



Bloggging Success Study

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John Cass - Backbone Media, Inc.
Dr. Walter Carl - Northeastern University

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Thank You For Participating

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Mike Landfair
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Donna Lynes-Miller
David Paull
Jeremy Pepper
Tom Pionek
Zane Safrit
Aliza Sherman Risdahl
Rich Short
Tery Spataro
Cathy Taylor
Ralph Wayne

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1.0 Executive Summary

The Blogging Success Study was conducted by Dr Walter Carl, the students in his Advanced Organizational Communication class (Spring 2006) at Northeastern University and John Cass and his colleagues at Backbone Media, Inc. The objective of this research was to determine the reasons, conditions and factors that make a blog successful, and to create a list of criteria to help companies assess whether and how they should engage in blogging.

In order to identify the elements of a successful blog, the research team interviewed twenty corporate bloggers from companies of varied size and industry, and asked each blogger a series of standardized questions. (See Appendix 2.0) Only bloggers who had been blogging for over one year and considered their blogging efforts successful were eligible to participate. While the selection of participants was, therefore, somewhat subjective and limiting (without the resources to determine the most successful bloggers on the Web), the research team was able to identify common elements among the subject group and distinguish a number of factors for blogging success. These elements are discussed at length in sections two and three of this paper. Herein you will also find case studies detailing how the twenty corporate blogs achieved success. New and veteran bloggers alike will find the case studies and anecdotes enlightening, as they reveal a variety of different paths to success. Thus, we have included summaries of all twenty blogger interviews within the study's appendix.

Interview results were transcribed and summarized in twenty separate case studies. Each was then studied and analyzed with three questions in mind:

- How does the set up of a blog contribute to a blog's success?
- What is it about how you blog that makes the blog a success?
- What is it about the content on a blog that makes the blog a success?

After careful review, the research team identified five factors for success. The majority of the twenty participant bloggers pointed to these factors as important to the success of their blog. We focus in on these factors in Section Three.

The five factors identified by the participants were:

1. Culture
2. Transparency
3. Time
4. Dialogue
5. Entertaining Writing Style and Personalization

A company should carefully consider all of these factors before making a decision to blog:

Culture: If a company has particular cultural traits worth revealing, or conversely, a bad reputation they want to repudiate, blogging could be an attractive option. A great example of the latter is Microsoft. Microsoft had a distinct problem—distrust on the part of many customers. The company was seen as being very big and unresponsive to customers. Microsoft used blogs to reveal that individual employees do care about customers, and they are willing to provide a lot of value by way of product and developer information. Blogging at Microsoft has worked well because Microsoft and Microsoft bloggers were able to show the public what Microsoft's culture was really like behind the big company image.

Transparency: Transparency is crucial to establishing credibility and trust with an audience. While you do not have to be completely open—it is okay to set boundaries—people want to see an honest picture of a company, and know there are not ulterior motives behind the posts bloggers write. Blog audiences respect a willingness to disclose all points of view on a subject. Thoughtful consideration of all viewpoints demonstrates an expertise, and it shows a willingness to engage in a dialogue rather than just pressing an agenda. Successful corporate blogs are those that establish their credibility well. The level of transparency depends on the industry and audience, but citing other sources of knowledge and perspectives will always bring more credibility to a blog.

Time: It takes a lot of time to set up, research and write a quality blog and engage the blogging community effectively. A company that wants a successful blog needs to identify a person who has the time or free up that person's time, or needs to leverage its resources so the responsibility is shared among a group of bloggers.

Dialogue: A company's ability and willingness to engage in a greater dialogue with the blogging community is an important determinant in the success of their blog. The Stonyfield Farms blog is a perfect example of a corporate blog used to engage an audience through discussing topics not just related to their products but also, related to organic farming, healthy lifestyle and other germane subject matter. Despite the fact that these topics are not directly related to the yogurt they sell, Stonyfield demonstrates an expertise in areas of importance to their customer base.

Entertaining Writing Style and Personalization: The writing style and how much a blogger is prepared to reveal about their life, experience and opinions in a blog post bring a human side to a blog. This helps a company build personal connections with their audience. Entertaining content, especially content that contains humor, will also bridge the gap between writer and reader. Personal connections and entertaining content help turn casual readers into return customers.

We believe that the study has identified many factors that will make a blog a success. We provide a more in-depth analysis of these and other factors in sections two and three of this paper. The reader can use this list of factors to determine the readiness of their own company to start blogging and as a roadmap to plan a strategy that will bring them the most success in current and future blogging endeavors.

2.0 Summaries Of Blogger Statements In Relation To Blog Success Questions

We asked the following questions to understand what a company needs to do to develop a successful corporate blog:

1. How does the set up of a blog contribute to a blog's success?
2. What is it about how you blog that makes the blog a success?
3. What is it about the content on a blog that makes a blog success?

To answer each of the three questions, we identified a number of practical tips or factors from the blogger interviews that describe the steps a company might take to develop a successful corporate blog. One or more blogger statements were excerpted from the blogger case studies to provide examples for each of the tips, and they were organized by the three questions.

2.1 How Does The Set Up Of A Blog Contribute to a Blog's Success?

We asked some questions about how a blog's set up affects the relative success of a blog. We chose the most important reoccurring issues described by the interviews. The culture of the company was another important factor that can play a major role in helping to make a blog a success; the issue of culture is described in section three.

Strategic Planning

A number of the corporate bloggers thought that without a reason to blog, it is not a good idea just to start blogging. They felt it was important to develop blogging goals in advance. There has to be some reason as to why a company should blog. There are a variety of reasons why companies start blogging, including building a company's brand and increasing a company's search engine rankings. One of the bloggers, Heather Hamilton of Microsoft, thought that corporate bloggers should have a real business goal behind their reasons to blog. Heather stated, "The reason why I'm successful as a blogger at Microsoft is I have a job that can be accomplished through blogging, which is building our employment brand."

Other bloggers, however, did not think it was as important to develop initial blogging goals. These bloggers felt that engaging an audience online today was enough of a reason to start blogging. Dave Balter from BzzAgent said, "It's a dive right in philosophy. No matter what you think ahead of time, people will not cease to amaze you. So, it's best to learn over time."

Blogger Selection

In preparing to blog, it is important to pick the right people to begin blogging for your company. Several of the corporate bloggers gave their insights into what characteristics to look for in a good corporate blogger. These characteristics include:

- The ability to listen to your audience
- Passion for the topic
- The ability to communicate a personality online
- Perseverance and commitment
- Expertise in a field or variety of topics
- A warm and friendly approach
- Good writing ability
- The necessary amount of time for blogging
- Openness to criticism

A company can use these insights as a yardstick when identifying the right corporate blogger.

Zane Safrit from Conference Calls Unlimited thought that, "The best blogger is a person who's the most honest, the most passionate, and the most committed."

Here is an example of how Emerson Process Management selected Jim Cahill to be their corporate blogger. Deb Franke explained that decision makers in her company had two main concerns: Would their bloggers understand their brand and messaging? And how do you associate a single real person or a number of real people in a very large company with huge brands like ours? Deb said, "Jim Cahill became the obvious choice, however. He has an engineering background; he has grown into a position where he is the hub of so many stories; and Jim knows so many people across the entire company. In addition, Jim is the brand manager for many of the most popular brands. The objections and concerns went away."

Jim from Emerson continued, "We didn't expect the people who did have the expertise to begin blogging and building up a number of posts. So, the strategy was that I would be a connector to the experts around the organization where I could tell their story individually and pop back on them in a few months based on what was going on there. From other people in the organization they looked at it as a pilot for the company, but we wanted to show people both internally and externally that this could be effective and kind of a building block to get more bloggers going overtime."

Reading Other Blogs

Reading other blogs in your industry is crucial in gaining an understanding of your industry's blogging community. Many bloggers suggested monitoring other blogs for an understanding of their blogging community, ideas for posts and uncovering industry trends.

David Paull of MSInteractive's own readership grew the more he read and commented on other blogs. David said, "I think it's critical, if you want to have a successful blog, to comment on other people's blogs. I think you have to engage in other blogs, otherwise just getting the word out about your blog is very hard to do."

Practice With An Internal Blog Before Going External

Starting a blog internally helps your employees to become familiar with blogging. Ultimately, this makes the launch of a public blog smoother and its implementation more successful.

Deb Franke and Jim Cahill at Emerson Process Management specifically recommended an internal blogging strategy. Initially Emerson set up an internal blog so employees could get used to the idea of blogging and podcasting. The more employees that became interested in blogging and began to write on the

internal blog, the more writers were added to the external corporate blog. Once the company had set up their blog, Deb and Jim worked with the HR and legal departments to set up a policy for the company, and then everyone could blog.

2.2 What Is It About How You Conduct Blogging That Makes The Blog A Success?

How a company conducts its corporate blogging effort is important for the development of a successful blog. In this section, we explore how the way a blogger writes or runs their blog will help make a corporate blog successful. Two additional factors, time and dialogue, are discussed in more detail in Section Three.

Blogger Engagement

Engaging others in your blogging community was seen by many bloggers interviewed for the study as an important success factor. Engagement with other bloggers includes conversing with other bloggers on your own blog and on other blogs. Bloggers engage the community by commenting or sending a trackback or pingback (see Glossary) to another author's blog from a blog post of his/her own.

Dialogue through commenting back and forth in a public blog was seen by many of the bloggers as a way to engage other bloggers and blog readers. Many bloggers interviewed thought that the interaction that occurs through this public discussion was very important to the success of their blog. Commenting on other blogs and how you commented were both seen as being very important, and a step towards engaging other bloggers successfully.

Tom Pionek from Stone Creek Coffee thought that other non-company bloggers had a big impact on the company blog, by commenting and linking to the blog. Those links have helped with higher rankings on Google search terms like 'wholesale coffee.'

Tim Jackson from Masi Bikes thought it was important to receive comments from fellow bloggers on his blog. Tim Jackson believes that "a key ingredient to being successful with a blog personally, is to network with other bloggers and to do the right thing and post comments and add links and do things like that because you build your strength and credibility within the community and you're not just another, you know, soulless marketer with a blog site." He thought it was especially important to receive comments from influential bloggers within his industry. Seeking out influential blogs in your industry is very important. Tim

said he would leave comments there to invite dialogue. Posts about the latest products, even competitors, generate the most comments from readers on the Masi Bikes blog.

Jim Cahill from the Emerson Process Management blog said that commenting on other people's blogs helps with the success of his blog because, "we are trying to build a conversation about the topic at hand and the more you add to the conversation, then over time others will begin in the conversation on your blog. As more people become more blog and RSS aware, we want them to participate."

Blogger outreach was an important issue for the Emerson blog. According to Deborah Franke, "You are participating because conversations are going on, the conversations just haven't been as visible. I think people are adopting blogs to be heard and people can jump in and be part of the conversations. Word of mouth has always been around; it just hasn't been on the web. It's also about community. It's about the place. It's about the exchange that is happening. You're not pushing a message at them whether you are commenting or posting. You are simply engaging with the community."

Chris Halvorson from Stonyfield stated that readers commenting and sending emails to bloggers was an important measure of success. Stonyfield management wanted to see that the blog was connecting with customers, and commenting was the clearest indication that relationships were being developed.

Cathy Taylor at Adweek described how one of their competitors, the person who runs the blog Adrants, comments on many blogs. Cathy thought that the Adfreak team would probably comment more if they had the time. Cathy said that the Adrants blogger gained a greater boost as a result of the extra comments.

According to Janet Johnson of Marqui, companies should conduct a lot of commenting and send a lot of trackbacks as connecting with other people in the blogosphere is very important to building relationships. Those relationships will help a company to achieve their goals. Janet said that the more you engage other bloggers, the more they will engage you.

Heather Hamilton from Microsoft thought that commenting on other blogs drives traffic back to her blog; while reading blogs about marketing helps her

understand her marketplace. Heather said that she receives a lot of comments about her personal posts. Those personal posts also drive the most traffic.

Jeremy Pepper stated that bloggers have to conduct a conversation with their audience, and that it is important to reply to people who comment on a blog and to comment on other blogs. Nonetheless, he warns not to comment for the sake of commenting, only when it fits in with a conversation.

Content & Comment Moderation

Moderating content and comments has powerful implications for the success of a corporate blog, according to the bloggers we interviewed. Allowing comments to appear from blog readers was widely accepted as the right way to set up a corporate blog, although Eric Anderson at Adobe had some different opinions about the quality of comments from blog readers. Most bloggers did agree that commenting added to the success of a blog. Commenting on other blogs helps a blogger acquire links, drive traffic and develop relationships with other bloggers.

