

# THE WEB STARTUP SUCCESS GUIDE

---

*Bob Walsh*

Apress®

## ***The Web Startup Success Guide***

**Copyright © 2009 by Bob Walsh**

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner and the publisher.

ISBN-13 (pbk): 978-1-4302-1985-9

ISBN-13 (electronic): 978-1-4302-1986-6

Printed and bound in the United States of America 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Trademarked names may appear in this book. Rather than use a trademark symbol with every occurrence of a trademarked name, we use the names only in an editorial fashion and to the benefit of the trademark owner, with no intention of infringement of the trademark.

Lead Editor: Jonathan Hassell

Technical Reviewer: Thomas Rushton

Editorial Board: Clay Andres, Steve Anglin, Mark Beckner, Ewan Buckingham, Tony Campbell,

Gary Cornell, Jonathan Gennick, Michelle Lowman, Matthew Moodie, Jeffrey Pepper,

Frank Pohlmann, Ben Renow-Clarke, Dominic Shakeshaft, Matt Wade, Tom Welsh

Senior Project Manager: Sofia Marchant

Copy Editor: Elliot Simon

Associate Production Director: Kari Brooks-Copony

Senior Production Editor: Laura Cheu

Compositor: Susan Glinert Stevens

Proofreader: Greg Teague

Indexer: BIM Indexing & Proofreading Services

Artist: April Milne

Cover Designer: Kurt Krames

Manufacturing Director: Tom Debolski

Distributed to the book trade worldwide by Springer-Verlag New York, Inc., 233 Spring Street, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10013. Phone 1-800-SPRINGER, fax 201-348-4505, e-mail [orders-ny@springer-sbm.com](mailto:orders-ny@springer-sbm.com), or visit <http://www.springeronline.com>.

For information on translations, please contact Apress directly at 2855 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 600, Berkeley, CA 94705. Phone 510-549-5930, fax 510-549-5939, e-mail [info@apress.com](mailto:info@apress.com), or visit <http://www.apress.com>.

Apress and friends of ED books may be purchased in bulk for academic, corporate, or promotional use. eBook versions and licenses are also available for most titles. For more information, reference our Special Bulk Sales—eBook Licensing web page at <http://www.apress.com/info/bulksales>.

The information in this book is distributed on an “as is” basis, without warranty. Although every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this work, neither the author(s) nor Apress shall have any liability to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the information contained in this work.

# Social Media and Your Startup

---

*“Tell me to what you pay attention and I will tell you who you are”*

—Jose Ortega y Gasset (Spanish philosopher and humanist, 1883–1955)

*“The simple act of paying attention can take you a long way.”*

—Keanu Reeves (actor)

## It’s All About Attention

Over the past few years the economics of attention has fundamentally changed—and that change has profound and deep implications for your startup. Sure, “building buzz around your startup” has always been high on every founder’s to-do list. But what has changed is what works, what doesn’t work, and what you need to do.

A decade ago, in the dot-com heyday, you built buzz by hiring a good public relations firm (for about \$30,000 a month, minimum) that would woo and wheedle the computer trade press for a mention, a review, anything. And you could plan to spend a good \$50,000 or more (way more) doing a launch event. Of course, all of this was just the prelude to a good web ad banner campaign chock-full of pop-ups, pop-downs, and pop-overs, all designed to scream louder than the other ads at the sucker watching the screen.

Back then, there was no Facebook or Twitter, no blogs or social networks, no news blogs, no social media. Attention was something you ripped out of (and ripped off) “consumers” with advertising and sycophant reviews in trade magazines while “harvesting their eyeballs.”

The economics of attention online worked like strip mining: you blow up the attention of millions to garner a handful of sales, and who cared—everyone else did the same thing. You—the advertiser—were in the business

of stealing attention, or at least appropriating it without consent, via the tried-and-true process of hammering your message into thick consumer skulls.

This same approach is alive and well today—just turn on your television—but something else has arisen. It's why Facebook has as many active users as Russia has "active citizens" and why social networks worldwide are growing, in terms of the number of participants, the depth of their participation, and the effect others in these networks have on opinion, values, and buying decisions.

What's developed is a different approach to attention, to markets, to people. And the cluetrain manifesto represents the theory, the instigator, and the clearest guide to that shift. What is the cluetrain manifesto? Back in 1999, Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger wrote the cluetrain manifesto (<http://cluetrain.com>) to nail on the door of the Holy Church of Advertising a list of tenets about markets and people in the Online World.

The preamble to the manifesto starts with: "We are not seats or eyeballs or end users or consumers. We are human beings—and our reach exceeds your grasp. *Deal with it.*"

The full list of 95 statements about the Online World reads like a social network Declaration of Independence from traditional marketing. Here are a few statements that should hit home if you're the founder of a startup.

- Markets are conversations.
- The Internet is enabling conversations among human beings that were simply not possible in the era of mass media.
- Corporations do not speak in the same voice as these new networked conversations. To their intended online audiences, companies sound hollow, flat, literally inhuman.
- To speak with a human voice, companies must share the concerns of their communities.
- But first, they must belong to a community.
- Companies that do not belong to a community of discourse will die.
- Markets do not want to talk to flacks and hucksters. They want to participate in the conversations going on behind the corporate firewall.
- We are immune to advertising. Just forget it.

- You want us to pay? We want you to pay attention.
- We know some people from your company. They're pretty cool online. Do you have any more like that you're hiding? Can they come out and play?

We now have a new economy of attention online. First and foremost, are you interesting? If you're not interesting, you'd better be prepared to work hard to bring interesting things to the global conversation to rescue your startup from obscurity.

The good news about how social networks have retooled who gets attention online is that the new rules favor startups.

## The Big Idea

So here's the big idea we're going to be unpacking later in this chapter: The other critical job in a startup today (besides development) is that of *community manager*. That's the person or persons who do the work to connect your startup to social media so that it gets and continues to get that buzz it needs.

Unless you enjoy shoveling money into a wood stove to keep warm, social media replaces traditional advertising. Matter of fact, you'd probably get a better return on your initial investment by burning dollar bills than by paying for most online and all offline forms of interruption-based advertising. The return was never anything to brag about, and as traditional media (television, radio, print, newspapers) have declined, it's now abysmal.

So what this chapter is really about is what a community manager does, where she<sup>1</sup> or he does it, how, how often, and so on.

But before we get there, we need to cover a few things, the two key components of social media: blogs and Twitter. And we'll also dig into the one part of traditional marketing—PR—that has value and that is frantically trying to reinvent itself in a social world, talking with some of the people who's words online can make or break your startup.

Since time management is definitely an issue, let's start with the not-so-little problem of tracking what needs tracking in the social media world.

---

<sup>1</sup> She? Absolutely. I'd argue that women in developed countries are by and large much better at working with people, creating conversations, and being community managers than alpha-male-developer-geek types. This is a generalization, but I think it's true. If you disagree, I suggest you get out more!

## Setting Up Your Social Media Basic Radar

I'm assuming that as a developer you are familiar with Twitter and Facebook and some of the other social media out there. But now, as you go from being a developer to being a startup founder, you have new needs and new concerns about who is saying what about your company and its product.

For starters, you need to erect what I call your *social media basic radar*. This is your startup's early warning system that good or bad things are about to rain down on your head or server. There are lots of ways of building this radar and lots of nice add-ons you can devise and install once you have the basic system working. And, as with all things Internet, what does the job today can easily be supplanted tomorrow by something that does the job even better.

For this section I'm going to use Mint.com (which we will get to know better in Chapter 7) because one of the things their CEO, Aaron Patzer, does well is social media. So here's a list of components from which to assemble your radar. Feel free to substitute parts that suit you better.

- iGoogle as your home page (there are alternatives, but this is the leader)
- Google Blog Search
- Twitter Search and TweetGrid
- BackType
- FriendFeed
- gReader and PostRank

I'm assuming that, as someone technically with it, you don't need step-by-step instructions here. Instead I'm going to focus on how each of these components works.

## iGoogle

URL: <http://www.google.com/ig>

**What it is:** Free widget/RSS multitable home page for any and all browsers.

**What it does:** For our purposes, it's the canvas onto which all the other components deliver their data.

**Setup:** iGoogle is part of your Google account. You want to set it as your start page for whatever browsers/boxes you use in the course of the day. Then create or add tabs for at least the following: "Our Startup," "Our Industry," "Me," and "Competitors." These tabs are going to be the endpoints for a number of RSS feeds from the other components, all with the goal of making it easy to know what people are saying about your startup, your competition, and you.

Keep in mind that, in iGoogle Settings, you can choose which tabs and tab components you want to share with specific people, such as the rest of your startup team. Day by day, Google gets more social. You can also import/export tabs, and you can backup your radar.

## Google Blog Search

URL: <http://blogsearch.google.com>

**What it is:** Google search, but only for blogs and with a very handy search by time period.

**What it does:** It lets you create ongoing RSS feeds for search terms as they appear on blogs.

**Setup:** Start with your startup's name, if it was mentioned in the past week. Mentions a week or less old are still fresh enough to get into the conversation. At some point you're going to want to add a feed for the last day, the last 12 hours, and, when you have your launch or a major release, the last hour.

Each search has a unique RSS feed (see your browser's address bar) that when clicked lets you add it to iGoogle (Figure 6-1).

Keep adding Google Blog Search feeds for your name, your competitor's name, and other keywords that make sense. Once you're done, it's time to move on to provisioning the next part of your radar.

