](http://www.secondlife.com) is about to offer voice-based interaction as well.

It seems that every week there is some new collaborative tool or website being launched — keeping up to date with them can be a full-time job! The Web2.0 collaborative tools make harnessing the phenomenal marketing and branding power of the internet easier to use than ever before.

¹⁵ http://news.com.com/IBM+eyes+programming+for+the+masses/2100-1007_3-6065324.html

¹⁶ <http://www.del.icio.us>

¹⁷ <http://www.skype.com>

¹⁸ <http://www.secondlife.com>

Why blog?

As two PR and Communications professionals, let's outline why we believe blogging is good for our respective businesses.

Trevor's blog, **Corporate Engagement**¹⁹, is nearly three years old. It has between 600 and 700 RSS and email subscribers and between 150 and 300 unique visitors each day. Over half of these visitors find their way to the blog through search engines.

Lee's blog, **Better Communication Results**²⁰, is 18 months old, has between 400 and 500 RSS and email subscribers and around 200 unique visitors a day, many of whom come via the search engines.

Basically, blogs are very easy-to-manage websites. They are no harder to set-up and maintain than sending an email or using Microsoft Word. This ease of use allows you to post your ideas and opinions often and without using up too much time. That keeps your blog 'fresh' and is more 'immediate' than the staleness of a 'traditional' brochureware site.

Blogs are very search engine friendly. Every post has a separate URL and the linking behaviour of bloggers also promotes them up the search engine rankings. People (including customers and investors) are more likely to find your blog than your website.

Jackson Wells Morris, the Sydney PR company that Trevor is a Director in, has a feed from the blog on the frontpage of its site. This drives traffic to their website (and to the blog) and helps keep their corporate website²¹ looking fresh.

Lee has both a blog and a more traditional, brochureware, site²². By incorporating links between the two sites, plus using free tools that insert the headlines of his latest blog posts onto the front page of his brochureware site, both sites benefit from the different aims of each site. The 'brochureware' site has over 100 articles on the topic of

¹⁹ <http://trevorcook.typepad.com>

²⁰ <http://www.leehopkins.net>

²¹ <http://www.jacksonwells.com.au>

²² <http://www.leehopkins.com>

business communication and is very popular in the search engines amongst students of business communication. The blog provides immediate, more intimate and 'conversational' information.

So what are the key benefits of blogging for professional services firms like ours:

- building profile. Blogging is a cheap form of marketing and advertising
- revealing expertise. No imaginable brochure could match the richness of the nearly two thousand posts on our blogs, which give people a real insight (hopefully) into what we do
- networking. Blogging has allowed us to build professional relationships with PR academics and practitioners, business communicators and students around the world
- generating business. Both Lee and Trevor have had businesses approach them to ask for help in understanding and utilising this new way of marketing and conducting business on the internet.

There are other benefits, but we'll talk about them in the next few pages.

Web feeds (RSS and other geeky stuff)

The key to managing the vast flows of information available on the Internet these days lies with the power of RSS feeds and RSS feed aggregators.

Understanding and using feeds can make you far more productive in your daily worklife, just as 'googling' has done over the past few years. Getting your customers and other stakeholders to subscribe to your site will enable you to stay 'in-touch' with them much more effectively than just relying on them to bookmark favourites.

The BBC has a very clear definition of what RSS is²³:

News feeds allow you to see when websites have added new content. You can get the latest headlines and video in one place, as soon as it's published, without having to visit the websites you have taken the feed from.

Feeds are also known as RSS. There is some discussion as to what RSS stands for, but most people plump for 'Really Simple Syndication'. In essence, the feeds themselves are just web pages, designed to be read by computers rather than people.

Wikipedia²⁴ also has useful information if you wish to know more about RSS and its uses.

Millions of websites now provide RSS feeds; not only 'blogs' but also most media sites. The Australian Government now provides a feed of all its media releases, as do the main political parties and an increasing number of Federal and State Departments.