Some bloggers don't moderate their comments; their comments are unrestricted or un-moderated. Rich Short from Indium Corporation leaves commenting open, even to the extent of allowing spam comments to remain on the blog. The reasoning behind this is transparency. Rich said, "You need to be believable and credible. Well, you know, we already are, but when you start acting in another way you sort of degrade your existing image. We're very well known as a technology company, and as a very high integrity, sophisticated market resource. If I go to market with some filtered, manipulated set of information that takes us backwards. Our customers are smart enough to go through our comments, and see an ad for offshore gambling and realize that it's just spam, and then overlook it. Or, if some guy starts ranting and raving about how he's my competitor, he's the man, my customers are smart enough to realize."

Aliza thought companies edit content on corporate blogs that are being written by employees and that most companies moderate commenting. She also made the point that in the past, on message boards, if a company deleted or edited posts, courts had considered the company a "publisher" and the company became responsible for comments left by other people. Aliza suggested the same rule could apply to blogs: the more control you exert over a blog, the more responsibility you take for all the content.

One blogger, Donna Lynes-Miller from Gourmet Station, moderated comments on her blog for consistency with her company's brand and image; Donna Lynes-

Miller described how everything on the blog has to be consistent with the brand. Donna moderates the comments and makes sure those comments are consistent with the brand. To her, an important part of brand consistency is ensuring there is no profanity and there are no unrelated comments on the blog.

Chris Halvorson from Stonyfield explained that Stonyfield did not review or fact check content before publishing. Chris thought that lack of oversight led to a very human voice for the blog. Chris spends about two hours a day writing the two remaining blogs. Chris writes all the content, except for the Bovine Bugle, the content for that blog is written by one of Stonyfield's organic farmers.

Chris Halvorson does moderate comments to make sure the tone of the comment never gets very "nasty," which are something she has seen on many Mommy blogs where some people will harshly criticize others for making different choices. Also, Chris would not allow comments that are factually wrong, such as a comment stating that, "babies need to watch television in the first month of life." Chris would do some of her own fact checking, or post the comment with her own comment stating that the issues raised have not been proven.

Originally, the Stonyfield blog did not have a comment policy. Chris decided to create one after receiving a lot of comments on a post where several of the comments were repetitive. If all points of view have been stated in comments, Chris decided not to allow any additional comments. Chris moderated any comments that described repetitive viewpoints.

There is an alternative view, however, as a number of the bloggers thought that comments were not important to the success of their blog. For example, Eric Anderson from Adobe was skeptical of comments generated on blogs, as he has no way to validate the identity of the person who commented. Eric said it's very difficult to get honest feedback on such major products as Flash and Flex. Eric said the posts that generate the most traffic are those posts that discuss Adobe's competitors and competing technologies and posts about a product's future direction.

Dave Balter from BzzAgent did not think blogs necessarily had to have a lot of comments. He finds that while some posts generate few comments, readers he meets recall reading the post later.

According to Shawn Lea from the Mississippi Hospital Association, she does not spend very much time commenting on other blogs. Shawn thought she did not

comment very much because her readership are members of the hospital association of Mississippi. Editor's interpretation of this lack of commenting on other blogs by Shawn Lea, is that Shawn thought that her blog's content is unique, and that she did not have to comment on any other blogs because she had a captive audience who were members of the association.

Building a Blogging Community

One way to develop a successful blog is to concentrate on helping the rest of your blogging community. By helping your community, a blogger can gain a lot of respect and develop a good reputation. The effort put into helping the community gives a blogger thought leadership in the community and instant recognition. Jeremy Pepper discussed how he thought that bloggers in the PR community should focus their efforts on improving the community itself.

An example of someone who helps his community is Constantin Basturea. Constantin maintains a number of helpful and useful websites and blogs that provide information for the PR blogging community. Constantin has a great deal of respect in the PR blogging community because of his tremendous support and participation.

Monitoring Your Blogging Community

Monitoring the web for instances of your company's brand and relevant subject matter can help you to build a successful blog. Bloggers used search engines, blog search engines and other online tools to monitor the blogosphere for their brand and industry terms.

Chris Halvorson from Stonyfield Farms did not spend a lot of time linking to other bloggers. However, she did monitor the web for keyword occurrences of Stonyfield on other blogs. Once found, she would correct any factual errors stated on other blogs and link to relevant websites. Correcting the factual errors in a comment section of another blog helps to clarify Chris and Stonyfield's position on an issue and demonstrates that Stonyfield is paying attention.

Feedback from Your Customers

Asking for feedback from your customer was an important factor and technique identified in the Backbone Media Corporate blogging survey 2005, and will help with building better products and make your blog a success. The study of 75 bloggers produced six case studies; two of the case studies identified Macromedia and Microsoft as two companies where customer feedback was important. The two case studies described how listening to customer feedback contributed to building successful blogs. A good tip for any corporate blogger

is to develop compelling content that leverages feedback from your audience rather than just focusing on your own ideas. Foster relationships with customers, bloggers and readers. Demonstrating that your company encourages and listens to customer feedback transforms casual readers and customers into enthusiastic evangelists.

Tim Jackson from Masi said that one of the most important benefits of the blog has been the ability to ask for feedback from readers. Tim said that the effort has helped to "shape the products that are coming out." It also gives pride of ownership with customers and retailers who read the blog—in a way that promotes a more personal connection with the Masi brand.

Writing Often for Success

Having the discipline to write often will help build the success of your blog. Our subjects found that increased frequency of posting could be correlated with increased readership. In addition, fresh content and incoming links can garner better search engine rankings. The frequency of writing for a blog can vary depending on the abilities of the blogger and the industry in which they are writing. An industry with a lot of bloggers and many changes will probably need more content frequency.

Cathy Taylor from Adweek said there is definitely a correlation between the number of posts and the number of people who come to the blog. The larger the volume of posts on a blog the more traffic is generated. Also, when large influential blogs link to the Adfreak blog, run by Cathy Taylor, the Adweek team sees an increase in traffic.

Max Goldman from SuccessFactors thought that persistence is very important to be a successful blogger, and you also need the patience to keep on blogging, as a company will never know what will attract their audience's attention and what will not. You have to just keep on writing. Max described how each communication with another blogger helps to build a stronger relationship shifting perceptions about a company positively over time.

2.3 What Is It About The Content On A Blog That Makes A Blog Successful?

Content is very important to the success of a blog. We asked the bloggers what it was about the content on a blog that contributed to the success of a corporate blog. Two very important factors that the bloggers mentioned the most were writing transparently and writing content that is entertaining and/or personal. This issue is discussed in greater detail in Section Three.

Compelling Content Comes from Unique Experiences

Content that is unique and gives readers a view of the world they would not gain from anywhere else is an important factor in the success of many blogs.

Tim Jackson, writing for the Masi Bikes blog, writes about the Tour de France. The irony of the success of his posts about the Tour de France is that he writes about what is happening on the Tour from his office in San Diego. Tim reads news reports about the race and gives his updates and opinions about what's happening. Readers in the bicycle world appreciate Tim's insight highly, even if Tim Jackson is not even attending the major cycling event.

The Stonyfield farm blog was the most successful blog run by Stonyfield Farms. Jonathan the farmer, Stonyfield's organic farming blogger, writes about whatever is happening in his life, the calving season or maple sugar season. The success of the Stonyfield Farms organic farming blog is because it is all about a farmer's unique experiences in farming an organic farm. What must seem mundane to the farmer is refreshing, compelling and entertaining content to most readers.

The content on the Masi biking blog and the Stonyfield Farms organic farming blog really defines and reinforces the stature of each company brand. Masi is associated with the most famous cycle race in the world, and from reading the organic farming blog it is pretty clear that Stonyfield makes its yogurt with organic milk because you can read all about how the milk is produced on the farmer's organic farming blog.

Industry Content Provides Great Relevancy for Audiences

Content that is industry related on a blog can be the content that brings success to a blog. Several bloggers interviewed described how their blogs' themes changed over time to relate even more to their industry. Content can be very compelling to an audience when a blog author writes about their industry in general as opposed to just their own product line.

Eric Anderson of Adobe writes unique industry content for his audience, who are developers interested in reading about Adobe's technology. Deborah Franke and Jim Cahill of Emerson Process Management and Dr. Ron Lasky of Indium Corporation focus most of their blog content on their industries (process automation technology and electronic assembly materials, respectively), and in the process hope to demonstrate the skills and expertise of their bloggers through the good coverage of their industry, thereby associating their company's brands with a blogger who is a thought leader in their communities.

In contrast Zane Safrit of Conference Calls Unlimited makes sure he specifically does not write about his company's industry, rather Zane writes about his customer's marketplace, the small business environment.

Eric Anderson from Adobe said that publishing content that people need is very important to building a successful blog. Eric said the posts that generate the most traffic are those posts that discuss Adobe's competitors and content about a product's future direction. Eric said that his style of blog writing has progressed over time. He used to write about new releases etc., all content he had not written, and he got tired of referencing this type of material. Now Eric writes about technical information not covered anywhere else.

Rich Short from Indium Corporation explained the biggest reason their blogs are successful is because of the stature of Dr. Ron Lasky in the industry. He also said that controversial subjects garnered more interest on the blog, but that is not what the Indium blogs aim for in terms of content. As time has progressed, Dr. Lasky has grown in his blog writing; he is now more comfortable writing in this medium. His posts are longer and more detailed. Rich thought he was more comfortable because Dr. Lasky had a better idea of what people wanted to read on his blog. Rich said, "You need to know what people want to hear. You know, you need to know what interests people."

David Paull at MSInteractive described how he started a blog at his company and quickly realized that to be authentic he had to write about more than just his company's products and services. David writes about his clients' markets and industry, he ensures that the blog provides useful information for his customers. David stated that it took a few iterations before he found the right voice for his blog.

Max Goldman of SuccessFactors stated that he stays on topic about the human resources industry in his blog. He does not post a lot of articles about personal issues because his audience would not be interested.

Deborah Franke and Jim Cahill of Emerson Process Management keep their blog focused on making it as easy as possible for customers in the process-manufacturing world to talk to experts at Emerson Process Management. Deb said, "The best way to get visibility to your expertise message, we believe, is to blog." Both Deb and Jim said that the posts that have generated the most interest are those where there is already some discussion and interest on the web. The Emerson Process blog has added something to the discussion through the bloggers perspective on an issue.

Sometimes The Most Random Content Generates The Most Interest

A common theme discussed by the bloggers was that it is not always predictable which blog posts will attract the most attention. Oftentimes, they are not the posts one would expect, and sometimes not even related to the industry or company at all. Many bloggers described how it was often personal posts unrelated to the main topic of the blog that generated a lot of comments and traffic. A post that is about unrelated subject matter demonstrates the connections between an audience member and a blogger, and so builds a closer connection between blogger and their readership, precisely because the post is less about business and more about living life.

The content that generates the most comments can be very random on Janet Johnson's blog at Marqui, and she has been surprised that her personal posts have generated some of the most surprising comments.

Put Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Marketing at the Center of Your Blogging Content Strategy

A blog can be a great way to develop a lot of content, but also a way to help a company achieve top rankings on search engine keywords their audience uses to find a company on the web. Many companies hope to gain a lot of traffic from search engines and aim to achieve higher search engine rankings in order to get more traffic. In addition, customers sometimes perceive a top ranking on a search engine to indicate that a company is a stronger brand than their competitors. Thus, to the extent that high search engine rankings help with brand perception it could be stated that blogs help with brand perception.

Both the quantity of Web content and the proper use of keywords used for search are important factors in achieving a high-ranking search engines. Donna makes SEO strategy really pay off for her blog. She is diligent about writing content that targets the keywords her audience finds relevant. The payoff is top rankings on search engines for the keywords she targets. Donna stated that her blog has achieved a number two ranking on the keyword "gourmet dinners" in Yahoo! The Gourmet Station blog has played a big part in helping Donna's company to achieve those high rankings.

The topic that generates the most conversation and interaction from readers on the Gourmet Station blog is romance. Donna said the reason for traffic success with romance-related keywords is the high search engine volumes for romance, and that romance is so closely associated with dinner in terms of romantic dinners.

Seasonality can also be a factor in search engine marketing. Searches on particular keywords rise and fall with the season depending on the industry and products. As seasons change, Donna changes the content on her blog to target the interests of her audience by targeting different related keywords. Timely publishing can also have an effect on the rankings of a web page related to a keyword. Donna makes sure each of the 14 categories on the Gourmet Station blog has a fresh recent post in each of the categories, so that she can generate a volume of content around a set of keywords.