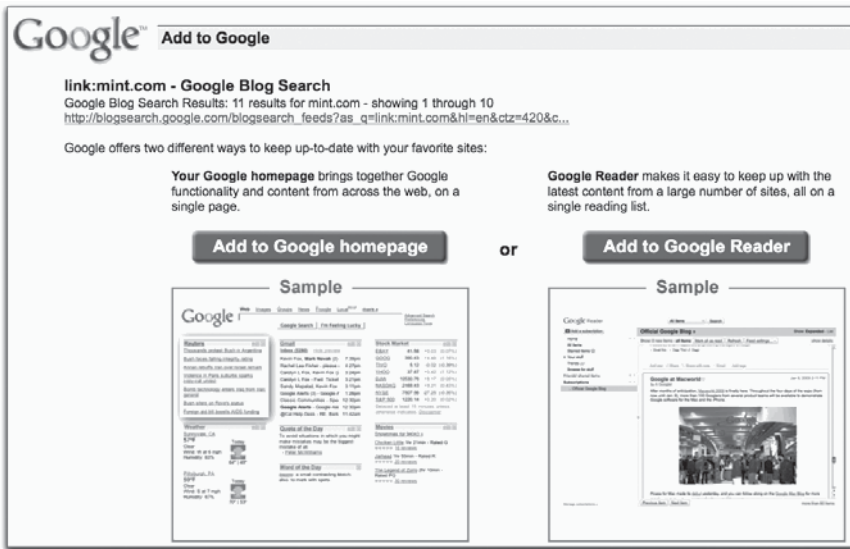


Figure 6-1. Adding a feed from Google Blog Search

## Twitter Search and TweetGrid

URL: <http://search.twitter.com> and <http://tweetgrid.com>

**What it is:** Real-time search of Twitter and then, with TweetGrid, a way to bundle multiple searches on one page.

**What it does:** Gives you a powerful communication tool for starting Twitter conversations (Figure 6-2). As to why you'd want to do this, see the section "Welcome to the Land of Twitter," later in this chapter.

Now, you could pull a feed from this page onto your iGoogle, but unless you are going to sit there and hit Refresh several hundred times a day, you'll lose the real-time-ness of this search engine. Better still, add it as another start page for your browser so that you can pay continuous partial attention to it throughout the day.<sup>2</sup>

Now, TweetGrid lets you pipe in up to 12 real-time searches of Twitter. This is perfect if your startup's product is getting noticed in multiple ways in Twitterland; it's overkill for most people (Figure 6-3).

<sup>2</sup> You can add multiple start pages in Firefox as follows: Go to <http://www.google.com/ig> and then to <http://search.twitter.com/search?q=mint.com>. In IE, go to the page you want to add, click the down arrow next to the Home Page icon, choose Add or Change Home Page, and then choose Add this webpage to your home page tabs.



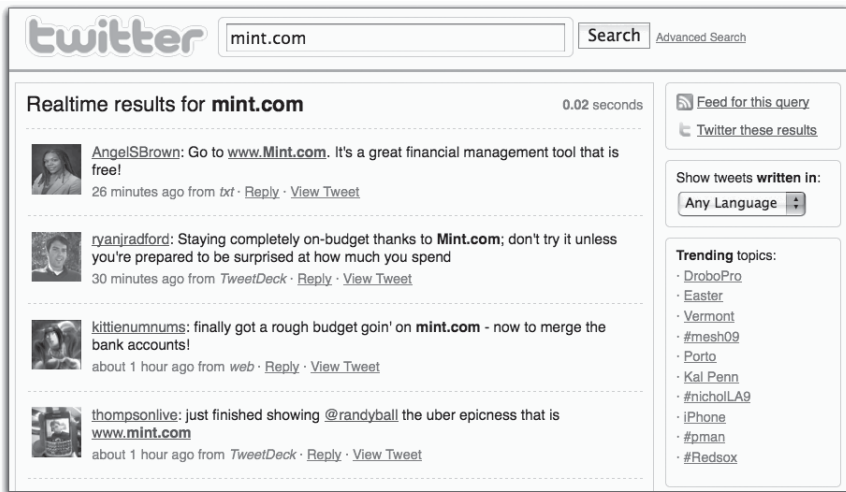


Figure 6-2. *Mint.com* results on Twitter Search

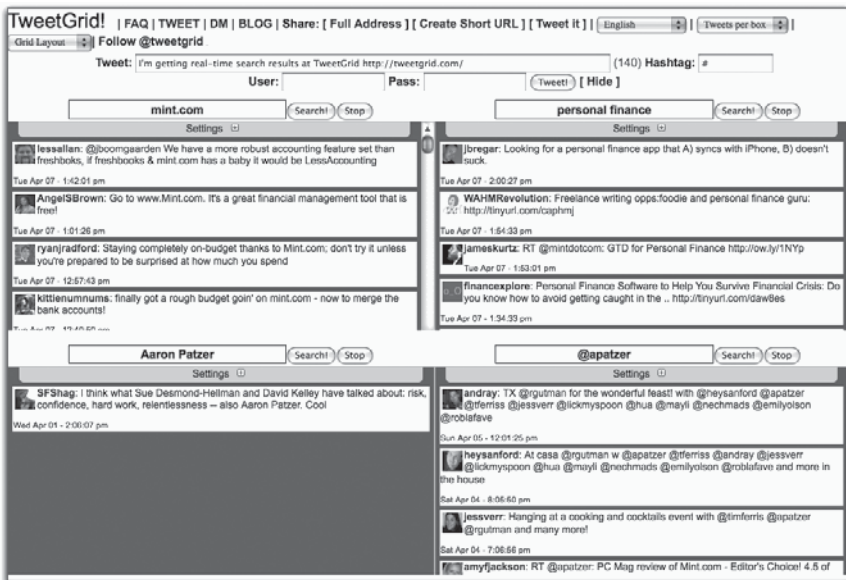


Figure 6-3. TweetGrid

## BackType

URL: <http://backtype.com>

**What it is:** Free search engine for blog comments.

**What it does:** Comments are the other half of the blog conversation, and they are nearly as influential as actual posts. If someone praises or rants about your startup as a comment, you are going to want to know it. BackType doesn't cover the entire blogosphere by any means, but their list of covered blogs is constantly growing, their interface is clean, and their BackType Connect feature lets you see who's talking about a given post or article—very handy.

**Setup:** Go to BackType, create your searches and feeds, and add them to your iGoogle (Figure 6-4). If you're really nervous about comments, BackType can send you e-mail.

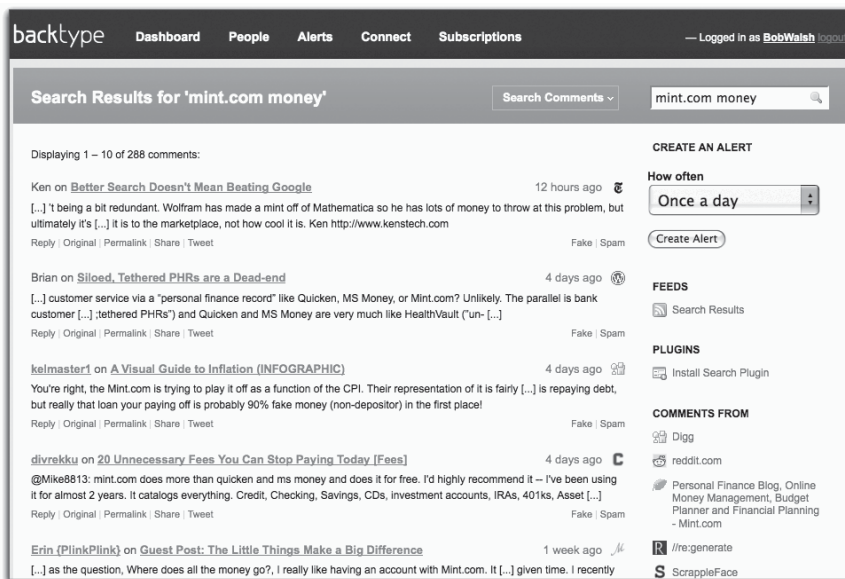


Figure 6-4. BackType

## FriendFeed

URL: <http://friendfeed.com>

**What it is:** Free life-stream/social media tool.

**What it does:** A lot of social media data ends up in FriendFeed. You want to mine that data for bits that are relevant to your startup.

**Setup:** Set up an account, start adding friends, and then begin creating custom searches and capturing the RSS feeds to iGoogle. I say “add friends” because there are two kinds of searches that interest you here: searching everyone’s feed of social items and searches of your friends, colleagues, and cofounders, who are likely to include higher-quality, more relevant items (Figure 6-5).