Web Web feeds (RSS or Atom) are typically linked with the word "Subscribe", an orange rectangle, a feed icon, or with the letters XML or RSS. Many news aggregators such as *My Yahoo!* publish subscription

²³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/help/3223484.stm>

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_%28file_format%29

buttons for use on Web pages to simplify the process of adding news feeds.

RSS / XML is a very small and simple piece of coding and works quietly in the background of websites to automatically send out new information when it is published.

Research has highlighted that the people who access information through RSS feeds typically stay-in-touch with many more information websites than people who rely on more traditional methods like bookmarking their 'favourites', or reading newspapers or watching tv. The users of RSS feeds typically expose themselves to more information, from more sources, on more subjects.

A huge advantage of using web feeds is that they put the user in charge. The user must 'subscribe' to each feed, thus avoiding the problem of email spam. Using a separate aggregator to read feeds means that this information can be kept out of your already cluttered email inbox. But even then, for those who prefer to get their news in a way that is comfortable to them, most RSS feeds can also be subscribed to via email — you get the latest information from your favourite sources emailed to you on a daily basis.

And just as RSS feeds make it easier for users to keep informed, feeds and aggregators (or readers) make it easier for organisations to stay in-touch with people who are interested in what they are doing but may forget or not find time to visit the website looking for updates. RSS feeds 'push' the information out to the subscribers, saving the subscribers valuable time because they don't then have to visit each individual website to find the latest information. And let's face it, how often have you visited a website, perhaps infrequently, and have trouble deciding what is 'new' information and what you have read before — RSS readers allow you to mark new items as 'read', so that you won't be presented with them again unless you deliberately go hunting for them.

Web feeds can also be created for individual subjects. For instance, a company could provide internal users with feeds on subjects like sales, marketing, human resources and so on. This allows users to subscribe to the information they want, rather than receiving everything or going to websites to look for updates on subjects that interest them.

Another great use of web feeds is the capacity to subscribe to saved feeds. Google News²⁵, for instance, allows you to do this through a link in the left-hand column. This replaces Google Alerts²⁶ and again gets them out of the email inbox.

Aggregators are becoming ubiquitous. New generation browsers are including web feed aggregators, and Microsoft's Internet Explorer to feeds. Email programs, like **google's gmail**, are also offering feed reader capacities. The next version of Microsoft Office, currently in beta testing, allows you to subscribe to feeds in Outlook, putting them into separate folders automatically.

The Yahoo search engine also shows the feed as well as the URL of sites on its results' pages.

Bloglines²⁷ is one of the most popular web-based aggregators. It is free and is simple to configure and use. Its a good place to start your RSS adventures. **Bloglines** allows you to mark your subscriptions as public or private. You can see Trevor's public subscriptions at <http://www.bloglines.com/public/engagement>; Lee's are at <http://www.bloglines.com/public/leehopkins>.

There are plenty of pc and mac-based aggregators available on the web, from 'free to purchase' through to more integrated packages that cost around \$30-35. Lee is a devotee of **GreatNews**²⁸ and Trevor is a recent convert.

Feeds and aggregators are a great example of the power of Web 2.0 because they allow users to consume information in ways that make sense to them. In the same folder of your aggregator you can have feeds on a topic from media outlets, public and private organisations, relevant bloggers and saved searches.

With your aggregator and subscriptions in place, you are now disaggregating and re-aggregating the global information flow to suit

²⁵ <http://news.google.com/>

²⁶ <http://www.google.com/alerts>

²⁷ <http://www.bloglines.com>

²⁸ <http://curiostudio.com>

your needs and preferences. That's a very powerful and a very productive thing to do.

You can read more about web feeds and aggregators on these sites:

Wikipedia web feeds

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_%28file_format%29

Wikipedia aggregators

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aggregator>

Google News Feeds

http://news.google.com/intl/en_us/news_feed_terms.html

News.com.au

<http://www.news.com.au/feeds>

ABC

<http://www.abc.net.au/services/rss.htm>

Some corporate blog examples

More and more members of corporate Australia are 'joining the conversation'.