3.0 Recurring Factors That Help with the Success of a Corporate Blog

During the course of the study, it became apparent rather quickly that the measurement of success for a blog is dependent on the goals and objectives of each corporate blogger. What is success for one blogger may not be success for another. In addition to the many factors of success we discovered in Section Two, we discovered a number of recurring factors described by most bloggers in their interviews. The research teams identified five factors that we believe a company should incorporate into their blog, or at the very least consider these factors in order for a blog to have some chance of success. Those five factors include:

- Culture
- Transparency
- Time
- Dialogue
- Entertaining Writing Style and Character

The team discovered that the recurring five factors can be used as a yardstick for measuring the success of a blog. Using the blogger interviews as a starting point, we explored each of the five themes as a way to gain success for a corporate blog.

3.1 Culture

Several bloggers we interviewed discussed how the issue of company culture was key to building a successful blog. If a company's culture is warm and open, and a company is transparent about their blogging, this will come across in the blog. An audience and customers will then have a better connection with a company through its blog. In addition, a company will better convey its corporate message to an audience if that message is written clearly, and if the

blog provides a glimpse into the inner workings of the company culture. A blog may change perceptions about a company's brand, but in order for that perceptual shift to occur, a company must have a corporate culture that is worth promoting to the world.

Keeping a tight control on the flow of information from a company does not work well in the blogging culture. Many companies have a fear that allowing their employees to blog freely about their work will cause the company to lose control and put the company at risk. To the contrary, our bloggers found that having the ability to connect with their audience in a transparent way and engage in frank and honest discussion garnered more respect from readers and customers. Ultimately, a company should set guidelines for their bloggers, but then allow the free flow of information.

Heather Hamilton thought that companies should decide if blogging fits in with their corporate culture. Heather is the staffing manager for Microsoft's marketing central sourcing team. She blogs to answer candidate questions and to reveal to candidates that Microsoft employees are real people with the same issues everyone else shares. If a company is apprehensive about revealing too much, or letting employees write on a blog without management control, then blogging may not be for that company. An analysis of the openness of a company's culture has to be conducted before deciding to blog, as restrictions on openness could restrict the success of a blog once launched. Blogging can quickly demonstrate that a company is open and flexible. What an employee writes on their blog will reveal a lot about a company, also what an employee does not write will also reveal a lot.

Microsoft has not only encouraged blogging, but through bloggers like Heather Hamilton, the company has been able to change many minds in the industry about the willingness of Microsoft to be flexible and entrepreneurial.

Another blogger, Jeremy Pepper, described how Robert Scoble of Microsoft (who has since moved on from Microsoft) had really changed the impression of the company among its customers. Jeremy said, "I can say without any issue that Robert Scoble has given Microsoft a friendly persona out there on the Internet. He's given a face to the organization that's different than Steve Balmer or Bill Gates. He's made it warm and fuzzy. It's no longer the evil empire. It's just, "Oh this is the company Scoble works for!" It's – It helps take off the taint that the company has had." Jeremy went on to say, "He [Scoble] doesn't talk about Microsoft all that much, but he is known as a Microsoft blogger."

We now know that a company needs to look inward at its corporate culture before that company can start blogging effectively. There needs to be executive support. Management must be willing to reveal the human inner workings of the outer corporation. There needs to be an understanding that blogging does not have to be controlled in the ways that some companies have traditionally tried to restrict dialogue. And, lastly, a company needs a culture worth promoting or revealing through a blog.

Discussing the issue of whether a company should blog or not, Jim Cahill at Emerson Process Management said, "you do have to look at the culture. If you are an organization that wants to keep an iron hand on the flow of communication, this might not be for you. Or, it might be an organization that is very firm in the information they want to go out and when they want it to go out. So if you're a business that can't deal with the change of flow in information it may not be for you. But if you look at the companies out there, I would hope there is enough latitude between the two extremes to cultivate at least some type of internal approach."

3.2 Transparency

Having a corporate culture that is worth revealing can only be done if a company is transparent about its activities on a blog. That is why blogging, according to many bloggers, is by its nature more believable and credible than a traditional website. The reason for blogs' enhanced credibility is the openness of bloggers. Bloggers are open about themselves and thus corporate bloggers especially have a difficult time hiding behind the veneer of a marketing message. Many bloggers believe being free to express positive or negative ideas about their own company adds tremendous credibility to any organization.

On a blog there are several ways for a corporate blogger to be transparent, both in form and content. Bloggers can leave comments open for anyone to write a reaction without moderation, while other bloggers consider comment moderation not only acceptable but required management of a company's brand online. Transparency is not just about commenting, however. Many bloggers believe transparency has more to do with the content of a blog and how open a blogger is about their reasons for writing content, or for a blogger to be willing to discuss criticisms of a company. For example, as discussed by Jeremy Pepper in the study, Robert Scoble of Microsoft was one of the best-known examples of a corporate blogger. Robert Scoble was a Microsoft employee who runs his own blog called the Scobleizer, the blog attracted a large audience, and Robert Scoble was the best-known Microsoft blogger

because of how he wrote his blog. In part, the success of the Scobleizer was because Robert Scoble regularly criticized his own employer, yet still retained his job at Microsoft. He left the company for personal reasons in 2006. However, Robert Scoble's example taught a generation of corporate bloggers what to do in terms of being transparent about their own company on a blog. Many Microsoft customers were impressed by Robert Scoble's openness and willingness to discuss delicate company issues openly. Scoble's blog and others at Microsoft helped to change negative perceptions about Microsoft left over from the court case against Microsoft in the late 1990's.

Taking risks by giving your opinion of a company's position may raise a few eyebrows with management, but the effort can establish the legitimacy of a blogger with their audience. Transparency builds trust; trust builds interest; and interest builds an audience. Robert Scoble's audience with Microsoft changed their perception of the company from negative to neutral.

Transparency as a blogging strategy is worth considering because rather than losing control, or losing customers, it appears that just the opposite happens: your audience is more likely to believe what you tell them when your blog is more transparent.

3.3 Time

It is important for companies to have a pre-existing website strategy for content creation and to understand the resources necessary to maintain a blog. One of the corporate bloggers, Aliza Sherman Risdahl, believes it takes time and dedication to be a successful corporate blogger, but a company should not expect to be successful if that company was not already successful with their other online efforts. A company has to make the time to blog, and it is the principal issue for many bloggers. Here are some of the tasks a blogger has to conduct to be successful:

- Write posts
- Reply to comments from readers
- Monitor other blogs
- Keep up with the latest industry news
- Build relationships with other bloggers within a community.

Thus, when choosing a blogger, it is important to pick someone who actually has time available.

Realizing the limits to your resources is very important in starting a blog. If you understand that your blogger may not be able to write on a regular basis, starting a multiple author blog can be a great way to get around the issue of any one individual having enough time. A multiple author blog can help a company to launch a strong, content-rich blog. The authors can write in different styles and might also take different responsibilities for commenting on other blogs or not. A multiple author blog removes the responsibility for blogging from just one author and the chances for building a successful blog are much higher.

Cathy Taylor at Adweek explained that, due to the time constraints, the Adweek management decided the whole editorial staff would be able to contribute to the blog. By having a number of people available to write on the Adweek blog, the company would always have content on the blog, but not overload any one individual blogger.

If a blogger does not have to take a lot of time to write, the amount of articles the blogger needs to write depends on the community. If you're the blogging community in which you are involved is not very active, writing just a few times a week may mean a company still has the opportunity to build a successful blog. If there is not a lot of activity in the community its easy to comment in blog posts on the community. Eventually, the amount of content that needs to be produced in a blog depends upon the company's goals. If a particular community is very active and it is not possible for your blogger to keep up with their community, then it may make much more sense to commit resources to a different blogging community where you can have an effect. (See the interview summary regarding the Stonyfield Farms blog in the appendix.)

Time is also an important factor when it comes to the quality of writing produced by a blogger. Bloggers have discovered that their blog writing style produces more results as their understanding of their audience improves. Honing the quality of their posts and the best way to connect with an audience can take time.

The time it takes to run a successful blog also changes with the growing success of a blog. Tim Jackson of Masi Cycles runs marketing for Masi for the Haro Bicycle Corp.; he is literally a one-man marketing department. While Tim initially found the time to write when he first launched his blog, the subsequent success of the blog created a challenge. He does not have as much time to blog and monitor the community. Tim is both a good example of a blogger who

gained tremendous benefits and brand recognition in his community from blogging, but now that success has come, he has less time to blog.

Eric Anderson from Adobe explained that Macromedia/Adobe set up a number of blogs with its employees; in fact, the number of blogs at Macromedia grew so rapidly amongst employees and in the community that it was difficult to follow the whole community. There was so much Macromedia content on the blogs there was a need to search through all of the blogs in the community in one place. As a result, Macromedia set up a blog aggregator for all of the RSS feeds from all of the employee and customer blogs about Macromedia products. This saved a lot of time on the part of bloggers in the community in finding content. The Macromedia related blog aggregator was created before sites like today's popular technorati.com and other RSS feed aggregators. And by aggregating all of the content in the whole community in one place, including employees and customers, Macromedia was able to leverage the content on customers websites so that fewer Macromedia employees had to blog to provide coverage on a Macromedia product. Setting up a community blog aggregator for your product or community can be a great way to empower individual blogs at your company by showcasing a company's blogs within the community. Effectively the community was helping to support Macromedia's marketing efforts with additional content.

3.4 Dialogue

The web has given companies and their audiences the opportunity to conduct an open online dialogue. The online dialogue between customer and company was once a private conversation that now can be made available on the Web and benefit the greater community. While an individual customer's problem might be answered or ideas discussed online, the very nature of dialogue online enables customers and industry peers to assess the overall strength of a company's brand. When a customer reads an online interaction between another customer and a warm and friendly employee, the reader will likely take away a positive impression of the company. Such open dialogue is one of the most important benefits of corporate blogging.

For many bloggers generating dialogue is one of the best measurements of success on a blog. However, a blogger may not actually have a high level of interaction with his readers even though there's a large audience. Customers often prefer to keep to the sidelines and read blog content because they may be uncomfortable about revealing too much about themselves, due to privacy concerns or fear of revealing competitive details to the rest of the industry on the

blog. A blogger should realize that confidentiality is important to blog readers and to have their contact information available to blog readers when they need to correspond privately.

Dialogue is not just about conversation on your own blog but also the process of seeking out the places on the web where there is conversation about your industry and interests. Bloggers should search their blogging community for places where conversation and dialogue about their industry occurs. Blogging should never be just a cynical attempt at dialogue, but a real conversation between individuals. Successful blogging occurs when writing is transparent, open, and bloggers are willing to listen to criticism. One of the ways to be transparent and open is for companies to provide insight into how and/or why decisions are made that affect their customers, shareholders and the surrounding community.

Successful blogging requires the development and implementation of a complex blogging strategy. Corporate bloggers might understand that dialogue is important, but so, too, is the subject matter that should be discussed and the other bloggers with whom to communicate online to achieve a company's blogging goals. To answer those questions, careful content planning and an outreach strategy must be developed. A company needs to create the best content and connect with the most important people in the community.

Corporate bloggers have goals in mind when they prepare to launch a blog, goals such as attaining more leads through blogging. The way to achieve those goals, however, is not necessarily by writing about the company's products. Success may come from discussing an issue that is totally unrelated to the product but resonates with the company's audience.

Successful bloggers understand that demonstrating an expertise in topics relevant to their audience can be more important than talking specifically about products. This concept may be new to many marketing professionals. Content generation in corporate blogging is about creating a dialogue with your audience; that dialogue may take place by reacting to another community member's blog post with a post of your own or by leaving a comment on the other blog. As community dialogue might be unrelated to product discussion, it is sometimes difficult for most marketers to understand how a particular blogging strategy can bring benefits to a company.

Stonyfield Farms is an excellent blogging example of using a blog to speak about related topics rather than product line. Stonyfield sells yogurt but does

not write about yogurt; rather Stonyfield's blogs provide content that addresses the issues that are important to their customers such as children's health and the environment. A conversation about yogurt on the part of Stonyfield would have been a very lonely experiment in blogging, but a conversation about children's and the environment as they relate to healthy food and growing healthy food works. The Stonyfield Farms' content strategy is based on the psychographics of the audience – Stonyfield is attempting to create a dialogue with its audience about organic farming and health. The content on the Stonyfield blogs is related to yogurt but not about the products Stonyfield sells. The Stonyfield blog content draws in an audience who can then conduct a dialogue with Stonyfield bloggers. The content and the open comment boxes on the Stonyfield blogs say two things: Stonyfield is willing to talk and this is what we are willing to talk about.