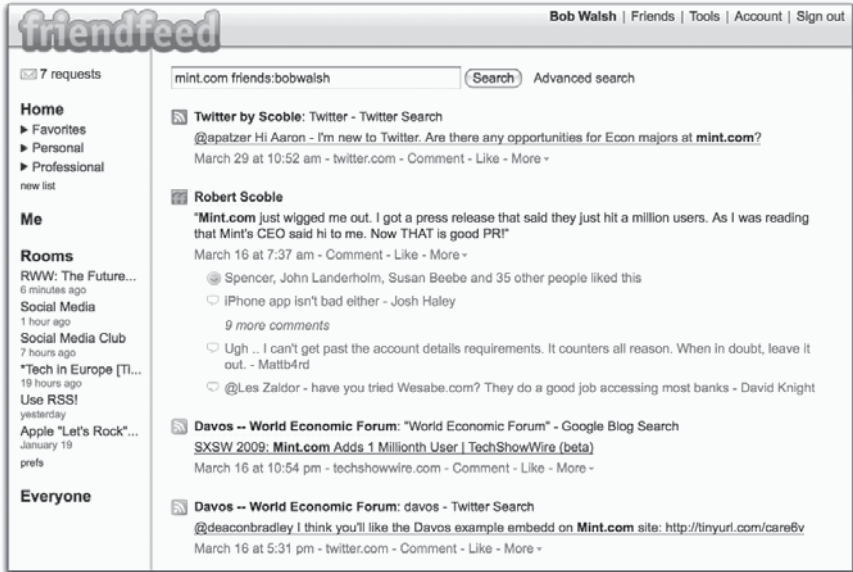


Figure 6-5. FriendFeed

## Google Reader with PostRank

URL: <http://www.google.com/reader> and <http://postrank.com>

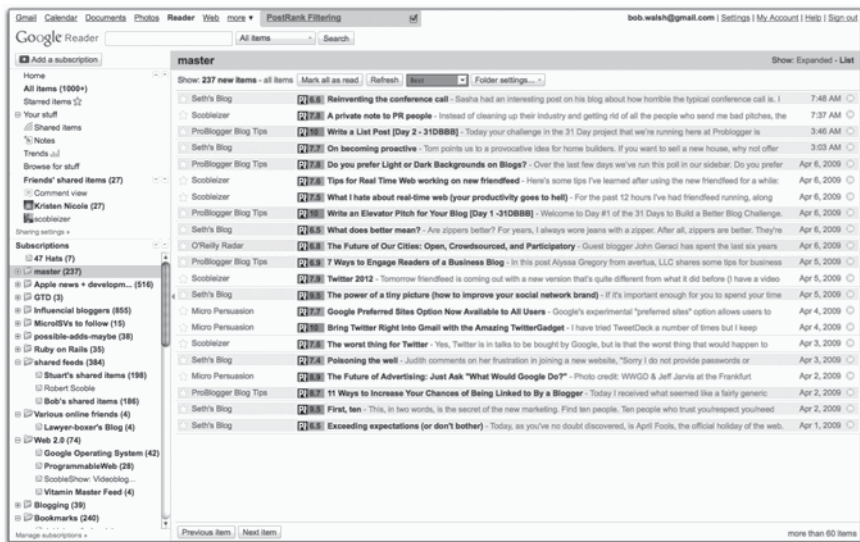
**What it is:** RSS reader combined with a popularity filter.

**What it does:** Finally, besides pinpointing who exactly you should be talking to online, you need to step back and get the broader picture. Following the right posts for your given market or industry is a great way to do that, and RSS makes it easy.

However, it actually makes it too easy. Most people I know are in RSS bankruptcy—too many feeds to follow—or have given up on RSS entirely. Too much—much too much—information is at your fingertips. Unless you live and breathe this stuff—and make a living from doing so—you need to throttle this fire hose down to something manageable. That’s where PostRank comes in. PostRank will take your feeds in Google Reader and other popular RSS readers and add an orange PostRank rating badge

to each item. This rating in turn is determined by how much play a given post, comment, or news story gets in the world of social media.

For example, Figure 6-6 shows my Google Reader, equipped with PostRank. Now, I could have spent 90 minutes trying to catch up on the 237 posts from my 32 favorite bloggers, or I could look at a single screen utilizing PostRank and pick the best of the best.



**Figure 6-6.** Google Reader with PostRank

So there you have it: a fairly clean, free way to filter an enormous flood of information for the tiny little bits that have to do with your startup. And it's easily accessorized with a feed from Digg and one from, say, Get Satisfaction (see Chapter 4) so that you'll know when you are about to get whacked by 10,000 hits or one really angry customer.

The trick here is to make checking your radar a standard workday routine without getting sucked into endless hours of surfing the Web. Here are a few points concerning what you're looking for in all this data (and definitely check out the next three sections of this chapter).

## What to Look for on Your Social Media Radar

1. *Any factually incorrect information about your startup's app*, such as new comments referring to old bugs that have been fixed, misstatements about what your software can do, mistruths (inadvertent or not), etc. These kind of information bugs are like single broken windows in a skyscraper—soon, no one wants to go in the front door.
2. *Extremely happy, enthusiastic users of your software's service or product*. By reaching out to these people and expressing humility and offering a little gratitude, you get a positive opinion and a mindset of “I must tell others” and build up your legion of online influencers.
3. *People with the problems your software solves*. These are known as *customers*. Connecting to people on blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media in a low-key, nonselling way works wonders. Don't dump a sales message on them and run. Let them know you sell a solution, and ask politely if you can help them.
4. *Other ways of offering value to people*. As we'll cover in the later section “Your Other Title: Chief Community Officer,” you have more value to people than just the software or service your startup sells. From a pure dollars-and-cents point of view, it makes sense to share that value—expertise, experience, contacts, insight—with others who, though not necessarily a prospective customer today, may be one tomorrow. Consider it enlightened self-interest—adding value to people's lives, work, and online experience is good business.

## The Startup Company Blog

I can go on for quite a while about the what and how of blogging—in fact I did just that in my previous Apress book, *Clear Blogging: How People Are Changing the World and How You Can Join Them* (Apress, 2007). In this section, however, I'd like to focus on the why—why the founders of your startup should blog, and why they should blog instead of or in addition to using Twitter or Facebook or participating in any number of social networks and media: **because it works!**

When people buy a product or service, they are in a sense buying the people who make that offering and brought it into the world. This is true for the largest of the large companies—who, you may notice, make a point of putting real people in their television commercials—to the smallest, newest business entity on the block. That's you.

By blogging, you, as the founder of your startup, can communicate and spread the passion, excitement, and expertise that made that startup possible. You are on a mission (or should be) to share this exciting new thing with as many people as you can.

One thing I need to warn you about: If you think your blog is a place where you can get results by just touting your “marketing message,” you will be very disappointed in the results you get—like disappointed right out of business. Blogging is a person-to-person thing; no smooth, third-person marketing pronouncements need apply.

There’s no one right way to do a startup blog. A huge amount depends on who you and, by extension, your company are, who you’d like to converse with at your blog, and the tone, frequency, and length that feel right for that conversation. But there are some basic guidelines, some proven rules of thumb, that will help you structure and execute a good startup blog. With work, passion, and a bit of luck, it will be a great startup blog.

Here are my recommendations about what makes for a good startup blog.

- Let your customer know what’s going on. I don’t mean posting about what you’re going to do for them; I mean posting about what you’ve done for them to make your software/service easier/better/more usable/more valuable.
- Definitely use your blog to ask for and listen to feedback from prospective and actual customers.
- Provide real value. Long gone are the days when blogs were novel and read just because the concept was new. If your market is reading blogs—and more and more people in general are doing just that—they are reading a lot of blogs. You need to provide real substance and worth in your posts, about your startup’s software, about the problem(s) it addresses, about the lives and livelihoods of the people who have those problems.
- Take the high road, not the low. That means do write posts that dig deep into topics your customers care about; don’t pick fights with straw men or real competitors. Do explain what makes your product valuable, meaningful, and worthy of attention, but don’t trash other companies in the process. By all means, do explain what it is that got you excited enough to take the huge leap of creating a startup, but don’t bore your readers with mundane bits of your life.

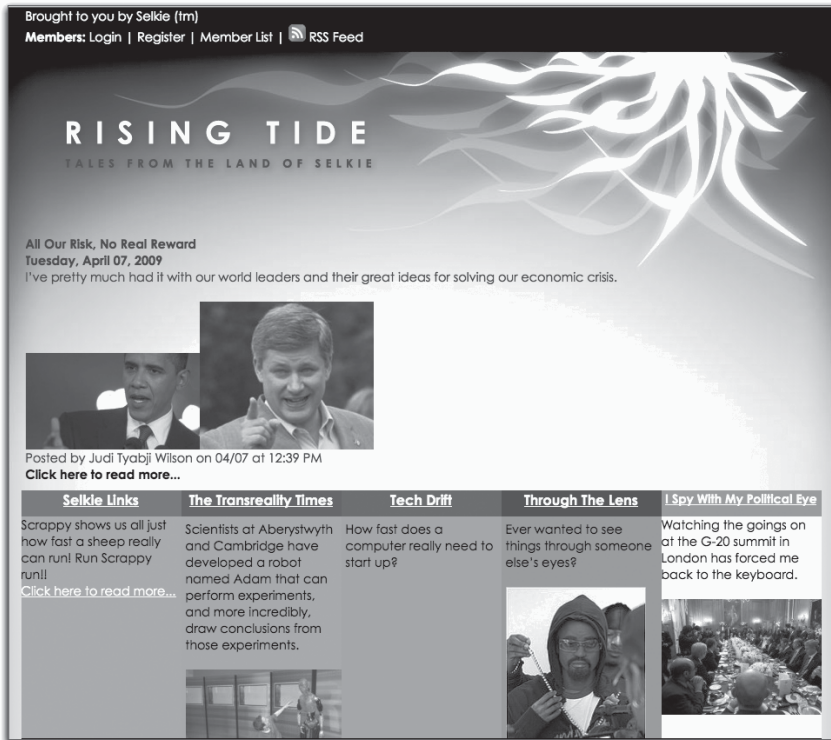
- Use your blog as part of your customer support and product improvement workflows. That's a fancy way of saying that when you notice customers are stumbling over a particular feature or defect, talk about it on your blog and how you're working to resolve it. That can be as small and quick as posting a 20-second video on how to do something in your app (Jing, at <http://www.jingproject.com>, works really well for this) to asking your readers what they think should be the next big feature you add.
- Spend a good one-third of your "blogging" time adding value to other blogs by commenting and eventually doing guest posts. Whose blogs? The blogs your prospective customers are already likely to be reading. Blogging is not doing a monologue. And if you've not yet launched your startup's product or service, you should be spending half of your blogging time doing this.
- Be emphatic in inviting comments. Comments are hugely important in a blog. To be blunt, they are what adds to your Google page rank, what ignites more inbound traffic, what prompts other readers to comment, what makes the blogging world go around. This means that when you're first starting out, use other social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to inform people you know personally that you want comments. If that doesn't work, don't be too proud to e-mail them. Getting those first few comments is the hardest, so be prepared to work for them. Of course, the easiest way to get people to comment on your blog is to comment on their blogs first.
- Keep to your focus. At times, you will be tempted to post about all sorts of things that happen in the world, good and bad. Think twice, maybe three times, before doing so. On occasion I've succumbed to the temptation to use my blog as a soapbox on which to stand and shout; invariably I regretted it later. Remember, you're not writing for yourself; you're writing for your readers. You deliver what they're interested in, they pay you attention: that's the deal.
- Avoid the topics of sex, religion, and politics—they have no place in a startup blog, unless you sell a product that improves sex, manages churches, or keeps politicians out of jail.