Telstra has the best-known corporate blogs in Australia, called collectively "**Nowwearetalking**."²⁹ As an aside, have a look at this post³⁰ on a virtual classroom at Homebush High in Sydney. Telstra's blogs don't attract the traffic its other websites get, but we're told it gets a good quality readership of people from the media and so on.

Lee helped the staff at Dymocks in Adelaide set up a blog called "The Adelaide Bookshelf."³¹ The blog is a place where the shop's staff can post their views on new releases. It's more than just a 'come buy this' site — the staff at Dymocks truly love books and this shines through in their reviews. Having a way of sharing your thoughts and ideas with a group of like-minded souls is a good marketing idea.

Again in Adelaide, a local counselling and mediation service has set up two blogs to help them position themselves as a premiere service — it has helped bring in a tremendous amount of business for them and positioned them as a national leader in their industry. See Lee's post on them³² for more details.

One of Jackson Wells Morris' clients is [Findit.com.au](http://www.findit.com.au), a new online classifieds business which is using many of the tools described in this paper. Findit's owner, Mark Fletcher, has had his own blog called **Australian Newsagency blog**³³ which gives some real first-hand insights into the nature of the newsagency business.

Findit itself also has a blog³⁴ which is being used to post information about **Findit** and the online classifieds business more generally.

²⁹ <http://www.nowwearetalking.com.au/Home/>

³⁰ <http://www.nowwearetalking.com.au/Home/Page.aspx?mid=128>

³¹ <http://dymade.blogspot.com/>

³² <http://leehopkins.net/2006/05/15/blogging-works-for-this-business/>

³³ http://www.towersystems.com.au/fhn_blog/

³⁴ <http://blogs.findit.com.au/blogs/findit/default.aspx>

In Caringbah, one of Sydney's southern suburbs, real estate agent Bill Noonan runs a blog³⁵ which brings together local news and helps promote his business

Frank Arrigo works at Microsoft in Australia and is one of our best-known and most active bloggers³⁶. He uses blogging to interact with the developer community.

Lee has helped the RSPCA in South Australia start their own blog³⁷ as a way of creating more visibility and interaction with the community.

Globally, McDonalds is using a blog called **Open for Discussion**³⁸ to help promote awareness of its corporate social responsibility efforts

In fact blogging comes in all shapes and sizes from big global corporations to small local businesses. Blogging is very flexible.

Here's a corporate blogging survey³⁹ from late 2005 that you might find interesting for an overview — bear in mind that the growth rate for blogs is roughly double every six months, so there are a lot more companies blogging now than reflected in that survey.

As we mentioned in our introduction, there is a new blog created every second and there are currently over 57 million of them; there will always be a consistent percentage of them that are focused on business.

³⁵ <http://caringbah.localsblog.com.au/index.php>

³⁶ <http://blogs.msdn.com/frankarr/>

³⁷ <http://blog1.rspcasa.asn.au>

³⁸ <http://csr.blogs.mcdonalds.com/>

³⁹ <http://www.backbonemedia.com/blogsurvey/>

Podcasting for business

A question that we both get asked a lot is 'what is podcasting?' Podcasting is the automatic delivery of audio media (usually an .mp3 file) via RSS to subscribers. The content of that audio media varies considerably.

The early adopters of this new information distribution channel used it predominantly as their own music radio station; indeed, you could call podcasting 'radio with a rewind button'. But once the costs of production (almost zero) became known to businesses and consultants it was only a matter of time before all sorts of material became available by rss subscription.

Today you can subscribe to

- University lectures
- Comedy shows
- Music shows (focusing on each and every type of music - whatever your taste, you can find a niche specialist who equally shares your passion)
- Industry information (for example, the PR industry has many podcasts, most notably [For Immediate Release](http://www.forimmediaterelease.biz)⁴⁰ and the [Comms Cafe](http://commscafe.com)⁴¹).

Anything that can be recorded and distributed as a digital audio file can be podcasted (remembering that the 'podcast' isn't the audio file itself, but how it is delivered and distributed, which is via RSS subscription).