Describing the inspiration for the Stonyfield blogs, the blog author, Chris Halvorson, said the Howard Dean campaign in the last Presidential election, which used blogging to create a dialogue with constituents, had a big effect on the CEO of Stonyfield Farms, Gary Hershberg. Over time Stonyfield reduced its original number of blogs from five to two, and that reduction is a good example of how a company needs to be self-critical and create content that is of interest to an audience and will facilitate dialogue. We asked Chris why the company cut down the number of blogs. Chris said, "We started out with ah five, I was the only staff person doing it and it did get to be a little too much to write and maintain five. We had five different topic areas and all along we considered it one big experiment. So, we put the five out there to see what works. We got rid of one because it never seemed to find an audience. It was sort of an insider's view to the company, you know, I wrote about quirky little things we did as employees. We had a potluck today, in Honor of St. Patrick's Day, or whatever it was and it didn't really seem to find an audience which is in retrospect, understandable."

When the Stonyfield blogs first started in April of 2004, Chris Halvorson wrote about politics and religion and other non-business issues. Those posts received a lot of comments. The company started a blog about strong women because the majority of yogurt eaters are women. Chris Halvorson told the interviewer that the other blogs were successful even though Chris did not write about yogurt more than three or four times in two years. Chris also spends a lot of time reading the news about parenting because that is the content strategy of this blog. Chris also tied the blog content into Stonyfield yogurt products because the company was one of the first companies to put DHA into their yogurt. DHA is good for developing baby's brains. Chris would not try to pitch the product but

ask questions around the subject, whether people know about the importance of their babies eating DHA, and if they or their babies eat food with DHA in it. Chris said she tries to raise questions in people's minds and be provocative by asking questions to generate comments. Dialogue is important for the success of a blog, but only when that dialogue is linked to issues your audience is interested in reading and discussing.

What is surprising about many successful blog posts that create dialogue between bloggers is that success can be very random in nature. As we discovered in the interviews with bloggers many bloggers don't know if their posts are going to be successful or not. Many of the bloggers did believe that stating an opinion is definitely a factor in creating dialogue. Also, agreeing or disagreeing with the majority of people in their industry will create a greater chance of eliciting a response from the audience. However, even opinion pieces are no guarantee of success. Dialogue is really about showing the community a willingness to talk and engage in meaningful conversation.

3.5 Entertaining Writing Style and Personalization

Many of the bloggers we interviewed suggested that both personalizing blog posts and making a blog post entertaining were techniques that a blogger could use to build a successful blog.

The bloggers in the study suggested that bloggers should write to entertain their readers and not just to give an opinion or inform. Success in part then can be said to come from the personality of the blogger. The personal writing style of a blogger will influence the interaction and reading habits of the audience. And this "personality" can stem from humor, unique personal experience or passion expressed for their topic. The more entertaining a blogger is, the more captivating and riveting the content, the higher the chance for blogging success. In addition, attempts by a blogger to conduct a dialogue with their readership, other bloggers and the community at large will have a positive effect on the success of a blog. Conducting outreach with the blogging community will enhance a blogger's reputation and draw people to their blog because their content interests the reader. That outreach also has to be personal and hopefully entertaining.

We must consider some different findings from the study that questions whether personalization really is a successful blogging strategy to follow, however. For example, while many bloggers suggested a personal approach will bring more success to a blog, Eric Anderson from Adobe stands out as counter to the

argument that content which includes personal information fuels blogging success. Eric writes his blogs and concentrates on technical content avoiding personal details. Interestingly, one of the authors, John Cass, has previously interviewed Macromedia bloggers for the Backbone Media Corporate Blogging Survey 2005. In those interviews, the other Macromedia bloggers suggested non-personalization of blog posts was a company-wide strategy and that this non-personalization strategy has been shown to be successful for the Macromedia blogs.

It is our hypothesis, that it is a matter of audiences. Adobe has a technical audience that demands technical knowledge. Thus, Adobe's audience is most interested in finding technical information on a blog. Eric Anderson's blog content might not be entertaining, but it is riveting to a highly technical audience who are affected by Adobe's product development with Flex. Similarly, the amount of personal reflection might be different depending upon the industry culture you work within. The way people write technical material might include humor or personal reflection, but to the non-industry observer, any such comments would not come across as revealing very much, or be perceived as entertaining or personal. Yet in the context of the industry, those blog posts might be very entertaining and personal.

Dave Balter from BzzAgent feels that the entertainment and personalization component derives from providing an inside scoop on the inner workings of the company. Dave started blogging because he thought it would be a way to explain simply and directly exactly what BzzAgent does. Dave discovered the blog had a powerful impact on the reader. Dave believes discussing the inner workings of BzzAgent is really powerful for clients and creates a bond with customers, investors and readers in a way other traditional communications media could not. In addition to their regular blog, the BeeLog, Dave's company ran a blog called 90 Days of BzzAgent. This blog describe a period of 90 days where the company went through a financing round, and how the company evolved during that period. This is an example of how a blog can be compelling because of the intimate personalization of the content that revealed much of what happened at BzzAgent during that short time period.

If the content on a blog is interesting, a blog has a higher chance for attaining success. The personal perspective of a blogger in a unique role is one way to develop interesting content for a blog. The Stonyfield organic farmer blog is an example of a blog that provides compelling content and provides the average reader the opportunity to talk directly with an organic farmer.

Blogging can be successful not just because of unusual content or related content as in the case of the Stonyfield Farms blogs. Blogs that reveal the inner human from inside the corporation can help to pull down some of the barriers between a company and its audience. Aliza Sherman Risdahl's comments illustrate a recurring theme in corporate blogging, that is, blogging allows a writer to reveal more about their life, experiences and opinions. And a company has a lot to gain by letting its employees be more open and different in the voices that are revealed through their blogs.

3.6 Deciding if your company should blog

Time, dialogue, transparency, culture, personalization and entertainment are all leading factors that can contribute to the success of a corporate blog, and there are many other factors we have discussed in the study that can help to establish a successful blog. All of these success factors do not necessarily have to be in place to build a blog, but each factor will certainly contribute to a blog's ultimate success.

Blogging is complex, and each company approaches blogging differently. If one measurement of success is reaching an audience, it is, therefore, important to choose a content strategy that is relevant to your audience. If you do not conduct a dialogue with your audience, but instead try to sell your audience something, your blog will probably not produce the traffic or links you seek. Without results, a company will either change its strategy in order to become an effective blogger or give up blogging entirely. The decision to blog, then, should be based upon an understanding of what resources are available and the commitment that is needed to maintain a successful blog.

Appendix 1.0 Corporate Blogger Interview Summaries

Each student interviewed two corporate bloggers in a recorded session. Each student transcribed one interview for course credit; the remaining interviews were transcribed by Megan Dickinson of Backbone Media, Inc. Rather than provide the complete interview here, we have summarized each interview from the original transcriptions below.

1.1 The Bloggers

1.1.1 Company: Adobe

Blogger: Eric Anderson

Student Interviewer: Amanda Nastari

Blog: <http://weblogs.macromedia.com/eanderson/>

Eric Anderson is the Product Manager for Adobe's Flex product. Adobe Flex is an application development solution for building rich Internet applications. Eric formerly worked for Macromedia when it merged with Adobe and he worked for Allaire Corp when it merged with Macromedia. Macromedia was an early corporate blogging company inspired by Jeremy Allaire.

Eric started work with Allaire Corporation six years ago. He started blogging to get information out to his customer community quickly. The blog is primarily a way to get technical information out to customers and gather feedback. Eric said that blogging was a way to get "tidbits of information what weren't full blown papers out to the community."

Macromedia allowed its employees to write about their products and a blog aggregator was developed to allow like-minded bloggers to aggregate their blogs together. This Macromedia blog aggregator was before sites like technorati.com and other RSS feed aggregators were around. The Macromedia aggregator had content from both Macromedia and other bloggers who wrote Macromedia related blog posts outside of the company.

Eric said that the culture at Adobe is much more controlled by legal than the culture at Macromedia. However, Eric said that there was a desire to be more open at Adobe over time. Adobe has hundreds of blogs and the company pays for its employee blogs. There is no editorial control process for blogging at the company.

Eric told us that his blog helped encourage 30-50 people blogging about Flex, his product. The blog has become a place for the community to go to for information about Flex. When Eric attends a conference, he finds it very rare that customers have not already read his blog. The blog gives Eric "immediate technical credibility" with his audience.

Eric thought that, "publishing content that people need " is very important when building a successful blog. Eric was skeptical of comments generated on blogs, as he has no way to validate the identity of the person who commented. Eric has found it to be difficult to get honest feedback on such major products as Flash and Flex. Eric said the posts that generate the most traffic are those posts that discuss Adobe's competitors and competing technologies or posts about a product's future direction.

Eric stated that his style of blog writing has progressed over time. He used to write about new releases and content he had not written but he got tired of referencing this type of material. Eric currently writes about technical information not covered anywhere else. He sees the blog as a very useful tool for communicating technical information with his audience. He sees his blog as a place that established his credibility as a technical writer with his community. Eric said that technical content rather than personal content was the type of content that generated the most comments and traffic to his blog.

1.1.2 Company: Adweek

Blogger: Cathy Taylor

Student Interviewer: Melissa Buckley

Blog: <http://adweek.blogs.com/adfreak/>

Cathy Taylor is a journalist who works for Adweek. She initiated the Adfreak blog at Adweek and helps run the blog with her colleagues.

Cathy recognized the impact of political blogs on the country's political discussion during the 2004 presidential election, and also noticed several blogs whose content on advertising competed with Adweek. She recommended Adweek start a blog to compete with the advertising related blogs. Cathy said that Adweek noticed the benefits of the blog being the conduit for all content related to advertising. Cathy said this insight developed over time.

Due to the time constraints of blogging, the Adweek management decided the whole editorial staff would be able to contribute to the blog. However, all content would pass through two gatekeepers, Cathy and Tim Nudd. The two journalists serve as editors for the blog. The editors ensure Adweek steers clear of posts that might cause legal problems, makes sure content is on target with what the AdFreak audience is looking for and provides copyediting for the blog posts.

Cathy said there's definitely a correlation between the number of posts and the number of people who come to the blog; more posts produces more traffic. When large influential blogs link to the blog the Adweek team also sees an increase in traffic.

Cathy said the person who runs the blog at a competitor, Adrants, comments on more blogs than the bloggers at Adfreak. Cathy thought that the Adfreak team would probably comment more if they had the time. She also discussed how she and her colleague send out links every once in a while and that she makes

sure that the links she sends out are extremely relevant and important to the people she sends them to. She suggested bloggers had to be judicious in sending links about posts to other bloggers.

Cathy does comment on other blogs, but she has so little time, that it's just occasionally, and typically she comments when it relates to her blog posts, or when someone else has criticized what she has written previously.

After reviewing two commercials one by Apple featuring the music star, Eminem, and the other by Lugz Footwear, Cathy was really taken aback by how similar the two commercials were and commented on the similarity on her blog. Eventually the New York Times and other major newspapers picked up the story. Lugz Footwear started sending cease and desist letters to Apple. All because a blog reader had sent a link to Adfreak asking the question, "do you guys think this looks really similar?"

Once Adfreak pointed out the similarity, everyone in the industry started to pay attention. Cathy even received a call from the ad agency who did the Lugz spot. And Cathy was introduced to the spot's creative director. There was a misconception that the production company for the Lugz Footwear spot had sent the link around the media community. Cathy took it upon herself to call media who had been contacted by Lugz' agency about the story, to let them know that was not the case. When she was working to set the story straight with other media, she changed her role from reporter to something else; perhaps PR person or a blogger. Cathy questioned her role in the affair, and asked herself, "What am I now? A PR person getting the story straight, a blogger or the reporter?" and went on to say, "The lines that used to be so stark are just not stark anymore."

According to Cathy, the content on the blog focuses on ad creative and takes a big time commitment but is also a big listening device about customers and stories.

1.1.3 Blogger: Aliza Sherman Risdahl

Student Interviewer: Krista Grosser

Blog: <http://babyfruit.typepad.com/mediagirl/>

Aliza has an extensive background on the web having published some early websites targeting women in 1995. Aliza also has a great deal of experience in the world of Internet marketing, as she was an early pioneer in the Internet revolution. In 1990 she was a moderator for a commercial online service. She was the first woman to start an Internet Company in New York City. Aliza's first

personal website was "very diary oriented, very personal." She later moved to blogging in the early part of the 21st century.

Speaking on the effort it takes to create a successful blog, Aliza believes it takes time and dedication to be an effective corporate blogger, but a company should not expect to be successful if they were already not successful with their online efforts. Blogs are very different from websites. A company has to make the time to blog. With a blog, you have to keep on message, therefore as a company you have to make sure you have a message.

Aliza believes that companies should go through "a good strategic process to determine why they are deciding to blog." A blog can help a company build a more personal relationship with customers. She thought the GM Fastlane blog was a great example of a blog from a company that's updated quickly, especially since General Motors is not generally seen as the "hippest" company in the world.