## **Startup Blogs—Three Examples**

Just about every startup has a blog—for good reason—so there's no shortage of examples out there. I wanted to focus on just three here, because they each exemplify something you should know about startup blogs.



First up we have the Rising Tide blog, from Tugboat Enterprises. Tugboat makes Selkie Software, a line of data-rescue and -migration products for business and consumers—not necessarily the most exciting or attention-getting subject out there (Figure 6-7).



**Figure 6-7.** Rising Tide

I asked Matthew Bleicher, Tugboat Enterprises online marketing manager, about Rising Tide.<sup>3</sup>

“Your timing on these questions is good,” replied Matthew. “Our blog reached a milestone of sorts this past month. It has now passed all of our product sites and our corporate site in traffic. A very small percentage of our visitors are checking out our product sites from the blog. As our blog traffic grows we certainly expect that number to grow.

<sup>3</sup> A note of disclosure here: I consulted with Tugboat about how to position their blog, its structure and focus.



“For the most part we use the blog to post topics not directly related to our product. We have done some posting in regards to our product on there, but that is not the focus of the site. We would rather pull in a larger audience than just those seeking recovery and migration software. What I am hoping to see, and honestly expect to see, is that in the coming months more and more people will come back to us by way of our product sites to purchase the product. I expect this, since it is a rare computer user that doesn’t require software like ours.”

The lesson here is twofold: (1) Passion attracts, even when it has little to do with your software. And (2) every rule (even the ones I suggest in this book) has an exception. If your software isn’t exactly something people get excited about, blog about what you and they do get excited about, because that shared passion let’s you start a conversation that can move on to other, more business-oriented topics.

Next up we have Ian Landsman, founder of UserScape. UserScape sells HelpSpot, a help desk system. Way back in 2004, before launching HelpSpot, Ian began to blog about its features, tease with revealing screenshots, and discuss why things would work in certain ways in his startup’s software. He successfully engaged with his market before he had a product (Figure 6-8).

“My prelaunch blog made all the difference in the world. It’s why I’m still in business today, it’s as simple as that,” Ian replied to my e-mail. “I was entering an extremely competitive software niche. Help desk software has thousands of competitors, from small startups to billion-dollar public companies. My personal blog allowed me to zig while the competitors were still zagging. Blogs were just really getting going in business in 2005, and few of my competitors had them.

“The blog allowed me to build up a small following which helped evangelize the product, linked to the product, helped my search engine rank, and also provided a place for a mental release. Starting a company is very stressful, and my readers were great at lightening my mood and listening to my ongoing trials and frustrations.”

However, that was then and this is now. What does Ian blog about today, and how many people read his blog?

“My blogging has fallen off a lot. I think there are a few reasons for this. Primarily it’s a lack of time. We’ve been very successful, and that’s limited the time I have to write more in-depth posts. I also think many bloggers go through cycles. It’s hard to always be on top of your game, so I think mentally it’s good to get away from it a bit and then return when you’re jazzed to post. The rise of Twitter has also had an impact on me. Doing a quick Tweet is so much faster and less formal than a full blog post, so Twitter has replaced a lot of my smaller blog posts.

## Ian Landsman

[Home](#) · [About Me](#) · [Twitter \(daily updates\)](#) · [Most Popular Articles](#) · [Search](#)

### Your Product is Free Because You're Lazy and Scared

David over at 37signals had a nice post today about why startups seem to have abandoned charging customers for goods and services: "[How did the web lose faith in charging for stuff?](#)".

Of course, I agree with charging people for a quality product. I make my living doing it. However, I think there's a point he's missing in there. It's a point that people often put aside as not the primary reason, but I think it's a much more prominent factor than people think. What's changed in the past few years is that many startups are founded by programmers and programmers are inherently lazy.

In most cases, this is a good trait for a programmer. It leads to wanting to do things more efficiently, maximize speed, and can even lead to better quality IMHO. However, when it comes to running a business this attribute has some negative consequences. In my work the one I most often see is the total disregard for customer service.

Customer service is almost always viewed as a necessary evil. Annoying customers always poking around looking for answers to things which are right in front of them and causing us to take time out of programming to help them.

So this leads into the great cop-out. Make it beta and hey, make it free. Those 2 tags let the programmer get out of so much. Customer has a problem? Screw off, it's free. Can't find a phone number or email address to contact us by? Screw off, it's free.

It's so much easier to think that Google's going to buy you and that's how you'll get paid or that throwing up a Google ad will make you so much money that you can safely ignore the ~~ad-clicking~~ ad-clicking ~~drones~~ drones users.

Things that are outside your comfort zone are always scary and I think that's the case here. Programming focused startups fear customer service. They'd much rather have a half hidden link to a forum they occasionally check (only after a 36 hour Mountain Dew fueled coding session) than a prominent email address which they answer promptly.

In some ways of course they're not wrong. It does take an incredible amount of time to answer all those emails. On the other hand, if you have more emails than you can handle that's probably a good sign. Also, those people

**Figure 6-8.** Ian Landsman's UserScape blog

"As for readership, it's in the thousands, but honestly I don't have any stats on it. I don't think the quantity is that important really; too much emphasis is placed on it. What you really want is quality. From a business perspective, 10 readers, all with their own blogs, all who post about what you're writing and what you're doing, is far more valuable than 10,000 readers who just browse your RSS feed (though I still appreciate those readers!)."

OK. But having been through the experience, would Ian recommend that startups blog prelaunch and about major upcoming releases?

"Yes and no. To the first part of your question, absolutely yes. A pre-launch blog is critical. It's perhaps not as unique as a few years ago, but it's still a great way to get the word out, build up a following, and, if you do a good job, it will have huge benefits to your business.

“To the second part I think you need to be much more careful. Pre-launch you have no customers to disappoint, you’re in 100% publicity mode. You need to let everyone know what you’re doing and how great it’s going to be. Getting new customers is your entire focus, getting people to take a chance on you.

“Once you’re established, though, the risk of disappointing customers should your release plan not work out is huge. I would much rather underpromise and overdeliver. Also, in a small startup or MicroISV there’s always a good chance you’re not going to get all the features done you think you will, or you’ll hit an impasse where you’ll have to delay or remove features from a new release. You don’t want to have been blogging about those features for six months to not deliver them.”

Again, we get two lessons for the price of one: Ian started blogging before releasing and this was critical for his success: he amassed attention, potential customers, and valuable product feedback prior to launch. The second lesson is that over the years, Ian has experimented with I think about five blog layouts before arriving at his current, shall we say minimalist layout shown in Figure 6-8. Great content trumps web design when it comes to blogs—invest your time in the content, not trying to look amazingly great.

Finally, let’s turn to another startup’s blog: RescueTime. We’ll go into more detail about RescueTime and its CEO, Tony Wright, in Chapter 7, but I think RescueTime’s blog is notable, for several reasons.

- It’s not an overt product blog—it’s a developer blog in many ways. Posts like the following don’t, on their face, have a lot to do with time management: “Extend Rails ActiveRecord and Connection-Adapter to support dirty reads on MySQL.”
- Certain posts—and I think this is the core of the blog—reveal surprising information about how time gets spent. And these posts get a sizable number of comments. For example, a few posts past the foregoing, which got zero comments, is this post: “Daylight Savings Time costs the United States \$480,000,000.” It got 28 comments. This is in line with Tony’s strategy of garnering attention by using surprising information amassed from RescueTime’s raw anonymous data.
- The blog is not all Tony. RescueTime’s other two founders—Joe Hrusha and Brian Floca—as well as Montana Low, Sr. (software development engineer) and Mark Wolgemuth (chief architect) share some of the burden.

- The RescueTime blog is hosted at WordPress.com, which will host your blog Google ad-free for \$30 a year. You don't have the creative freedom or the attendant time sink of a self-hosted, all the plug-ins you can eat, WordPress.org blog, and that's probably a good thing.

I asked Tony how much of a role RescueTime's blog has had in its success.

"I wouldn't say too much, though if you add all of our blogs into the mix, it might go up a touch," Tony replied. "For us, it's a valuable channel for announcements. Note that we also use Get Satisfaction, which we love for public, two-way conversations." As for why the blog covers developer issues rather than customer issues on occasion: "Mostly because our developers want to write about it sometimes. Our customer base is pretty developer heavy right now, so interesting tech stuff is a bit of a draw for that. Anything link-worthy is good (SEO, etc.)."

How does it work having five bloggers under one URL roof? "It's 95% me, though everyone is welcome to blog. We'll generally send out e-mail drafts."

And finally, what's his take on hosting his blog at WordPress.com? "We LOVE wordpress.com. It's not QUITE as customizable as we'd like, due to the hosted nature of it, but it makes up for it by not requiring any effort/maintenance."

### Andy Wibbels, Six Apart

One of the most thoughtful bloggers on what blogging is all about is Andy Wibbels. Andy, now the product manager for blogs.com at Six Apart (the makers of TypePad), is the author of *Blogwild!: A Guide for Small Business* (Portfolio, 2006) and a clear and passionate advocate for blogging.

Although I've written extensively on blogging, I wanted to get Andy's take on blogging for startups, especially on how blogging and microblogging at sites such as Twitter interact.

**Bob:** Let's start with the big picture. What should startups understand about the strategic value of doing a blog today?

**Andy:** I think that the strategic value is how easily you can put stuff online. I always think about that with an online business, unless you can put stuff online quickly, you don't have a business. A blog is often the fastest and quickest way to simply get stuff online. I think that's kind of the foundation of it: quick publishing, cheap publishing, and just get it up and get it going. That is the foundation, for me, about why startups should be looking at blogs.