Another question we are also frequently asked is 'when did podcasting begin?

The word seems to have been invented some time in 2004. The first podcast-retrieval program (known also as a 'podcatcher') seems to have

⁴⁰ <http://www.forimmediaterelease.biz>

⁴¹ <http://commscafe.com>

been **iPodder**⁴², created by Dave Winer and Adam Curry in August 2004.

Through iPodder, or other programs, audio files (mp3 format) are delivered to the users' computer and mp3 player using the RSS (webfeed) process. The podcast capturing program checks your computer and the supplying site to see if there are new audio files; these are then downloaded into the **iTunes**⁴³ or a similar program.

The benefit of podcatching programs, as with feeds generally, is that the user is spared the laborious task of finding new updates themselves.

In 2005, a new version of **iTunes** was issued which allows users to subscribe directly (one-click) through **iTunes** itself. This led to an exponential growth in podcasting.

Why is podcasting so popular?

Podcasting allows people to listen to what they want when they want. Its ideal for commuting, exercising, travelling etc.

It also allows you to access material from around the world - for instance, every public broadcaster in the english-speaking world has a significant podcasting presence, including our own ABC⁴⁴.

Broadband and bigger hard drives, along with the popularity of Apple's iPod, have also helped. The dissatisfaction with current radio stations, expressed by many ("they play the same old boring songs", "they don't talk about what interests me"), has propelled many to start their own 'radio shows'. The access to high-quality digital sound recording equipment at extremely reasonable prices has also encouraged many thousands of amateurs to start their own programming. Plus, anyone with a modicum of creativity can use a cheap headset microphone, free and freely available recording and mixing software, a few sound effects and put together their own show based around the content that *they* would want to listen to.

⁴² <http://www.ipodder.org/directory/4/ipodderSoftware>

⁴³ <http://itunes.com>

⁴⁴ <http://www.abc.net.au/services/podcasting/>

Are educational institutions doing podcasts?

Yes, there are many experiments underway.

The University of California at Berkeley has just conducted a podcast pilot⁴⁵. This Spring 2006 webcast.berkeley is conducting a Podcast Pilot. Podcasting automatically delivers MP3 audio recordings of classroom lectures to computers and portable MP3 players. These recordings are primarily used by students to review key concepts and to study before exams.

The university channel at Princeton⁴⁶ is supplying podcasts of guest lectures from a variety of sources.

Georgetown University⁴⁷ is providing a podcast of its Forum's weekly radio program which highlights the research and expertise of Georgetown University faculty.

Auburn University is podcasting its PR lectures to its students.

There are many such experiments in education at the moment as people find the best ways to use podcasting in an educational environment.

Are companies using podcasts?

There are quite a few corporate experiments as well, for instance:

General Motors

http://fastlane.gmblogs.com/archives/2005/02/cadillac_buick_1.html

McDonalds <http://www.mcdonalds.com/corp/podcasts.html>

IBM https://www-8.ibm.com/e-business/au/podcast/podcast_john.html

Some interesting Australian examples can be found here:

<http://www.breakawaycontent.com/Podcasts.html>

⁴⁵ <http://webcast.berkeley.edu/>

⁴⁶ <http://uc.princeton.edu/main/>

⁴⁷ <http://explore.georgetown.edu/views/?ViewID=277>

Where can I find more podcasts?

As well as iTunes there are a number of comprehensive podcast directories:

iPodder <http://www.ipodder.org/directory/4/podcasts>

Podcast.net <http://www.podcast.net/>

Yahoo podcasts <http://podcasts.yahoo.com/>

Public radio podcasts <http://www.publicradiofan.com/podcasts.html>

Where I can learn more about podcasting?

From the ABC: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/help.htm>

From Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting>

The power of content delivery via audio has been known for decades — hence the popularity of audio cassette programs on all manner of self-development topics⁴⁸. Both Lee and Trevor know of companies who have used audio cassettes to deliver sales and service updates to remote, on-the-road sales and service people.