She also thought that it's important to have "guidelines and polices in place" before starting a blog. With such preparation, the corporate bloggers know the parameters of what can and cannot be written.

Aliza thought companies edit content on corporate blogs that are being written by employees and that most companies moderate commenting. She also made the point that in the past, on message boards, if a company deleted or edited posts, courts had considered the company a "publisher" and the company became responsible for comments left by other people. Aliza suggested the same rule could apply to blogs: the more control you exert over a blog, the more responsibility you take for all the content.

Success will be different for each company, and according to Aliza, success with blogging will depend upon a company's goals. To be successful Aliza recommended companies monitor their competition and understand what's happening in their industry's blogging community. She thought that most top rated blogs are technology related. To be successful, blogs need to have "fresh and continuously updated content."

Aliza went on to say, that a company can "give a much more intimate feeling about their corporation when they have a corporate blog but not if they blog in a corporate voice. And I think that's a mistake that some corporations make. They feel 'we must have one united voice' but they need to have personality. I mean that is always sort of the bane of corporations in the minds of the

consumers is that they're these big, stoic, impersonal entities. So they've got to be comfortable with really being real."

1.1.4 Company: BzzAgent

Blogger: Dave Balter

Student Interviewer: Laura Stevenson

Blog: <http://blog.bzzagent.com> and <http://90days.bzzagent.com/>

Dave Balter is CEO and Founder of BzzAgent. The company has developed a network of agents and media channel through which its clients can develop word of mouth marketing campaigns.

Dave started blogging because he thought it would be a different way of connecting with others and a tool for letting people "inside" the business. He went on to say, "Over the years we have posted advisor updates, investor information, presentations to clients, how we are deciding on company procedures, all sorts of stuff. What I've found is it's had a very interesting impact, not just on the outside world, but on staff, on people that want to work here, potential employees and clients." Dave believes discussing the inner workings of BzzAgent is really powerful for clients and creates a discussion with customers. Many customers have commented on blog posts to Dave directly.

In addition to their regular blog, the BeeLog, Dave's company implemented a blog called 90 Days of BzzAgent, which ran from February through April of 2006. This blog described a period of 90 days where the company went through a financing round, and how the company evolved during that period. Dave thinks there will be time- or event-specific corporate blogs will be common in the future, especially for campaigns or events.

For the BeeLog, anyone at the company may blog, although Dave moderates all of the posts. Dave filters the content for issues like employee bashing, or revealing confidential information.

According to Dave, the traffic volume on the blog is not a major factor, but he has found that individuals will sometimes become customers by reading material on the blog.

Dave does not believe that blogs necessarily need to have a lot of comments, as he has experienced situations where a blog post will not generate a lot of comments but when he meets people in person, they will recall the post.

He also explained that the posts that generate the most traffic to the blog include content that would typically only be background information for a traditional communications department: "The things that surprise people, because they are actually live. Things like being able to review a presentation to a client, information about two people we are thinking about hiring, anything that is sort of going to give them the first instinct of, 'I can't believe they are live' and those are the ones that get the most traffic."

Dave went onto say, "I think a lot of the corporate blogs you have, say, 'Can you put something together that talks about our new products?' When it's really about how are we communicating to the market in a way that's never been possible before? I feel like a lot of them are out there under false premises as opposed to this is a new tool for the whole market place and the whole point is transparency so let's let this change; what we're willing to tell the world and see what happens."

Dave believes to successfully start a blog "it's a dive-right-in philosophy. No matter what you think ahead of time people will not cease to amaze you, so it's best to learn over time."

Since the interview date, BzzAgent decided to suspend the BeeLog, at least for the time being, because Dave felt the content of the posts began to stray away from the original focus of providing an inside glimpse of the inner workings of BzzAgent. BzzAgent will continue to explore the use of time- and event-specific corporate blogs like 90 Days of BzzAgent. In this vein, their latest blog is called the Bento Box and will run for 24 weeks, offering an inside glimpse of the company from the perspective of two outsiders: an author and an artist.

1.1.5 Company: Conference Calls Unlimited

Blogger: Zane Safrit

Student Interviewer: Leah Hyland

Blog: <http://zane.typepad.com/>

Zane Safrit is the CEO of Conference Calls Unlimited, a conference call services company based in Iowa.

Zane explained that his company is an industry that is in the commodity business, and that traditional advertising works less and less. Zane realized that if his company worked hard at building a great relationship with his customers those relationships would translate into referrals and new business.

Zane had been inspired by Seth Godin's book, *Purple Cow*, and attending one of Seth's workshops on blogging. He decided that being dedicated to customer service for his customers would help get results.

He does not write very much about his company, partly because the services speak for themselves, but also Zane intends to only mention the company when there's something interesting at the company to write about. Zane thought that the process of writing a blog helps to clarify someone's writing and thinking, which in turn helps with better blog posts.

For Zane, the success of his blog was "the introduction with all of the business thinkers, influence makers, influentials, movers and shakers in amongst entrepreneurial and creative thinking business leader types." The blog gave him the chance to meet with many people who he would not have met with if he hadn't started the blog. And rather than investing in expensive advertising or promotion, all of the people he met online through blogging found him through links and search engines.

He thought that the biggest contribution to achieving success on his blog was writing everyday, and writing with "passion and honesty," where he was "willing to take a stand." By taking a stand Zane was able to demonstrate his honesty and transparency, he demonstrated his character and that built his online blogging reputation. Linking to other websites and using the site to network with other people in the blogosphere also helped.

Zane went on to say that some blogs are read because of who is writing them rather than the content of the blogs. The popularity is based on the person's reputation or achievement legacy. Zane identified two companies that generate a lot of controversy when he writes about them on his blog: Wal-Mart and General Motors. He also said that outsourcing was another important topic for generating interest from his readers.

Zane said, "If you dare to try blogging you will gain a lot from the exercise in the form of expanded relationships with influentials, decision-makers, and growing personal connection with your audience, an easy means to differentiate your company and a proven resource to develop your creative problem solving skills. This form of interaction with your audience will give you access to relationships that you would not be able to develop or sustain."

Zane believes that "the best blogger is a person who's the most honest, the most passionate, and the most committed." While Zane thought ghost bloggers were "borderline obscene" similar to having someone write "your own love letters."

1.1.6 Company: Daily Eats

Blogger: Tery Spataro

Student Interviewer: Leah Hyland

Company: Mind Arrays

Blog: <http://www.mindarrays.com/blog.html>

Additional blogs: Daily Eats

Blog: <http://www.dailyeats.com/>

Tery Spataro is the founder of Mind Arrays marketing consulting, and creator and co-author of the food-related blog, Daily Eats blog.

Tery explained how she uses blogging to get out a message to her audience, "I use it for Mind Arrays to write about things that effect marketing, customer relations, focus on consumer products." In recent posts she draws attention to a poorly thought out new commercial by web.com, which used tasteless humor, further demoralizing homeless people. I just thought we can't go down this route as marketers; I really wanted to get people focused on that. I used a number of different ways of getting it out there." Tery's posts contain opinion and a review of the industry for her readers. That opinion and review are what makes the blog a success.

Daily Eats is another blog Tery posts for. She uses Google's blogger because she thought she would gain higher readership and the assumption has paid off with extra traffic. Google is the most important search engine on the web with more people using Google than any other search engine. Google owns Blogger, a blog-authoring tool, and she believes Google might give Blogger a break in rankings.

She has asked a number of other bloggers to contribute to the Daily Eats blog. Asking people to contribute has been a successful tactic for building a highly visible blog.

Backing up an opinion with facts through research is a step Tery found important for bloggers to take in writing a post. Otherwise, Tery suggested blogging could easily be misunderstood for fact rather than opinion. Tery said,

"But I think it would be good if someone said on their blog 'this is just my opinion'."

Addressing the success of Daily Eats blog, Tery said, "I use the stat logs to estimate how many visitors are turned into repeat visitors. I have also spent time on what pages are attracting the most visits and the amount of time for page views."

She said, "I think of a blog as a better form of a newsletter, that you easily post every day, and if you do it right you can have a fairly big readership. It achieves everything that you need, and it's very quick. It's not an email so it's not clogging up mail. Different from newsletters, blog readers usually subscribe to a blog get the feeds when the blog updates."

Tery works to get other bloggers to comment on her blog, by commenting on other blogs.

She described an incident where another blog, YaGoof!, spammed Daily Eats blog, as a way of promoting the blog's sponsor. Rather than get angry, Tery took a conciliatory approach and worked with YaGoof! to get them information about appropriate blogging etiquette with regards to commenting on a blog. That olive branch approach really worked and now Tery has reviewed some of YaGoof's candy sponsors.

Some of the posts that received the most traffic and comments on Daily Eat's blog were about interesting combinations of food, for example, a Twinkie and sushi combination. Tery explained these posts were really unusual and funny.

For Mind Array's clients Tery develops a blogging strategy. A blogging strategy is similar to a PR strategy. Commenting on the reasons to blog by a company, Tery said, "Creating a sense of community, building direct relationships, and developing the right message is the right approach to developing a public blog for a company. Additionally using blogging as customer support to answer questions about your product are all good reasons to blog. Reasons not to blog include if you are going to talk only about yourself or do the hard sell for your products." Tery continued, "People really want to know what's behind products; not just that it is manufactured and should be bought."

1.1.7 Company: Emerson Process Management

Bloggers: Deborah Franke & Jim Cahill

Student Interviewer: Amanda Johnsen

Blog: <http://www.emersonprocessxperts.com/>

Jim Cahill is the Marketing Communications Manager for the Process Systems and Solutions business of Emerson Process Management. Deborah Franke is the eMarketing manager for the company. Emerson Process Management is a supplier of process-automation technology, products, and services.

Both Deb and Jim told the interviewer that Emerson started the company blog as a way to get their company message out. The company prides itself in fostering innovation and Deb and Jim wanted to push the envelope in reaching their audience compared to other suppliers in the industry. Discussing in detail the benefits of blogging, Deb said, "What you are trying to do in services marketing is to show your trust, commitment, and creativity in coming up with solutions. Those traits can be demonstrated in every blog post."

Initially Emerson set up an internal server to host blogs, where employees could get used to the idea of blogging and podcasting. The company added bloggers as people became interested in blogging. Once the company had set up their Movable Type blog, Deb and Jim worked with the HR and legal departments to set up a policy for the company, so everyone who wanted to, could blog.

For the external Emerson Process Experts blog, Deb and Jim keep it focused on making it easy as possible for customers in the process-manufacturing world to talk to experts at Emerson Process Management. Deb said, "The best way to get visibility to your expertise message, we believe, is to blog."

Describing how Emerson came to pick Jim as the blogger, Deb said, "The reason we went with Jim was an internal concern that our bloggers would not understand our brand and our messaging. When you start associating real people in a very large company like ours with huge brands like ours, there is just a lot of concern. So, Jim became the obvious choice. Jim has an engineering background and he has grown into a position where he is the hub of so many stories and he knows so many people across the company that we were able to get over many of the negative points with the decision makers. Jim is the brand manager for many of the popular brands, so the objections that 'our blogger won't understand the brand!' went away."

Jim added, "We didn't expect the people who did have the expertise to begin blogging and building up a number of posts. So, the strategy was that I would be a connector to the experts around the organization where I could tell their story individually and pop back on them in a few months based on what was

going on there. From other people in the organization they looked at it as a pilot for the company, but we wanted to show people both internally and externally that this could be effective and kind of a building block to get more bloggers going overtime."

Both Deb and Jim said that blogging is giving the company some really different results on the web, such as more coverage to areas of the company that were not getting any publicity, higher search engine rankings, and a way to communicate with customers and the press that was not possible before without a blog. Jim notes how he receives emails, calls, and Skype VOIP calls from people all over the world trying to connect to various Emerson people and companies. Both Deb and Jim believe that blogging is a direct conversation where all the details of how the company operates are described.

Jim said that commenting on other blogs helps with the success of his blog because, "we are trying to build a conversation about the topic at hand and the more you add to the conversation, then over time others will begin in the conversation on your blog. As more people become more blog and RSS aware, we want them to participate."

Blogger outreach was an important issue for the Emerson blog. According to Deb, "you are participating because conversations are going on, the conversations just haven't been as visible. I think people are adopting blogs to be heard and people can jump in and be part of the conversations. Word of mouth has always been around; it just hasn't been on the web. It's also about community. It's about the place. It's about the exchange that is happening. You're not pushing a message at them whether you are commenting or posting. You are simply engaging with the community."

Deb finds that people who are connectors really help their industry. Deb thought that Robert Scoble and Steve Rubel are two people who do that successfully.