Another part of the puzzle is that it provides this inside view into a company. For a startup, a lot of times with the marketing PR, they want to convey this sense that the company or the project or the product is really something that's going to be new and fresh and exciting. It's coming from people who are innovators or have a particular cache of inventors.

So I think that is kind of the second part. The first part is getting stuff online quickly, the second part is providing this warmth and this depth that a larger company can't replicate easily. That can be a strategic advantage for a company.

**Bob:** One question that comes up nowadays for some people who are, let's say, on Twitter 18 times a day or 1,800 times a day . . .

**Andy:** Right.

**Bob:** . . . is do blogs really matter in a world of Twitter?

**Andy:** Well, I think that these are all part of a larger trend that some folks are calling the social web, or social publishing. We had a Facebook, we have Twitter. We have all of these different conduits, so we have these different media formats that have these little bits of information and pictures and text and video. And then we have all the connections between them. So I think that blogging is kind of nested inside all of these trends.

With Twitter, it's going to depend on if your audience, your future customers, the journalists that you want to reach, and the people who you want to track your company, are those people on Twitter? I think part of it is, is your audience even on Twitter yet? I think Twitter can take up a lot of your time every day, and I think the value of Twitter is really for networking and starting to get to know people who may be useful for your business, for future employees, for press coverage, and just gently introducing them to who the heck you are.

But I think it can definitely be a time sink for a lot of people, because it provides that quick hit of instant publishing that I think blogging grew away from, which is why we even have Twitter in the first place. Blogging used to be white box: type what you think and click Save. And then we added categories and rich text editor. And we have to add images and tags and permissions and themes and templates. I think the advantage of tools like Twitter and the new blogging platforms Posterous and Tumblr, they've really stripped blogging down back to a white box you throw stuff into.

**Bob:** So if Twitter is how we get ourselves out there, assuming that the people we want to talk to are on Twitter, is our blog then sort of the backbone of our online persona?

**Andy:** I think it can be. I think a blog is becoming a more useful place to have much more thoughtful essays that go beyond 140 characters, that go beyond "Oh, I found this cool thing. Here's a link to it," which is what blogging sort of started off as. A blog can still be an anchor for the rest of your world, because with a Twitter profile, you don't own that profile, Twitter does. You don't own your Facebook profile, Mark Zuckerberg does. You don't own all of these online profiles unless you own -- you don't have domain over those profiles. But if you anchor them all to your online identity on a blog or a web site, then you truly own all these different pieces of your online life.

I think that's going to be a big issue coming up, maybe sooner than later. I'm not really sure. People get a bit nutty about privacy and who owns their profiles. We just had that big bad crash with Facebook, where they said we can own your information, even after you've deleted your account. The users went crazy. So I think there is a privacy backlash brewing as people start to realize their exposure and how they don't own their online identities when it's owned by a service like Twitter or Facebook.

So I think a blog can still be the anchor for all these other parts of your online persona.

**Bob:** Let's talk about just the idea of a blog for your "product" at a startup. Should blogs really function in the role as basically places to flog your product?

**Andy:** They can. It will not be very popular. I think part of a company's blog is focused on "Yes, here's what we're working on," but also "Here are the greater trends that we're seeing." "Here is information that our customers need to know," whether or not it's linked to the product. So we all have customers that we reach and people that we touch every day. That may or may not be fine, boosting our products right then and there. But if we can become the authoritative voice, then when a customer or reader has a need that we can fill, he'll think of us and come grab our product or service. I think part of it is about cultivating intending.

A blog is not a place to constantly talk about only what you're working on. But it can be a place to say, "Here's what we're thinking of working on" or "You know, a year ago we had this experience, and, wow, did we learn from that."

So it's a way to show the expertise as well as become this authoritative voice on your particular segment of the market.

**Bob:** Do you have any preference as to whether you have "a company blog" that a variety of people write for or, let's say, each founder having his own blog? Is there an advantage to one or the other?

**Andy:** I waffle back and forth on that. Here we sort of have the slogan that it's about the blogger, not the blog. That all this social media stuff is about connecting individuals who have individual voices, who may work for companies. So if you've got a company blog, you could have multiple authors, and each of them could have a certain space on the blog or a certain archive or a certain way to communicate that this is this particular person's voice. But with a startup, if you've got a kind of rambunctious leader, and that's part of your marketing edge, that you're working with an innovator, somebody that's the hot, young innovator, or sort of the old guard coming back, then that's part of that particular story and that particular perspective. So you may keep that on a separate blog. And it's going to depend on if the blogger is going to stay totally on topic all the time.

That's why I have a personal blog and a professional blog, because I like to rant about crazy things, and I keep that off of the professional blog because it's just not stuff that businesspeople really want to read unless they think I'm worth reading about.

**Bob:** So I guess one of the things you're talking about is, first off, that you have a separation between your company and yourself, which is why we have companies, and to carry that division over to the online world.

**Andy:** Right. And this is part of, I think, the friction between personality and company, is if you're running a startup and are wanting to be seen as this on-the-go company that's creating brand new visions, then you may want your blog to be all you all the time, and how dedicated you are toward your service or product or company. So it's going to depend on the goals of the particular blog. I go back and forth on if it should be totally separate or totally together. I think it depends on the persona of the company that's putting out the blog.

**Bob:** Where does Six Apart fit in all this, now that we've reached a point of maturity of what blogs are about.

**Andy:** We are really seeing blogging, I guess in this overall social publishing, social web blanket or cloud, I guess, of trends, that people need to have the ability to publish anything to anyone anywhere and have full control over how that's going to appear. That's one reason why we've worked very hard on the OpenID standard, because that's kind of a way that people can continue to own their online identity.

We worked with a lot of large media companies; they're seeing this trend and saying, well, how do we build a community around a certain artist or a certain movie or a certain piece of entertainment? That dichotomy that we have at Six Apart is we have a services team that usually works with pretty large companies and pretty large organizations, and then we have been working with Moveable Type. The reason we launched a production called Motion that brings the idea of a friend and news feed, like the Facebook feed, and my microblogging into a product, into a blog that a company can own. So like I said, instead of having Facebook own all of your customer data, you can.

So large companies really get excited about that. And then on the flip side, toward individual bloggers, we are really retooling what TypePad can do and TypePad is. So it can integrate with all these new services and new products and new ways of publishing online. They can connect Twitter and Facebook, and it can reach out to all these other services that didn't exist a couple of years ago.

We also have launched a media division that is focusing on developing these bloggers and these publishers. So we're able to serve the large companies that want to reach out to these bloggers, but also we work on publisher development, which is just fancy speak for we help bloggers cultivate their audience and their blogs.

And also I guess a footnote is we're trying to go beyond just servicing people on Six Apart platforms. Part of what I 'm working with is a new service called TypePad One, which is going to be growing past training and services just for TypePad users, and how we can help people using WordPress or Blogger or Tumblr. How can we help all the bloggers out there? So, yes, of course we



would love for them to be in our media program and to use our products. But at the base, we remain an advocate for blogging in all of its formats and social publishing in all of its formats.

**Bob:** OK. Any final advice that you would give people who want to go from being a developer to being a startup founder when it comes to social media?

**Andy:** I think it can be a very different mindset. If you're an engineer, you may be very focused on the things that are shiny and cool to you. And sometimes I find myself reflecting on a lot during meetings about our products or developments or features, who is this product for? And if you can, keep asking yourself who are you really making something for? I know here in the Silicon Valley area, I see—I came from Chicago about a year ago, so I feel like there's kind of a disconnect between what Silicon Valley people think users do and the rest of the population does online and then what I call real people do online. I think there's a lot of friction between—you have to recognize that not everybody lives online all the time, and they don't see that as something that they really want to do.

So I think with software developing and technology development, it's really asking, "Who are you developing for?" Is it the early adopters, is it real people, is it people who watch network TV or cable TV, and having a pretty good idea of who you're serving and what their problems are. And how you help solve those problems better than anybody else, I think, is pretty valuable.

To sum up our discussion of startup blogs, this is something that should be at the very top of your nondevelopment to-do list, from before you launch. The key thing is that your blog isn't about you and your startup; it's about your customers and potential customers who are paying you extremely valuable attention. You'll need to work hard for that attention, but, as we've seen, the payoffs of doing your startup's blog right are huge.

## Welcome to the Land of Twitter

Unless you've been locked in your basement with a pallet of Meals Ready to Eat, a chemical toilet, and your codebase for the past few years, you've heard about Twitter, the microblogging platform without a revenue model.<sup>4</sup>

If you've stoutly resisted—like Joel Spolsky,<sup>5</sup> for example—this giant timewaster on the grounds that it doesn't matter to your startup if a few

<sup>4</sup> As of May 17, 2009—but that will change, just as soon as it drives all the mainstream media nuts that one of the most popular and newsworthy startups doesn't have a revenue model!

<sup>5</sup> Now at <http://twitter.com/spolsky> with 7,925 followers, and counting.



hundred people know what you had for breakfast, then for a start let me refer you to my and Nicole Kristen's *The Twitter Survival Guide* e-book, available at <http://multisocialmedia.com>.

For everyone else, let's get specific about why you want to be on Twitter as a startup, why, in fact, you *need* to be on Twitter. It's not just that Twitter has taken off—adding 6 million users in just January and February 2009 alone—or that its demographics are shifting past the traditional early adopters of social media.<sup>6</sup> It's that Twitter can bring your startup sales. But it's *not* going to do it in a traditionally measurable way (spend  $x$  on advertising, get  $y$  customers). Social media doesn't work by herding cattle.

Consider Giacomo "Peldi" Guilizzoni's experience with Twitter. He's the founder of Balsamiq Studios, LLC, a self-funded startup that sells a great mockup/wireframing application that had already become profitable enough in its first six months to hire its first employee.