By moving the delivery mechanism from cassette to digital file, and by utilising the automatic distribution mechanism of RSS, companies can now harness the power of the internet to deliver relevant content to those who would most benefit from it — quickly, efficiently and exceedingly cost effectively.

⁴⁸ <http://www.nightingale.com/>

Blog writing tips

Although blogging is a new medium, it is already old enough to be able to make some observations about what works and what doesn't.

As Donna Papacosta⁴⁹ said in her first podcast, before doing anything in life you should consider what you are setting out to achieve. In other words, what is it that you want to communicate and why? Are you a business that wants to show its expertise to its market? Are you a practitioner in a particular field that wants to contribute to and develop further your understanding of your craft?

Lurk, or 'loiter with intent' as a police officer might say. Read others' blogs and get a feel for how they put their blog together. Do they stick to the topic, or do they wander around? If it is a business-focused blog do they only talk about their particular field or do they include personal stuff as well? If so, how does that sit with you? Does it bother you or do you like to read the personal stuff to get a 'feel' for the person you are highly unlikely ever to meet face-to-face?

How do you find blogs to loiter around? Follow the links from blogs you already know about. Thus, from us you could follow links off to people such as superb business communicators such as Shel Holtz⁵⁰, Neville Hobson⁵¹, or Allan Jenkins⁵², and for an example of the always-interesting and challenging writing of Kathy Sierra⁵³.

There's Seth Godin⁵⁴ who is arguably the smartest thinker in marketing at the moment, and has been for quite a few years, and there's Doug Johnson⁵⁵ and his fantastic daily planner site.

There's also Paul Graham⁵⁶ who doesn't post often but when he does it is always controversial, headshaking and mind-expanding. There's Jack

⁴⁹ http://trafcom.typepad.com/podcast/2005/09/show_1_sept_12_.html

⁵⁰ <http://blog.holtz.com>

⁵¹ <http://www.nevon.net>

⁵² <http://allanjenkins.typepad.com>

⁵³ http://headrush.typepad.com/creating_passionate_users/

⁵⁴ http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog

⁵⁵ <http://www.diyplanner.com>

Vinson⁵⁷ who is a guru of knowledge management, which blogs are a useful tool within. And there's Nova Spivack's⁵⁸ off-the-wall look at the world which is equally mind-expanding and life-affirming.

These are just some of the writers/conversationalists that we eagerly await each day as we power up our feed aggregators/readers (more on which later). Look at the lists of those mentioned above and you will find others with whom to connect.

Each of the writers/conversationalists mentioned above link to other conversationalists; follow the links and pretty soon you will have a hundred or more RSS feeds in your aggregator and you will have to start painfully weeding them out, categorising them into groups that you 'must' read, 'like to read' and 'will get around to reading when I get the time'.

Pick a platform on which to create your own blog. You could go for a paid hosted service such as **typepad**⁵⁹ (like Trevor's blog) or if you have your own server set up your own blog service, using, for example, **Wordpress**⁶⁰ (like Lee's blog). Conduct a search in **google** for blogging software and you will know doubt find 'plenty' of material to consider. Or you could consider a free service such as **blogger**⁶¹ or any of the other free blogging services (again, google for 'free blogs'). Lee's first **Better Communication Results** blog⁶² was on **blogger** and it was a fantastic way of getting his feet wet.

After a while the limitations of free services can begin to frustrate; Lee moved to hosting his own blog (courtesy of the very kind Ben Hamilton⁶³ and his company **DynamicWebHosting**⁶⁴) so he could take advantage of some of the more intricate parts of blogging, such as trackbacks. But such intricacies don't need to bother you if you are just getting started - better to start and get going than to stress what platform you are going to blog on. You can always change it later on.