Both Deb and Jim said that the posts that have generated the most interest are where there is already some discussion and interest on the web. Jim said, "Steve Rubel pointed to our RSS starter kit in a post on his blog, and due to the readership on his blog of the tens of thousands, many people found us that would have never found it any other way. So there can be an immediate impact if someone reads it that has some kind of interest some way. They can be someone of a completely different World, but blogs have the ability to quickly amplify it and share it and other people can link into it and something can

become very large very quickly.” The Emerson Process Experts blog had added something to the discussion through the blogger’s perspective on that issue.

When describing tools for interaction in the blogosphere, Deb said, "Trackbacks are one of the tools that help build the conversation and we liked that we would be joining in as part of the dialogue."

Discussing the issue of whether a company should blog or not, Jim said, "You do have to look at the culture. If you are an organization that wants to keep an iron hand on the flow of communication, this form of communication might not be for you. Or, it might be an organization that is very firm in the information they want to go out and when they want to go out. So, if you’re a business that can’t deal with the change of flow in information it may not be for you. But if you look at the companies out there, I would hope there is enough latitude between the two extremes to take the first step and try it internally on the company intranet."

1.1.8 Company: *Gourmet Station*

Blogger: Donna Lynes-Miller

Student Interviewer: Krystle Randall

Blog: www.gourmetstationblog.com

Donna Lynes-Miller is Founder and President of Gourmet Station, the premise of the website is that the company brings a fine dining experience to the customer. Gourmet Station sells fine meals and accessories on its website.

Donna described how everything on the blog has to be consistent with the brand. She moderates the comments and makes sure those comments are consistent with the brand. No profanity or unrelated comments are allowed on the blog. Donna explained that “everything has got to be very buttoned up, we have a very buttoned up brand, and we have a very upscale brand, very upscale, well educated customers. So anything that goes out there has to be consistent with that.” The blog also allows the company to discuss their content in a laid back tone. That content has produced higher rankings on search engines and helped to increase traffic to the blog by 10%.

Donna believes it to be important that the people who write on the blog are knowledgeable about food and wine. The blog's readers are looking for ideas around food, drink, and entertainment.

The blog has helped Donna's company add content to their website on the topics and products the company is focused on providing. Also, the blog has given Donna the ability to place content that they otherwise would not have been able to put on their website. Donna said it was important that a company covers all of the topics they wish to cover in their blog posts, and to categorize those topics by keyword.

The Gourmet Station blog has achieved a number two ranking on the keyword "gourmet dinners" in Yahoo! The blog has played a big part in helping the company to achieve that ranking. According to Donna, the blog has also helped establish the company's brand and provide more sales conversions by making a "passionate connection" with readers.

The topic that generates the most conversation and interaction from readers on the blog is romance. Donna said that made sense, as the search volumes for romance and dinner have a great connection.

Donna selects the content of the posts by season. Donna said the blog has 14 categories, and the company always has a recent post in each of the categories.

Donna recommends a company have a strategy before starting to blogging. Her company has two strategies: to fill their categories with content and to increase they're ranking on search engines.

1.1.9 Company: Indium Corporation

Blogger: Rich Short

Student Interviewer: Annemarie Martel

Blog: <http://www.indium.com/rickshort/>

Rick Short is Indium Corporation's Director of Marketing Communications. Indium Corporation provides materials to the electronics assembly materials industry.

Rich Short started blogging with a goal. Rich states it's important to

Have a goal, a very well-defined, clear end state that you're desired, and then work backwards to current situation to determine what you've got that can you can help reach your goal with. And, so, our goal was always to gain market share, improve our brand and our image, learn from our customer base, and let them talk to us. That's something that we've

always had as a goal. We do that traditionally through seminars and educational sessions, online question and answer type things and knowledge based things, face-to-face meetings. So, I saw blogging as a chance to listen, and that addressed one of our existing goals. And, always start with a goal. Always begin at the end of what you want to achieve.

Listening was one of Indium's goals and so Rich was looking for someone who can listen when the company started blogging. Rich went on to say, "if one of the goals is to learn from your audience, then you need to have a person that's a good listener. Not somebody who's all about me, and wants to blab on and on about themselves, but someone who's good at putting a couple of ideas, and then sitting back and hearing what people have to say."

Rich listed the four Ps of blogging.

*Point: if your blog doesn't have a specific point (purpose), then don't even start

*Passion: if you don't have a burning passion about the topic, then don't bother

*Personality: if you don't have the personality for blogging, then find something else to do with your time (here Rich means that a blogger's personality must come across in their writing, there must be opinion, likes and dislikes, not just a dry, dull review of the facts.)

*Perseverance: if you won't be able to stick with it once the blogging becomes routine, after you've battled with writer's block, after numerous distractions beckon, then find a new hobby

Rich's story about how his company started is very interesting and in part illustrates how his company was able to reach his customers through blogging. Two people blog at Indium, Rich and Dr. Ronald Lasky.

Rich blogs about Marcom, however, his customers don't buy Marcom, they buy electronic assembly materials. Rich's blog does not have all that much affect on his customers. However, Dr. Lasky's blog covers the topics Indium's customers are most interested in reading, what the customers do. Dr. Lasky is an expert in the industry. Dr. Lasky's blog has the content Rich Short's customers are most interested in reading. Indium can build better relationships with Indium customers by having Dr. Lasky blog rather than Rich Short. Rich explained the biggest reason their blogs were successful was because of the stature of Dr.

Ron Lasky in the industry. He also said that controversial subjects get more interest on the blog, but that's not what the Indium blogs aim for in terms of content.

Rich explained that Dr. Lasky had grown in his blog writing; he is now more comfortable writing in this style of writing. His posts are longer and more detailed. Rich thought he was more comfortable because Dr. Lasky had a better idea of what people wanted to read on his blog. Rich said, "You need to know what people want to hear. You know, you need to know what interests people. You need to know what success means to you." Relevancy or your audience's interests depends upon your audience.

Rich leaves commenting open, even to the extent of allowing spam comments to remain on the blog. The reasoning behind this is transparency. Rich said, "You need to be believable and credible. Well, you know, we already are, but when you start acting in another way you sort of degrade your existing image. We're very well known as a technology company, and as a very high integrity, sophisticated market resource. If I go to market with some filtered, manipulated set of information that takes us backwards. Our customers are smart enough to go through our comments, and see an ad for offshore gambling and realize that it's just spam, and then overlook it. Or, if some guy starts ranting and raving about how he's my competitor, he's the man, my customers are smart enough to realize."

Rich explained that during the first two years of blogging Indium concentrated on developing content for the blog. The company has a lot of opportunities to speak, and present good content. However sometimes the events don't have enough audience to justify a personal appearance. Blogging was an alternative where Indium could reach customers constantly through the web.

Describing the characteristics of his industry, Rich said that his company is in an industry where customers want to discuss legislation to ban the use of lead in solders, and other electronic assembly materials. There's a lot of dialogue from customers on these industry topics. However not very much of the conversation from customers comes from comments on the blog. As most of Indium's customers don't want to let their competitors know what they are doing. Instead customers send emails to the blog authors.

1.1.10 Company: Landfair Furniture

Blogger: Mike Landfair

Student Interviewer: Melissa Buckely

Blog: <http://landfairfurniture.blogspot.com>

Mike Landfair is the husband of Beverly Landfair, the owner of Landfair Furniture, a retail and wholesale furniture store in Portland, Oregon.

Mike described success for his blog, “To measure success for the blog I need to see traffic increase overtime. I want to hear some buzz about the blog, demonstrated by increased traffic into our bricks and mortar store. If you look at the blog you can see that publications have come in and interviewed us, so that message is getting out to people outside of our area. We have some ads on there, so that is an indicator that I am doing a good job if the revenues from the ads are helping. I think the top one though is traffic.”

Mike initially found it difficult to find other blogs to comment on in his own industry, the interior design industry. He happens to write about an industry where currently there are few blogs, so he does not have much opportunity to comment on topics he covers on his own blog on other blogs. Mike explained that, “The articles that I have pulled up that are getting a lot of traffic are about design, as well as the interviews with designers. Those have been popular, and I plan to do more of those I just posted a list of the top designers for 2005, so I will be doing interviews for that. I think those are popular too. On the other side I have seen some off-topic visits to posts with pictures. “I think most people are coming to the site for information about design.”

Mike reads a lot of books and magazines about his industry to develop content for the blog. He tries to give an overview of what the leading designers in the industry are thinking at the moment. Mike has moved away from promoting national designers to local designers. He thought that to develop a successful blog you have to blog frequently.

1.1.11 Company: Marqui

Blogger: Janet Johnson

Student Interviewer: Greg Chick

Blog: www.marqui.com/blog

Janet Johnson is the Vice President of Communications for Marqui, a software company that provides marketing solutions to marketers.

Janet explained that her boss Stephen King and Marc Canter devised a marketing strategy to pay bloggers to write about their new company, Marqui, in 2004. Once the company announced the program, the number of links from

bloggers generated grew dramatically. Marqui had a lot of criticism about the program, as many bloggers did not agree with the technique. Marqui paid every blogger for three months to blog, but the blogger was very open about being paid by Marqui. Janet stated that by entering into the conversation, and publishing every single post - whether positive or negative - it established the company's integrity by conducting blogging the right way.

Janet believes that if you can write an email well you could write a good blog post, and that a blogger should have an opinion and be prepared to go out on a limb. She drew an analogy between blogging and the ordinary conversations between two people over e-mail. She feels that if you can continue a conversation in email with another person, you have the ability to write a blog.

Janet believes that every business blog should have a mission. Her blog's mission is marketing excellence. Janet also said that "relevant materials and high quality content" are big factors for blogging success. Janet stressed that having a purpose for the blog was very important because it will help focus the bloggers' efforts.

According to Janet, companies should conduct a lot of commenting and send a lot of trackbacks, as connecting with other people in the blogosphere is very important to building relationships. Those relationships will help a company to achieve their goals. Janet said that the more you engage other bloggers, the more they will engage you.

The content that generates the most comments can be very random on Janet's blog, and she's been surprised that her personal posts have generated some of the most surprising comments.

1.1.12 Company: Masi Bicycles

Blogger: Tim Jackson

Student Interviewer: Kennie Swanson

Blog: <http://masiguy.blogspot.com>

Tim Jackson works for Haro Bicycle Corp., however he is the sole member of the marketing team for the Masi cycles division of Haro bicycle Corp. Tim is the sole blogger on the Masi blog.

Tim is the only full time employee at Haro Bicycle Corp. who works on the Masi brand. His blog has had a big impact because it makes his company seem bigger than it is.

Tim read a report by a cycle industry company that many biking enthusiasts were blogging, but no company in the industry was blogging. This gave him the idea of starting a blog for the Masi brand. Tim said, "I had to do something to come up with some creative guerilla marketing; something where I could get the name out and get people to once again connect with the brand and to connect to me by extension so that I could build on the brand's history and its future. And to me, blogging represented the easiest way of doing that."

The bicycle industry has an important trade paper called *Bicycle Retailer and Industry News* or BRAIN. Tim has achieved three feature articles in the trade paper since starting his blog.

Tim told us that one of the most important aspects of the blog has been the ability to ask for feedback from the readers. Tim said that the effort has helped to "shape the products that are coming out." It also gives pride of ownership with customers and retailers who read the blog in a way that's much more of a personal connection with the Masi brand.

The business has grown so much that Tim has not had as much time to spend on the blog. Recently Tim visited Australia and he was surprised to find so many retailers who already knew about his blog.

According to Tim, the transparency on the blog about what's happening with the Masi Company has helped him reach more customers, even if the blog has raised the occasional eyebrow with Haro Management when he blogs about future plans for bikes.

Tim explained, "Every year the bike industry has a huge trade show in Las Vegas- it's called Interbike. And that's where all the manufacturers and all the retailers who can attend get together, and you know, basically we sell to retailers. And, I have retailers frequently walk into my booth and say, that they read the blog on a regular basis. Even guys who don't carry my bikes and aren't going to carry my bikes, they read it because they find it entertaining. They agree with or connect with one way or another. I consider that a big success."

One of Tim's retailers told him that their retail store has computers with access to the web set to the Masi blog. The Masi retailer told Tim he set the computer browser to the Masi Guy blog so that customers can learn about the brand and get connected with Masi after the customer leaves the store.

According to Tim, the blog has made it easier to get in touch with retailers. Tim does not have a big advertising budget, and now the blog has reduced the need for a large budget to advertise to retailers because so many of the retailers are aware of the blog.

Tim believes that "a key ingredient to being successful with a blog personally is to network with other bloggers and to do the right thing and post comments and add links and do things like that because you build your strength and credibility within the community and you're not just another, you know, soulless marketer with a blog site."