"My use of Twitter has evolved over time (<http://www.balsamiq.com/blog/?p=1025>)," Peldi e-mailed back from Italy. "At first I used it mostly as a way to announce new features and blog posts . . . microblogging, if you will.

"Then I read your book on Twitter and it opened my eyes. I was doing it all wrong! Now I see Twitter as a way to stay close to the community of my product's users and customers. I use it to answer their questions, ask them for feedback early in the design process, ask them for recommendations on products or services to use . . . it's a wonderful group of people sharing my company's shared interests. I also try to retweet as much as I can, to provide value to my followers. Thanks to TwitterSheep [<http://twittersheep.com>], I know what their interests are, so I can cater my tweets to them."

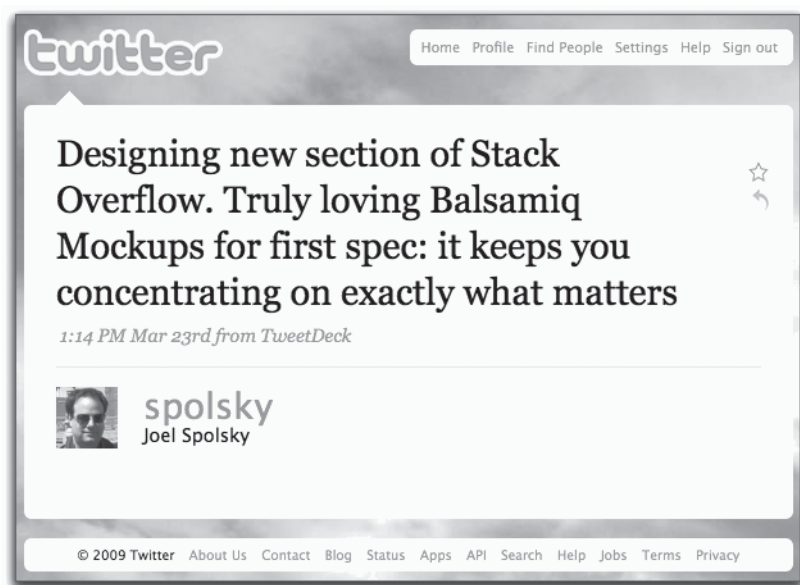
Does the time Peldi spends on Twitter translate into sales for his startup?

"I don't really know, but I'm sure it doesn't hurt. Twitter is definitely one of my top referral web sites, and I know people appreciate being able to reach me via Twitter when they need to. It's like IM, but in the open, which makes me more accountable. I like that."

Figure 6-9 illustrates one specific case of how Twitter can improve your startup's reputation: It shows a tweet that Joel Spolsky (highly influential ex-Twitter hater and one of our wise people interviewed in Chapter 9) posted about Balsamiq Mockups. This is the kind of positive mention you dream about as a founder.

---

<sup>6</sup> "Twitter Traffic Explodes . . . and Not Being Driven by the Usual Suspects!"—[http://www.comscore.com/blog/2009/04/twitter\\_traffic\\_explodes.html](http://www.comscore.com/blog/2009/04/twitter_traffic_explodes.html)



**Figure 6-9.** You can only wish your startup was this lucky.

The bottom line on Twitter for startups is simply this: Whether or not you participate, people are going to be tweeting about your startup and its service or product. You have their attention—ignoring them by not talking to them is a crazy bad idea for any startup.

## The New News Media

Let's turn our attention to another, older part of what gets people talking about a startup: it's in the news. Maybe it makes CNN or a major newspaper or maybe it gets favorable coverage in one of the leading technology news blogs that have readerships now surpassing major mainstream media news outlets, but getting press attention can make or break your startup.

Having been a full-time reporter for a major news organization (United Press International) before succumbing a very long time ago to the siren call of technology, and having written over the last few years for Lifehacker.org (<http://lifehacker.com>), Web Worker Daily (<http://webworkerdaily.com>), and CNET Webware (<http://news.cnet.com/webware>), I've seen and continue to see more press releases than I care to remember. They suck!

Something like 95% of the time startups get it wrong when trying to get media attention. They—or their PR agency—e-mail blast every reporter

on earth with the shattering non-news that they've moved from version 3.21 to 3.22 and that humanity is far better for it. Or those same, mostly brain-dead PR people whine and beg that you're life as a news blogger is simply not complete without spending at least an hour of a workday engaged in valuable virtual face time with the CEO, who will repeat the marketing message verbatim to you.

If it sounds like I have some very definite opinions about this, you're right. But my opinions aren't going to give you what you need in order to be in that 5% who win the media attention lottery. For that, if you want to know how your startup can get media attention, go ask them. That's what this section is all about: how online and mainstream editors, writers, and reporters decide what startups to cover and which to ignore.

First up, I talked to a friend of mine, Mike Gunderloy. Mike is an accomplished software developer, news blogger, and book author who up until recently was the lead writer for one of the major startup-covering news blogs: Web Worker Daily. I've known Mike over the years and also worked with him for a time as WWD writer; but for every post I'd do, Mike would crank out 10 (and they were way better) and still keep his programming contract clients happy and coming back for more. We did this interview via IM.<sup>7</sup>

**Bob:** When you were lead writer at Web Worker Daily, what was the right way to pitch a story to you, and what were the wrong ways? Besides always starting with an e-mail, what did you look for in a pitch?

**Mike:** Had to have some relevance to the readers, of course. Let's see: I threw pitches away for a bunch of reasons: more than one follow-up (if I'm not interested, I'm not interested), lack of any evidence that the person had done any research on us (i.e., getting pitched on stuff we'd already covered), didn't get to the point quickly, expected me to go online or call or get to a conference or listen to a briefing before I knew whether I was interested.

**Bob:** All good to know. So if a startup wanted to pitch a story to you, they'd better do their research, get to the point, not angle for you to talk to their CEO or do a demo before they knew you're interested and not to pester you?

**Mike:** Yup. Send over the basic facts, and let me decide whether it's worth following up on, and "XYZ signs 478th user" or "Big Company buys license for XYZ" is not newsworthy. Too many invented excuses for sending out the release of the week, even though no changes in the product.

---

<sup>7</sup> If you don't use IM as part of your social media mix, you're missing out. Check out Adium if you're OS in life is Mac (<http://adium.im/>) or Pidgin (<http://www.pidgin.im>) if it's not.

**Bob:** Gotcha. Were there any PR people you thought got it right?

**Mike:** Probably, but I don't remember PR people by name. I probably got 90% of my leads from my own research, rather than being pitched, even though I was reading 50+ releases per day for a while there.

**Bob:** How did you/do you do your research? Five hundred RSS feeds?

**Mike:** Mainly. RSS feeds, a few newsletters, Twitter mentions. Sites like MOMB too.

**Bob:** MOMB?

**Mike:** Museum of Modern Betas [<http://momb.socio-kybernetics.net>].

**Bob:** Aha—another add for the book!

**Mike:** Their RSS feed is pretty high quality for web apps. There are a few others similar: KillerStartups, Listio, SimpleSpark.

**Bob:** For startups doing their own PR, should they try to build relationships with writers or not?

**Mike:** I'm sure there are **some** writers that works with. But I'm not one of them. I suspect it works better with the sites that are on the "We must cover everything first" treadmill.

**Bob:** Besides your WWD work and other writing, you run a news site of sorts, A Fresh Cup, for the Ruby on Rails community. Why, and has it opened up any opportunities for you?

**Mike:** I'm a believer that one way to find clients is to be visible in multiple places. So I've got AFC, an active Twitter account, a professional site, all the stuff I do for Rails . . . it all adds up. People know I'm out there, they can recommend me.

Plus, for me AFC serves the same purpose as Delicious bookmarks do for some people—a long list of stuff I might want to get back to someday. Seems to serve the same purpose for some other folks too, which is nice.

**Bob:** While you're not doing a startup, you've found a solution to the problem they have: getting attention in a very noisy world. If a startup has solid expertise in a given technology or industry, would you as a writer be impressed if they were sharing that online actively?

**Mike:** Well, I'd be more likely to keep an eye on them if they were writing stuff about a technology I care about. There is a batch of rails startups—pivotal, exceptional, etc.—that I end up keeping track of because one of their devs is blogging

**Bob:** Any final advice for startups?

**Mikes:** You're better off getting noticed for something useful than for stunts—in today's world, I don't think stuff like tradeshow giveaways or imprinted pens or whatever is as important as having an authentic online presence.

**Marshall Kirkpatrick, Lead Writer, ReadWriteWeb**

Marshall Kirkpatrick broke into the news-blogging business at *TechCrunch*, fast becoming the lead blogger there before moving on to *ReadWriteWeb* as that blog's lead blogger and VP for content development.

Marshall's based in Portland, Oregon, far from Silicon Valley, but his virtuoso RSS/Web 2.0 research skills let him consistently leave more connected newspeople in his dust.

**Bob:** What's the right way for startups to approach you who want you to write about them? What's the wrong way?

**Marshall:** Sending an email to [tips@readwriteweb.com](mailto:tips@readwriteweb.com) at any time is appropriate. Sending your company's blog or news release RSS feed is the best way to keep us in the loop. Otherwise, we like to get an e-mail three or four days before a news event. Send us info about what you're doing, login access to see it, and contact info to reach out with any questions. If we can get the full picture without a briefing (we're pretty good at looking at startups), then that's great.

We don't appreciate it when a company expects an hour of our time to ramble on the phone in order for us to find out what they are doing.

**Bob:** Do you prefer hearing from startup founders or PR people working for startups?

**Marshall:** People working for them, especially not salespeople. Talking to engineers is ideal. If we must talk to a CEO or salesperson, though, we'll live.