⁵⁶ <http://www.paulgraham.com>

⁵⁷ <http://blog.jackvinson.com>

⁵⁸ http://novaspivack.typepad.com/nova_spivacks_weblog/

⁵⁹ <http://www.typepad.com/>

⁶⁰ <http://wordpress.org>

⁶¹ <http://blogger.com>

⁶² <http://bettercomms.blogspot.com>

⁶³ <http://ben.hamilton.id.au/>

⁶⁴ <http://dynamicwebhosting.com.au>

Contribute to the conversation. Go to any blogs you find of interest and add a comment. It doesn't matter whether what you say is earth-shatteringly profound or just agreeing with what someone said (or, indeed, disagreeing). Just remember the golden rules of online communication:

- don't SHOUT AT PEOPLE (type in all caps);
- don't swear at people;
- don't call people names;
- don't hide behind 'anonymous' - use your name and a link to your own blog.

You will notice that, by having links off to many wonderful writers on our blogs, we are contributing to the global conversation. We don't have to comment individually on their blogs, we can instead publish a post on our own blog and link to theirs. Eventually, because we are nearly all of us egotists {smile} and search the main search engines — [technorati](#)⁶⁵, [blogpulse](#)⁶⁶, [talkdigger](#)⁶⁷ and [google](#)⁶⁸ amongst many — for links to us, these writers will find that you have talked about them and will quite possibly come and find you. If they like what they see they may even link back to you in one of their posts.

Measure your conversational ability. This is not very hard to do at all. Wander over to [Feedburner](#)⁶⁹ and set yourself up with an account. Use the Feedburner feed you create (they walk you through the process) as your subscription link for your webfeed/RSS feed and you will be able to track how many people subscribe to your blog. It's free.

If you want to take it a little further, wander over to [StatCounter](#)⁷⁰ and set up a free account with them. Make some simple decisions and copy the code into your template. That way you can see how many visit each day, and from where. The more you enter into the global conversation, the more people will come to converse with and learn from you.

⁶⁵ <http://www.technorati.com>

⁶⁶ <http://www.blogpulse.com/>

⁶⁷ <http://www.talkdigger.com/>

⁶⁸ <http://www.google.com.au/blogsearch?hl=en>

⁶⁹ <http://www.feedburner.com/>

⁷⁰ <http://www.statcounter.com/>

Never stop learning. The universe of blogging, podcasting and RSS is a rapidly-evolving one. New technologies and tools come by at the speed of light, so you need to stay connected. Sure, you can go on holiday, take a month off and pick up where you left off, but be aware that any longer break will mean a bit of extra homework to play ‘catch up’.

Read this fantastic paper by Stephen Downes⁷¹ which says all we have just said but better. James Torio has written an outstanding paper for people who have a basic understanding of blogs, but hunger to know more. It’s called *Blogs: A Global Conversation*⁷² (pdf). In particular, Torio looks at how blogs have impacted business and communication. He includes some proprietary research as well. And for the creative use of podcasts, might we suggest Kevin Dugan’s post⁷³.

So, to sum up:

1. **Share your expertise** – People see blogs as a way of getting depth on a particular subject (often the narrower the better). Whereas traditional media tend to dumb down to maximize audience size, great blogs do the reverse. Specialisation won’t leave you with a mass audience but it will build your standing as an authority, and a loyal following of readers with a similar interest.
2. **Share your opinion** – Blogs should be factual and you should link to your sources wherever possible; but blogging is not objective — people read bloggers because they value their perspectives. An interesting, thought-provoking point-of-view can be a real value-add on a blog.
3. **Post regularly** – People won’t read a blog that looks neglected. It is better to put up a series of shorter posts rather than write infrequent lengthier essays.

⁷¹ <http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/website/view.cgi?dbs=Article&key=1122588384&format=full>

⁷² <http://www.everyhuman.com/work/theses8.12.low.pdf>

⁷³ http://prblog.typepad.com/strategic_public_relation/2005/09/20_creative_use.html

4. **Keep it brief** – People do not read large slabs of text on screen. The shorter your post the better, avoid anything longer than 250 words. If you want to provide papers and essays allow people to download and print them.

5. **Make it scannable** – Break up your text with sub-headings and lists, keep sentences and paragraphs short.

6. **Use a consistent style** – Your blog will grow on people if it is consistent in tone and style. Generally a less formal, more conversational tone is better on a blog.