Tim thinks it is important to receive comments from bloggers on his blog, and especially important to receive comments from important bloggers in his industry. That's why Tim thinks it's important to seek out important blogs in his industry and "leave comments there to invite that back and forth dialogue." Posts about the latest products generate the most comments on Tim's blog.

Tim told us about his experiences blogging about the Tour De France. He wrote on his blog about the race in France from his office in San Diego, but his take on the race and review of existing news reports gave such good information about the events there that he received a lot of traffic.

Tim said that over time he learned what content to develop for specific segments of his audience. That insight has given him the ability to write content that will attract more attention.

Tim believes companies could gain a lot from blogging by giving them a window on their marketplace.

1.1.13 Company: Microsoft

Blogger: Heather Hamilton

Student Interviewer: Laura Stevenson

Blog: <http://blogs.msdn.com/heatherleigh/>

Heather Hamilton is the staffing manager for Microsoft's marketing central sourcing team.

Heather Hamilton has been a recruiter with Microsoft for over seven years. Most of the blogs at Microsoft are developer blogs used to conduct outreach to customers; only a small number of blogs at Microsoft are involved with marketing or staffing.

Heather described how she just used "heatherleigh" in her URL. It was never intended to be the title, but people look at the URL and assumed that her last name was Leigh. She was nervous about using her name in the URL, although she now realizes that she did not have to worry.

Heather thought that corporate bloggers should have a real business reason behind their reasons to blog. Heather stated, "The reason why I'm successful as a blogger at Microsoft is, I have a job that can be accomplished through blogging, which is building our employment brand."

Heather looks at several success points for her blog, including: whether the company hires someone because of the blog, resumes are being sent, and long-term employment brand building.

Heather thought that commenting on other blogs drives traffic back to her blog, while reading blogs about marketing helps her understand the marketplace. Heather said that her personal posts drive the most traffic and receive a lot of the comments made on her blog.

Heather stated that blogging requires that you have some form of interactivity and comments are one way to allow interactivity. You also have to be authentic when someone disagrees with opinions and it is important to listen and respond. Heather really wants to hear people's opinions. She also stated that people are going to talk about Microsoft as a potential employer whether Microsoft is in the conversation or not and she'd much rather be part of the conversation, "because then I can influence how people feel about it, and I can learn about it."

Heather thought that companies should decide if blogging fits in with their corporate culture. Companies should have a business reason for blogging, and select the right person to blog, someone who is a good writer with the time to blog, who isn't sensitive to criticism.

1.1.14 Company: Mississippi Hospital Association

Blogger: Shawn Lea

Student Interviewer: Amanda Nastari

Blogs: <http://mhanewsnow.typepad.com/aroundthestate/>,
<http://mhanewsnow.typepad.com/>, and
<http://mhanewsnow.typepad.com/thebigpicture>.

Shawn Lea runs the blog for the Mississippi Hospital Association, a blog about hospitals and hospital employees in the news around the state of Mississippi.

Shawn started to blog because the Association had an electronic newsletter, and by putting the electronic newsletter on a blog it was easier to search the content. Each article became a blog post. Shawn also wanted to blog to post photos on the web. Shawn's focus of her blog is about sharing information with members.

According to Shawn, she does not spend very much time commenting on other blogs. Shawn thought that was due to the nature of her association's audience, hospital members in the state of Mississippi. Associations have built in audiences and so don't need to search for readers as much as a stand-alone blog with no affiliation. That's the reason Shawn does not spend very much time commenting on other blogs.

Shawn also writes a related marketing blog about nonprofit marketing, she has more comments generated on that blog, where the content relates to issues affecting associations and trends with non-profit associations. The more personalized the post on her personal blog the more comments she receives.

Discussing the benefits of blogs, Shawn said, "Look at things you already have internally that could be better served as a blog. Things that if they used on a blog they could get better rankings on search engines and easier search capabilities, where readers and members can find news much more easily."

1.1.15 Company: MSInteractive

Blogger: David Paull

Student Interviewer: Amanda Johnsen

Blog: <http://perceptionanalyzer.typepad.com/>

David Paull is the vice president for MSInteractive, a company that develops and markets interactive audience participation products and services for focus groups and business events.

David Paull at MSInteractive described how he started a blog at his company and quickly realized that to be authentic he had to write about more than just his company's products and services. David writes about his clients' markets and industry making sure that the blog provides useful information for his customers.

David stated that it took a few iterations before he found the right voice for his blog, before David was comfortable with his blog, he had to develop a voice that rang true for his audience. And he also tried out a couple of different

blogging technologies. Success for David's blog was, "generating a dialogue with readers," or "getting feedback from people," plus getting calls from prospective customers.

David thought that to have real success with a blog, you have to "read a lot of other blogs and you have to engage in the discussions on other blogs." As David's readership grew on his blog, the more he read and commented on other blogs. David said, "I think it's critical if you want to have successful blog, to comment on other people's blogs. I think you have to engage, in other blogs otherwise just getting the word out about your blog is very hard to do."

David clearly made the point that he gained a lot of additional traffic by commenting on other blogs, and having the bloggers and readers find out about his blog from those comments is very important. David also thought that the blog had really helped his company to achieve higher search engine rankings.

David thought that the most comments come from the posts that are the most topical or controversial. He said, "blogging is very participatory and it's a community of people who want to participate. So people participate in things that either get their dander up or that they feel is controversial or they want to weigh in on or find areas where they can be similar to other people. And posts like what word do you most hate."

David thought that posts where people have an opinion on one side of the argument or the other would generate the most interest.

1.1.16 Company: Paperback Bazaar

Blogger: Ralph Wayne

Student Interviewer: Greg Chick

Blog: No longer working.

Ralph started his blog because he looked at forums in the comic book industry and discovered that many forums did not get a lot of participation. He thought a blog would help promote his company without the need for much participation initially.

Discussing the issue of commenting Ralph described what generates the most comments on his blog, "We pick the content that will annoy people the most." "One example is this week we were arguing about the new Batman comics, where everyone hates it but they keep buying it. It would be like arguing about the new King Kong movie if you were a movie store."

Ralph went on to say "If they are going to blog they need something interesting to blog about and something that will get conversation going. If you ask them how they feel about something, that's not going to get a reaction from people. If you get down there and say you hate this comic book it is the worst thing ever written you will get some reply to that. You have to be entertaining. The web is either advertising or entertaining. You have to give them a reason to be there."

1.1.17 Blogger: Jeremy Pepper

Student Interviewer: AnneMarie Martel

Blog: <http://pop-pr.blogspot.com/>

Jeremy Pepper is one of the earliest PR bloggers in the US market. He started his Pop PR blog when he started his own PR agency. Now working for a larger agency he continues to write his personal blog.

Jeremy thinks that any company can blog, but a company needs to have either the right person or the right corporate culture. Jeremy went on to describe how Robert Scoble of Microsoft has really changed the impression of the company among its customers. Jeremy said, "I can say without any issue that Robert Scoble has given Microsoft a friendly persona out there on the Internet. He's given a face to the organization that's different than Steve Balmer or Bill Gates. He's made it warm and fuzzy. It's no longer the evil empire. It's just, "Oh this is the company Scoble works for!" It's – It helps take off the taint that the company has had." Jeremy went on to say, "He (Scoble) doesn't talk about Microsoft all that much, but he is known as a Microsoft blogger."

Discussing the issue of what makes his blog successful, Jeremy said, "I think what draws the attention to my blog is my honesty." And went onto say, "People know that I'm not going to sugarcoat anything. That I'm going to be out there. I'm going to be honest. I'm going to say what I'm thinking."

Jeremy stated that that bloggers have to conduct a conversation with their audience, and that it's important to reply to people who comment on a blog, to comment on other blogs, but not to comment for the sake for commenting, only when it fits in with a conversation.

Jeremy discussed how he thought that bloggers in the PR community should focus their blogging efforts on helping the PR community to improve their community. Jeremy thought that to be successful in blogging takes a lot of time and a thick skin and some passion.

1.1.18 Company: Stone Creek Coffee

Blogger: Tom Pionek

Student Interviewer: Krista Grosser

Blog: <http://sccv3.stonecreekcoffee.com/blog.cfm>

Tom Pionek works at Stone Creek Coffee, a coffee roaster and retailer of specialty coffees. He has over ten years of Internet database marketing experience. Tom helps run the Stone Creek Coffee blog. Stone Creek Coffee has nine retail stores in the Wisconsin area.

Tom told us that the ability to change content on the website more frequently was a big factor in setting up the blog. Nearly everyone at the roasting plant can blog although employees at the retail stores don't blog, as those employees are more often than not very transitory, and so Stone Creek Coffee prefers to have those employees blog who will write over time.

Tom thought it was important for the people in his company to blog, "from the heart and not try to put a spin on something." The employees try very hard not to make the blog seem very corporate by talking about their everyday work experiences.

As a measure of success, Tom tracks if his blog receives good feedback. Tom said the blog has generated a lot of publicity for the company. Other non-company bloggers had a big impact on the company blog by commenting and linking to the blog. Those links have helped with higher rankings on Google search terms such as "wholesale coffee".

Tom said that he is trying to use the blog as a content generator for printed materials and newsletters. He reuses the posts in such printed material for customers.

According to Tom, the content that generates the most comments are the posts about the coffee and the unique properties of their roasts. Most of the content is about the product, stores, and community projects. One of the posts that generated the most comments was when one of their store managers left the company. Many well wishers to the store manager left comments on the blog.

Tom recommended that a company decide who is going to blog and have a schedule of content.

1.1.19 Company: Stonyfield Farms

Blogger: Chris Halverson

Student Interviewer: Krystle Randall

Blog: <http://www.stonyfield.com/weblog/>

Chris Halverson is famous in the blogosphere for being hired as a blogger for one of the first non-technology companies, Stonyfield Farms, a yogurt company.

Describing the inspiration for the Stonyfield blogs, Chris told the interviewer that the Howard Dean campaign in the Presidential election had a big effect on Gary Hershberg, the CEO of Stonyfield Farms. After watching the benefits to the Dean campaign in the election, Gary wanted to use blogs as a way to connect with his customers.

Stonyfield's blog is very well known in a number of blogging communities because of its early adoption of the corporate blogging. The company started with five blogs and reduced the number of blogs to two. We asked Chris why the company cut down on the number of blogs. Chris said, "We started out with five, I was the only staff person doing it and it did get to be a little too much to write and maintain five. We had five different topic areas and all along we considered it one big experiment. So, we put the five out there to see what works. We got rid of one because it never seemed to find an audience. It was sort of an insider's view to the company, you know, I wrote about quirky little things we did as employees. We had a potluck today, in honor of St. Patrick's Day, or whatever it was and it didn't really seem to find an audience which is in retrospect, understandable."

Chris explained that the company had a blog focused on the environment but it shut down because there was not enough time to write content for the blog. Stonyfield decided that it would be better to let other voices in the blogosphere take the lead on this issue. Chris said that while it's important to conduct organic farming and support alternative energy, it is not the main focus of the company.

Chris explained that Stonyfield did not review or fact check content before she published it. Chris thought that lack of restrictions on what could be posted led to a very human voice for the blog. Chris spends about two hours a day writing the two remaining blogs. Chris writes all the content, except for the Bovine Bugle. The content for that blog is written by one of Stonyfield's organic farmers.

Stonyfield did want some measurement of success for its blogs, and wanted to demonstrate that the blog was building relationships with blog readers. Chris told us that the measurement for success for the blog was when a reader commented or sent a note to the bloggers.

One of the biggest success factors identified for Stonyfield blogs was the Stonyfield Farm blog. Jonathan, Stonyfield's organic farming blogger, writes about whatever is happening in his life on the farm, during the calving season or maple sugar season. As one of the first consumer product company's to blog, Stonyfield caught everyone's attention in the early days of blogging, they were watched closely to see what the company would do and how it would blog.

Chris told the interviewer that the blog was successful even though Chris did not write about yogurt more than three or four times in two years.

Chris did not spend a lot of time linking to other bloggers. However, she did monitor the web for mentions of Stonyfield on other blogs. She would correct any factual errors stated on other blogs and link to relevant websites.

When the blog first started in April of 2004, Chris used to write about politics and religion and other non-business issues. Those posts received a lot of comments. The company started a blog about strong women because the majority of yogurt eaters are women. One of the most popular posts was who readers thought would make the best women presidential candidate.

One of the Stonyfield employees, a father of a new baby, wrote a post about how messy his house was because of the time he and his partner were spending on looking after the new baby. The employee mentioned that his family used formula and this caused some readers to write that Stonyfield endorsed infant formula instead of breast-feeding, even though Stonyfield did not. The post on baby formula received over forty comments. So many comments were made that it was almost to the point of being unmanageable for the company. The Stonyfield blog did not have a comment policy, and Chris decided to create one stating that if all points of view have been stated in comments Chris would not allow any additional comments.