**Bob:** How many startups do you hear about in a week? How do you decide what to write about?

**Marshall:** It's hard to say, probably about 200. We're looking for a news hook and an innovation hook. We're much more interested in the tech of tech than in the business of tech.

**Bob:** What mistakes do startups make approaching news bloggers and for that matter regular trade/general reporters?

**Marshall:** Don't send us an e-mail with a link to our competitors' coverage of you—that drives us nuts. Also, tell us honestly what you are doing, quickly, and if we say no—accept that and come back later with something better suited for us.

**Bob:** Any advice for startup founders?

**Marshall:** Please give me really interesting stories about innovation so I can make us both look great. Try not to neglect your families, too. That's just a bad thing to do.

**Bob:** What question should I ask that I haven't?

**Marshall:** Q: Do you think this is a wildly disruptive time in technology that we're living through? A: Yes I do, it's very exciting. The possibilities are mind-blowing, and the ISV community is really at the forefront of it. Keep up the great work out there!

## The Editor Is In

Let's move up the new food chain in our search for getting your startup star power attention: Rafe Needleman has been covering startups and technology for a good 20 years for InfoWorld, Byte, Red Herring, Business 2.0, and, since 2004, CNET. He's the editor in charge of CNET's Webware blog (<http://news.cnet.com/webware>) (See Figure 6-10.). Webware is one of the top news blogs, and now that CBS owns CNET, coverage of a startup at Webware has a huge reach.



**Figure 6-10.** CNET Webware

Rafe's both a writer and the managing editor of Webware: setting the tone, managing about a dozen CNET and freelance bloggers, and deciding what gets covered.

**Bob:** What would be your dream day, as far as the startups that you would see and how they came to you? In other words, what should a startup be doing that's smart, rather than some of the less intelligent approaches that you've seen?

**Rafe:** Well, you know it's the product that matters. When I hear about a new product ahead of anybody else in a way that makes me sit up and take notice, that's good. I love hearing from people who are passionate

about a product, and that's generally a founder or CEO of a company. That's ideal.

**Bob:** Is it better if they talk to you directly? What about the various PR firms that are out there that get into the mix?

**Rafe:** I think PR has a lot of value. There are some PR people who I really do like to hear from. But, like I said, when I get a personal pitch from somebody who's actually built a product and wants to talk to me about it, that means more to me than getting what I know is probably a pitch that's going out to 100 people or more at the same time.

**Bob:** Should these CEOs of startups introduce themselves before they have something really to say? Or should they just knock on your door when they're ready?

**Rafe:** Well, *ready* is a relative term. I like talking to companies at all stages, and the earlier the better. If we're going to be reviewing a product, then of course the product should be something that's in a reviewable state and something that's close to availability. But when is the right time to talk to me depends on the company, the technology, what they're trying to do, and what I'm trying to write about.

**Bob:** What sort of things do you like to hear about? Is there any particular type of startups that will really get your attention?

**Rafe:** Well, if I knew that, I would be building it myself.

**Bob:** [laughs]

**Rafe:** I'm always looking to have my eyes opened.

**Bob:** So it's sort of the new and novel and different effect that matters? Is it harder to generate much excitement over yet another CRM system?

**Rafe:** Fair to say, yeah. Difficult, but there is innovation in every category. It's possible to knock my socks off with a CRM. It's also quite likely that there is a product that you might think that I would find tedious. Then three people who are unaware of each other are announcing similar things at the same time, and boom! I've got a trend. Now it's interesting.

**Bob:** Where do you find new things to write about? Besides the people coming to you, where do you go look for them?

**Rafe:** I have a pretty extensive collection of contacts, entrepreneurs, investors, and funders. You'd be surprised how many readers reach out to me saying that they've seen something. I scour a lot of sources, a lot of feeds, and a lot of aggregation sites. I go to events and parties. This stuff comes in all the time from everywhere.

**Bob:** Do you find that Twitter is a useful way for people to contact you? Or is that not a good way to try to pitch you on a story idea?

**Rafe:** No. I don't like Twitter as a way to try to contact me for a pitch. I don't think it's very effective for that. I like to control my incoming information through e-mail, just because it's easier to file, keep track of,

and respond to. However, I find Twitter extremely valuable as a way to reach out to people en masse. I monitor Twitter all the time. When there's an interesting trend or something that's very timely, I set up a filter in Twitter—a search field—and I watch to see what's happening there. So I find Twitter extremely valuable.

I do get a lot of tips from it, and I do get a lot of feedback from it, from readers and things. But I don't think it's appropriate to pitch someone. Well, it's not appropriate to pitch *me* on Twitter. Other people do like it. I don't.

**Bob:** How about Facebook?

**Rafe:** Well, you know I'm not very active on Facebook, except through Twitter. My Twitter feed goes into Facebook, and I see a lot of replies to it on Facebook. But I'm not particularly active on Facebook. People do, occasionally, pitch me on Facebook, which is a really bad idea. I don't like being pitched on Facebook, because it's not in my e-mail system.

**Bob:** These are good things to know. A while back, you put together a blog, and actually it continues to this day, Pro PR Tips [<http://proprtips.com>]. Why do you do this?

**Rafe:** [laughs] Because it's fun. Honestly, I like what I do, and I find it sometimes amusing, the bonehead moves that PR people make in trying to get their story out. I don't think that PR people are evil. I don't think they're stupid. But every now and then, somebody makes an interesting blunder. I thought it would be both funny and educational to chronicle it as it went. I'm going to do more with Pro PR Tips in the future, because I think it's a good way to get the word out and for everybody to learn.

**Bob:** You've been in the journalism business now for a long time. Has what PR firms done changed that much in the last few years? Or is it pretty much what they've been doing all along?

**Rafe:** The fundamentals of public relations and of any kind of communications have not changed, which is this: The best way to communicate with somebody is to know them and to tell them something that is personally relevant to them, either because it's something that they find personally interesting or because it's related to the work that they do. Everybody does different work. So the blanket pitch is generally pretty ineffective, except when it's not. Except when you're Google or Microsoft, and you have a story that you want to tell to everybody at the same time.

The tools and the technologies have made a big difference, as witnessed by your questions when you were asking me about people trying to reach me on Twitter or Facebook.

The ways to get a hold of people, the number of people who are trying to get a hold of people, and the number of people who are there to be got



hold of have all increased dramatically. There is a lot of noise, and there's a lot of information flying around.

The fundamentals are the direct connection. When Joe, the entrepreneur, says, "Hey, I've got this incredible, cool new product, new web service that will automatically make your food taste better at restaurants," I'm going to pay attention. He sends it to me, and he says, "I know that you like eating, let me show this to you before anybody else," I'm going to notice. That has not changed.

**Bob:** So that really comes under the heading of PR firms that know what interests journalists.

**Rafe:** Yeah. I think there's a big value in PR. I think that some companies overuse it and use PR as their mouthpieces. I don't always think that's wise. Sometimes it is, but in many cases it's not. Most companies trying to get noticed could use professional PR counsel. That doesn't mean that they should give the PR company the microphone and have them speak on their behalf. The demo and the pitch are always more effective coming from the person who built the product, the person who started the company, or the person who's passionate about it.

How that person gets in touch with people, how he crafts his message, and who he talks to, that is advice that a PR person can give them. But, it doesn't mean that the PR person has to be front and center in the communications, in the dialogue.

**Bob:** So you see more of the value PR people as advisors rather than mouthpieces.

**Rafe:** Yes, although I'm talking about in an ideal world. I realize that it isn't.

**Bob:** OK, any advice to startups?

**Rafe:** Yeah. My best advice for startups is to build a good product and don't fall back on PR to make a sucky product good. If the product is good, then you need good PR to support it. If the product is not good, no amount of PR is going to make it succeed. The journalists will find out. The bloggers will find out. People will find out, and the product will die. If the product is good, you want it to get out to as many people as possible.

### ***Al Harberg, President, DP Directory, Inc.***

Press releases are part and parcel of any company's effort to be in the public eye, and for nearly 25 years Al Harberg has been in the business of creating effective press releases. Al's company, DP Directory, specializes in creating and distributing press releases for software/IT companies, so I asked him a few questions about the realities and mechanics of doing good press releases.

**Bob:** How effective are wholesale press releases?

**Al:** Sending well-written press releases to well-targeted editors has been a cost-effective publicity tactic for nearly a century. And it continues to be effective today.

Millions of software buyers make their software-buying decisions based on what they read in magazines and newspapers. And these publications' editors continue to rely upon press releases to learn about the latest computer software.

I'm not sure what you mean by "wholesale" press releases, Bob. There are some awful services available on the Internet. These services blindly send poorly written so-called press releases to magazine writers and columnists, regardless of these editors' "beats" or specialties. They often mass-mail the press releases using bcc: or "undisclosed recipient" lists, giving the editors the impression that they've been spammed. Using such a service is a waste of time and money, and it can damage your reputation with the editors.

Make sure the person who writes your press release is an experienced marketing professional. If that's not in your budget, be sure the company that e-mails your press releases to the editors is run by an experienced marketing professional who will take the time to review your press release for you, free. My company, DP Directory, Inc. (<http://www.dpdirectory.com>), reviews our customers' press releases before we send them to the editors. We correct our clients' grammar, usage, and agreement errors, and we "Americanize" their writing, free. From the editors' perspective, they're receiving an individual e-mail from the developer and not a mass-mailed spam.

We offer more than 100 categories of editors for software developers, ensuring that each press release is sent to well-targeted publications.

Again, the two keys to success are a well-written press release and a list that is targeted to editors in your niche.

**Bob:** Are press releases as effective today as they were, say, a decade ago?

**Al:** There have been a lot of changes in the press release business since I started full time more than 24 years ago.

The Internet has changed the method of delivery from postal mail to e-mail.