7. **Provide many links** – Blogs provide access to a rich vein of information and viewpoints but only if you link to them. The more you link to other relevant sources the more valuable your blog is to your readers. Bloggers tend to link to people who link to them. Linking to lots of sites will generate more links to you which will be reflected in a higher *google* ranking for your blog.

8. **Use explanatory headings** – People will choose to read your post based on the heading. If the heading doesn't provoke their interest they will move on. Headings and first paragraphs are particularly important because many people will find access your blog through search engines and feed readers. Headings and first paragraphs should tell the whole story, just as they do in newspapers.

9. **Respond to comments** – Responding encourages people to believe that you value their participation and that encourages them to keep reading, and to promote your efforts to other people.

10. **Edit your post.** Good writing is good editing. Readers are more tolerant of errors in blogs than in other media, but not much. Frequent spelling and grammatical errors will just make you look stupid and careless.

Where to go to get started

Of course, now that you've read this paper, you'll be itching to get started yourself. All of the following tools are either free or available at a low cost.

Getting a blog

Edublogs⁷⁴: the largest educational blogging community on the web, provides free blogs and wikispaces for teachers, researchers, librarians, other educational professionals and students.

Edublogs was created by James Farmer. James has worked as a lecturer in research and education design at Deakin University and is currently the Online Community Editor at The Age.

Google's **blogger**⁷⁵: a basic, free service.

Typepad⁷⁶: A global company operating out of California. Its prices range from \$US49.50 per year for the basic service to \$US149.50 per year for the Pro version. Prices are all up – software, hosting and bandwidth. They also offer a 30 day free trial.

Wordpress⁷⁷: another way to get a free blog. WordPress is an Open Source project, which means there are hundreds of people all over the world working on it. (More than most commercial platforms.) It also means you are free to use it for anything from your cat's home page to a Fortune 500 intranet site without paying anyone a license fee

Providing a feed

Feedburner⁷⁸: Blogs usually come with the capacity to create feeds built in. Feedburner, with both free and premium services, allows you to do

⁷⁴ <http://edublogs.org/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.blogger.com/>

⁷⁶ <http://www.sixapart.com/typepad/>

⁷⁷ <http://wordpress.com/>

⁷⁸ <http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/home>

more with your feed, including promoting your blog. This service is the most popular of its type on the internet and Lee and Trevor's first stop after helping clients create their own blog.

Choosing an aggregator (feed reader)

Bloglines⁷⁹: is one of the most popular ways to subscribe to feeds. Its easy to use and its free.

Some others to look at are:

Newsgator⁸⁰

GreatNews⁸¹

Rojo⁸²

Feed Demon⁸³

Monitoring your stats

Blogging tools often provide an inbuilt capacity to see how many visits your blog is getting and which posts are most popular. The aforementioned **Feedburner** offers free statistical tools, as does **Statcounter**⁸⁴.

If you want additional information there are add-on services which can provide you with a very rich stream of data at a low-cost. For example, **Blogbeat**⁸⁵.

⁷⁹ <http://www.bloglines.com/>

⁸⁰ <http://www.newsgator.com/home.aspx>

⁸¹ <http://curiostudio.com/>

⁸² <http://www.rojo.com/today/>

⁸³ <http://www.newsgator.com/NGOLProduct.aspx?ProdId=FeedDemon>

⁸⁴ <http://www.statcounter.com>

⁸⁵ <http://www.blogbeat.net/>

Monitoring the blogosphere

Traditional search engines list results in some sort of order of importance, a new generation of blog search engines list posts in chronological order with the most recent at the top.

Technorati⁸⁶

Ice Rocket⁸⁷

Feedster⁸⁸

Want more help?

Please don't hesitate to contact the authors, who will be very happy to discuss how their expertise in this new Social Media may benefit your own organization.

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⁸⁶ <http://www.technorati.com/>

⁸⁷ <http://www.icerocket.com/>

⁸⁸ <http://www.feedster.com/>