Chris moderates blog posts for the tone of the comments. She does not let the blogs ever get very "nasty," which is something she has seen on many blogs about parenting where people will criticize each other for making different choices. Chris would also not allow comments that are factually wrong, such as a comment stating, "babies need to watch television in the first month of life."

Chris would do some of her own fact checking or post the comment with her own comment stating that the issues raised have not been proven.

Chris spends a lot of time reading the news about parenting. Chris tied the blog content into Stonyfield yogurt products because the company was one of the first companies to put DHA in their yogurt, a fatty acid helpful for the brain development of babies. Chris would not try to pitch the product but ask questions around the subject, such as asking if people know about the importance of their babies eating DHA, and if they or their babies eat food with DHA in it. Chris said she tries to "raise questions in people's minds" or be provocative, by asking the question what do you think of this issue or that, to generate comments.

Chris thought it was important for companies to understand how blogs can be applied in their own marketplace and learn how a blog can be useful to their company. Chris thinks companies should not be afraid of their customers' responses and that a company will need to dedicate enough resources for a company to be able to blog.

1.1.20 Company: SuccessFactors

Blogger: Max Goldman

Student Interviewer: Kennie Swanson

Blog: <http://blogs.successfactors.com/workforce-performance/>

Max Goldman is Product Marketing Manager and blogger for Success Factors. The company provides web-based integrated talent management software solutions to help organizations align, develop, motivate and retain their employees.

Max told us that the blog was started as a way to reach members of the HR community and he said "Really there's just a handful of people that are participating in the conversation and to the extent that's possible I've reached out to those people."

Speaking on what skills and expertise one needs to make a good blogger, Max said, "The only consideration as to who should be a corporate blogger is good judgment." Max said a company has to walk the line between revealing private and public information.

According to Max, his company looks at unique numbers, page views, and the Technorati rank of the blog as measures of success for the blog. Max also

attempts to participate in conversations about his industry in the blogosphere, Max sees blogging as one way to achieve their goals for traffic and ranking in the industry.

Max thought that persistence is very important in order to be a successful blogger, but you also need the patience to continue blogging, as a company will never know what will attract their audience's attention and what will not. Max described how each communication with another blogger helps to build a stronger relationship that shifts perceptions about a company positively over time.

Max stays on topic about the HR industry in his blog and avoids posting personal issues because his audience would not be interested, although he has shifted from a reporting posture to an opinion posture with his blog.

According to Max, the fundamental underpinnings of the blogosphere are about conversation and dialogue. Anything you can do to enhance that dialogue will help both the conversation and the corporate blogger who is involved in the conversation.

Appendix 2.0 Interview Questions

John Cass and Dr. Walter Carl developed the interview questions initially. The questions were then provided to the student's of Dr. Carl's Advanced Organizational Communication class. The students discussed each question, made suggested edits, and added several questions based on their interests. Below are the questions the Dr. Carl's student's asked of the bloggers during the spring semester:

1. What are the factors that determined your company's decision to blog?
2. Do you feel there is a "right" kind of person to blog in your industry? If not, why not? If so, what characteristics, role and experience make up the right kind of person?
3. Describe the sequence of events that have occurred in the development for your company's corporate blogging efforts.
4. What factors contributed to the eventual success of your blog? Describe how each factor helped to make your blog a success.

5. Was blogger outreach important for the success of your blog? If so explain how?

6. How did other bloggers in your industry contribute to the eventual success of your blog, if at all?

7. Describe the content that generates the most comments and traffic on your blog? Please describe the content in terms of industry related, personal, or off-topic. Please provide examples of posts that produced a lot of trackbacks, links and comments. Why do you think these posts were so successful in generating such audience interest?

8. A lot of people in the blogging community praise blogs for the level of transparency they offer. What do you think makes a blog transparent? Which of the following do you allow on your blog?

Comments?

Trackbacks?

Critical comments?

9. How do you determine the content of the posts on your blog? And were you developing the same sort of content when you first started blogging? If there was a change in content on your blog overtime, what was the progression of change, and what were the reasons for the progression?

10. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give to a company making the decision about whether or not they should blog?

11. Is there anything else you think we should know in order to better understand what makes for a successful blog and what companies should do in order to start blogging?

Appendix 3.0 Authors & Bios

3.1 Lead Authors

John Cass - Backbone Media, Inc.

Dr. Walter Carl – Northeastern University

3.2 Student Interviewers and transcribers

Melissa Buckley
Greg Chick
Krista Grosser
Leah Hyland
Amanda Johnsen
Annmarie Martel
Amanda Nastari
Krystle Randall
Laura Stevenson
Kennie Swanson

3.3 Backbone Media, Inc. Transcription & Editing

Stephen Turcotte
Megan Dickinson
Kristine Munroe
Dave Alpert

3.4 Northeastern University Editing

Jenn Oles

3.5 Lead Author Bios

Walter J. Carl, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies, Northeastern University

Dr. Walter Carl conducts research and teaches in the areas of interpersonal and organizational communication. His research explores how organizations effectively and ethically manage their stakeholders' word-of-mouth communication through an understanding of the similarities and differences between everyday and institutional WOM practices. His manuscript entitled "What's All The Buzz About? Everyday Communication and the Relational Basis of Word-of-Mouth and Buzz Marketing Practices" was recently published in *Management Communication Quarterly* (2006, Volume 19, Issue 4) and his research report "To Tell Or Not To Tell? Assessing the Practical Effects of Disclosure for Word-of-Mouth Marketing Agents and Their Conversational

Partners” was the first academic-industry collaboration that revealed how honest disclosure of participation in organized WOM marketing programs is not only ethically sound but also has practical business benefits. Dr. Carl is an active member on the Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association’s (WOMMA) Advisory Board, co-chair of their Research and Metrics Council where he leads the workgroup editing Volume 2 of the research book entitled Measuring Word-of-Mouth, and was on the drafting committee for the WOMMA Terminology Framework, the first set of industry standards for researching and measuring WOM marketing. Dr. Carl also consults with companies on how to build WOM principles into their business practices. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa and his master’s degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Home Page: <http://www.waltercarl.neu.edu>

Word-of-Mouth Communication Study Blog: <http://www.wom-study.blogspot.com>

John Cass – Marketing & PR blogger

John lives in Boston, Massachusetts with his wife Karin. He has held senior positions in marketing and PR for a number of companies. John moved to California from the United Kingdom in 1992, and has a B.A. from Leicester Polytechnic in the United Kingdom.

He is Immediate Past President of the Boston Chapter of the American Marketing Association. John is also a research fellow with the Society of New Communications Research.

Personal Blog: <http://pr.typepad.com>

Appendix 4.0 Research Methodology

Late in the fall of 2005, Dr. Walter Carl of Northeastern University and John Cass. started to discuss some ideas about what it takes to build a successful blog. Dr. Carl had previously conducted word of mouth marketing research, and John Cass had been the lead author on the Backbone Corporate Blogging Survey of 2005, a survey and series of case studies on corporate blogs. Both colleagues wanted to expand on their own research, yet answer a different set of questions while collaborating together in a new research project. Dr. Carl’s Advanced Organizational Communication spring class on corporate blogging

was seen as the opportunity to ask some different questions about corporate blogging.

The research team wanted to determine the reasons, conditions, and factors it takes to make a successful blog, and in the process help a company to determine if they should blog and how they should blog. To this goal Dr. Carl's students interviewed 20 corporate bloggers with a view to determining how each person began blogging. In addition, student interviewers would learn from the process of conducting the blogging success interviews for credit in Dr. Carl's class, from helping to design the survey questions to conducting and transcribing the interviews. There were initial qualifying questions asked to determine whether the blogger would be included in the study. We asked if the bloggers had been blogging for longer than one year, and if the blogger considered their blog a success.

Northeastern University's Division of Research Integrity approved the study.

Participants for the study were recruited from the list of people who participated in the Backbone Media corporate blogging survey 2005 by email. In addition, several study participants were recruited through announcements on blogs and by networking with bloggers directly.

The interviews for the surveys took place during April of 2006. Students contacted study participants to set up a time for an interview. Students used the interview questionnaire to ask participants a series of questions. The interviews were then recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for recurring themes.

Appendix 5.0 Glossary

Blog / Blogging

A blog is a website that is typically driven by a content management system. The home page of the website features articles or posts in sequential order by date. Each post can be categorized and found through the side navigation of categories.

Blogging is the process of writing a blog article or post on a blog, or commenting on another blog.

Blog Aggregator

A blog aggregator is a website that lists a number of RSS feeds from any number of blogs. The aggregator features headlines or text from the RSS feeds of the blogs that are aggregated within the blog aggregator.

Blogger/Blogspot

Blogger or blogspot is a blog publishing system provided by Google.com for free to any Internet user.

Blogosphere

An informal term for describing the whole community of bloggers on the web, the term is also used to define a particular community such as the PR community of bloggers or PR Blogosphere.

Comments / Commenting

Blogs are a design of website that allow a lot of interaction between the writer of the blog, and the blogger's audience. A comment dialog box allows a blog reader to make a comment on a blog post. Due to the increasing volume of comment spam, many bloggers moderate their comments before publishing them.

Podcasting

Podcasting is the process of creating an audio recording and syndicating that content through an RSS feed.

RSS feed

RSS or really simple syndication is not as you might think an example of stick man cartoons being syndicated through national newspapers but the syndication of one website's content to another website or RSS feed reader.

Bloglines.com is an example of a web based RSS feed reader.

The advantage to the visitor who is using an RSS feed reader is that you know if the content on a website or blog has been updated without actually visiting the website. RSS feed readers are designed in such a way that the visitor can review a large number of feeds all at the same time. Some people have 50, 100, or several hundred feeds in their feed reader. The design is much more efficient

than email, in that typically an email user does not know when they are going to receive an email, for example a monthly newsletter, but with RSS the visitor can ask for the content when they are ready to receive the information. RSS makes the process of monitoring content updates much more efficient. An RSS feed can be used by a visitor or website to request for updates to a website on a periodic basis or when a visitor returns to their feed reader.

What's interesting is that the demand for content from publishers increases with RSS, instead of cursing more regular email newsletters than once a month, an RSS feed reader might begin to question the same content provider's ability to produce content when they are not writing every few days.

The marketing opportunity is that your customers will be more likely to read your content, as you can break up the content into chunks over time, and also the RSS reader is able to see more content than they could ever do before.

SEO / organic SEO

SEO or search engine optimization is the process of optimizing a web page in order to increase the chances of the web page appearing at a higher ranking in editorial listings on a search engine.

Search engines such as Google, Yahoo! and MSN feature two types of listings, editorial or organic listings and sponsored listings. Organic listings are those web pages listed in a search engine, which are ranked without sponsorship by a search engine. Organic SEO is the process of attempting to obtain a higher listing in the organic section of a search engine.

Technorati.com

Technorati.com is a search engine for blogs and RSS feeds. The company developed the idea of tags.

Trackbacks

The best way for a blogger to alert another blogger that she has mentioned her work in a blog post is to use a trackback. Trackbacks send a notification to a blog that another blogger has written a post about their blog article. To send a trackback, a blogger has to copy and paste a trackback URL from a blogger's article into the ping field of a blog content management system. Once the blog post and trackback ping is published the blog content management system notifies a ping server that the page has been updated. The ping server then

notifies the blogging system of the blog from the original trackback that a trackback has been sent from another blog. A trackback link will then appear underneath the post on the original blog.

There is an increasing amount of trackback Spam from malicious blog Spammers, and so many blogging publishing systems allow bloggers to monitor trackbacks before deciding whether to publish the trackback.

Search engines give higher rankings to those websites that have more links from relevant websites. Trackback Spammers send trackbacks to obtain more links in order to get higher rankings on search engines and receive direct traffic. The correct etiquette in using a trackback is to reference in your post a blog post where you wish to send a trackback. Commenting in your own blog article about a blog article on another blog where you wish to send a trackback will increase the likelihood that a blogger will publish a trackback on their blog.

Successful trackbacks, like successful blog marketing, can only be achieved if a blogger understands that he is having a dialogue with other bloggers. Merely targeting other blogs for links will not only get your trackback deleted but may also give you a reputation for Spamming amongst your industry's community of bloggers. Don't send a trackback unless you wanted to comment indirectly through a trackback on a blog post, or you wish to reference some information provided by a blogger's article on his blog. Only send a trackback if your post is relevant to the other blogger's article. Lastly, definitely do not randomly send trackbacks to a blogger's article when your own article does not even reference their post, or has nothing to do with the content on another blogger's blog.