The biggest change, however, has been the economic stress that has been placed on magazines and newspapers. For the past two decades, these publications have been under tremendous pressure from cable news and entertainment and from the Internet. Readership is down for both magazines and newspapers as people turn on their TVs and computers for information and relaxation.

In general, this is good news for software developers. Editors simply don't have time to do market research, investigative reporting, or any in-depth work to uncover the newest software. They rely more and more upon software developers' press releases to learn about new applications.

The other big change in the marketplace in recent years has been the addition of computer reporters to smaller newspapers. Twenty years ago, computers were expensive and complicated. Today, even the smallest business has multiple computers, and most homes have more than one machine, too. To respond to this proliferation of technology, small-town newspapers and general-interest magazines have reporters who cover the computer beat. More dedicated computer editors means more opportunities for software developers to use press releases to get free publicity.

**Bob:** Have you expanded your lists to include tech blogs? And are bloggers more or less likely to use a press release?

**Al:** Many computer magazine editors write blogs. Similarly, many newspapers now have tech blogs. I include these bloggers in my press release distribution lists.

There are quite a few bloggers who welcome press releases from distribution services like mine—services that ensure that only well-written New Product Announcements are sent. These bloggers are on my list.

Some bloggers have a narrow focus for their writing, and they don't enjoy receiving press releases that are about software that is not in their particular niche. They only want to hear from software developers whose applications are a perfect match for their blogs. So the best way for software developers to reach these specialized bloggers is to develop a "house list" and contact these bloggers individually and personally.

## So Is the Reporter

I've known Leslie Suzukamo, a *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reporter on telecom, technology, and energy, since we bumped into each other heading for UCLA's *Daily Bruin* many, many years ago. I got out of journalism, he stayed in. That he's still a reporter in today's era of shriveling newspapers is proof positive he works five times harder than most people. I asked Les to spill the beans on exactly how he picks and chooses what to cover.

**Bob:** What's the best way for startups to pitch reporters today? Formal press release, e-mail you, call?

**Les:** You know all this anyway, but for what it's worth . . . We are, for better and for worse, tied to our e-mail now, the way reporters a generation ago were tied to the phone. Formal press release [paper, I assume] is too slow for daily work and usually means it's not urgent. If it can wait and you want something thoughtful, there's still a place for paper. But that place is rapidly shrinking because so many newspaper reporters are doubling (or, in my case, tripling) up on beats. Calls are OK, but I usually tell them to send me an e-mail anyway. Calls work best after an e-mail, but they tell me something that brings it into immediate focus. The newsroom is

an ADHD environment, and if we sound gruff and impatient on the line, it's because we've got one of those Indiana Jones-size rocks rolling behind us. It's called *deadline*. Get to the point, be knowledgeable enough to answer a few questions in more detail than you've done in the press release (I hate it when I get PR people who obviously don't know anything beyond what they've already written you—it's like talking to a parrot), and don't call in the late afternoon or whenever it's deadline (I say that because web operations and TV have their own separate sets of deadlines).

**Bob:** What do you want to know from companies pitching you? What do you not want to hear about?

**Les:** I want to know about something that would surprise people, something I didn't know (and people in general don't know), something that matters to people, or something that would startle them. I want a good story—and that's where the problem lies. PR folks are looking to tell me how wonderful their company is. Most of the time, the average person. Just. Doesn't. Care. Doesn't mean the company isn't wonderful, but they don't care. On the other hand, the average person cares mightily about something that affects them or their lives directly. So if it involves layoffs from their company, they care. If it involves a CEO's getting a million-dollar bonus while everyone else took a pay cut, they care. They care more than ever about companies behaving badly. They care about good companies taking care of their employees too, but it's got to be newsworthy, like that banker in Florida who cashed out when he retired, and, rather than just keeping the money, he spread the wealth among all his bank's employees, even the ones who had retired. It's got to have drama and conflict and, hopefully, resolution, but certainly the first two. Companies doing PR hate the idea of drama and conflict because it implies trouble. But people know that life is trouble. It insults their intelligence to pretend otherwise.

**Bob:** Are there any PR people you know who do a really good job for their clients in your estimation? If so, how?

**Les:** There are a few that I know and work with regularly. One—they don't waste my time much with stuff that doesn't matter. They know me, know my paper, so they know what we like and what we ignore. They answer my calls, even when it's bad news, especially when it's bad news. A couple have taken the bullet for not just their companies but for their entire industries, and their counterparts are laying low and refusing to return my calls. I give those bullet-takers respect back when it counts. I sometimes think their companies don't get that, though. Which is a shame.

**Bob:** Should a startup contact their local mainstream media newspaper, news blog? Does being local count?

**Les:** Can't speak about others, but for us, local is the first, second, and third reason we do stories about companies. If you're not local, there'd

better be a good overarching reason for the story, like you represent a service that is ubiquitous. My best example of that would be cell phone service. None of the majors are local, but everyone has a cell phone, so they're always high-reader-interest stories. Ditto with cable (though I focus on Comcast because it is the dominant cable provider for Minnesota) and home phone service (Qwest Communications International, of Denver, dominant phone provider in the state). For startups, local newspapers or news outlets of any kind are a good place to start. News blogs aren't necessarily local, but that's an emerging forum for publicity, as you well know. Get the right blogs behind you, and you can leverage for better positioning with bigger blogs, etc. Know who you want to reach too. Too often I get releases that are written as a one-size-fits-all and is mainly for the tech press or the trades. They're dense, hard to read, and, for me, anyway, a waste of time. If you want to reach a trade audience, go for that and don't waste my time. And vice versa. I imagine that something I'm interested in may not be of much use to something like, say, *Light Reading*, or *Heavy Reading*, to name two trade sites that do a lot on the telecom world.

**Bob:** How do you find startups to write about?

**Les:** I look at press releases, I pay attention to the blogs like *TechCrunch* and *VentureBeat*, I use my powers of mental telepathy, read the tarot, and scrutinize chicken entrails. Seriously, this is one of the few areas where PR actually helps a lot. Because I can't read minds and unless someone I know tips me off, I'll have no clue you're out there. We welcome tips—the juicier the better. If you want to really be my friend, tip me off about juicy things that maybe don't involve your company directly but are in your sphere of knowledge. Get me interested. Make yourself memorable, and I may have more time to spend with you trying to figure out if there's an interesting story to dig out from your company. Many times, I've found that the most interesting thing an executive says is as I'm getting up to leave. Often, he doesn't know it's that interesting because it's around him all the time so much that it becomes like wallpaper—you don't see it anymore. But for the outsider, like me or the reader, it's a fascinating glimpse into another world.

**Bob:** Any advice for startups?

**Les:** See above. And don't get discouraged. I often don't write about startups right away because I want to see if they make it past the first year. It's a way to reality-check the business. But I save a lot of press releases by creating e-mail folders in Outlook so I don't forget who they are a year later if or when they call back to remind me that they're still alive. That's another reason why e-mail is so important, for me, anyway. It is my electronic memory. (My IT guys hate me, though, because I'm one of the top three users of network space. Can't say I blame them either, but it's the way I work.)

## **Luke Armour, PR Coordinator, *blogtalkradio.com***

Luke Armour is a PR blogger and podcaster and the PR coordinator for BlogTalkRadio, the first citizen broadcasting network built on a web-based platform. It allows any user with a phone and a computer to host a live, interactive Internet radio show; and it is the home of Cinch, the simplest podcasting tool ever. He can be reached at [LukeArmour@blogtalkradio.com](mailto:LukeArmour@blogtalkradio.com).

I ran into Luke when, as a writer for *Web Worker Daily*, I got his press release for BlogTalkRadio. I was so impressed with how he crafted that PR that I asked him if he'd share some of his expertise at my blog, [47hats.com](http://47hats.com) and now this book. Here's Luke's post.

### **Luke Armour's Post**

So you've got a killer app. Now what?

I guess the first thing would be to tell someone, right? Right. But shouting out the window and e-mailing every e-mail address you can find on the Internet are not likely your best options. What are your best options? First I'm going to assume that what you've got is worth having. If what you're shilling isn't new or newsworthy (to someone other than you), go back to the drawing board. I mean it.

As a MicroSV your goal is to get your products into the hands—and minds—of those who can best use it, best share it with others, or both. To do that, you must (1) pitch the story of your product to the (2) right people (3) in the proper manner. Your target audience might include a high-profile blogger, an online news site, or a tech reporter for a print publication.

Remember, you are competing with hundreds of other people and thousands of other messages. And while a great, attractive product will speak for itself, getting it into the hands of the proper people will really help spread the word. When BlogTalkRadio unveiled Cinch, it was referred to as "the simplest podcast API ever." Word spread quickly, especially when we released some additional developments and told a handful of relevant people.

You may only get one shot at cutting through the clutter and reaching the eyes of your audience until the next update, product, or service—so do it right. Let's talk about sending a quick pitch e-mail to introduce yourself and your product. Since any good outreach begins with understanding your target audience, let's start there.

### **Tailored/Relevant**

Great outreach begins with a relationship, but we don't always have that association to the media or the end users we need to reach. Without that connection, you first need to make sure what you're offering is of interest. Every new name in the e-mail inbox is a potential groan-and-delete for the media. Save yourself the bridge-burning and e-mail the right people.

Doing a little bit of homework on each outlet or reporter is essential. That reporter who covers the education beat? Probably not your best bet unless you can make the connection. That mommy blogger? Probably not, but that social media marketing guy who loves the newest tools might be a good bet. Be creative and be energetic, but don't be unrealistic.

Laziness is probably the biggest culprit here. You've compiled a list of e-mail addresses. Why not just send the note to them all? Because that's why we don't open 85% of our postal mail—it's junk. Only, it's a lot easier to block an e-mail address than to move, so take the time to make sure the outlet is suitable. Draw that connection between them and your offering if you have to.

### Concise

As Bob Walsh notes in his book *MicroSV Sites that Sell!* a big mistake with many sites is “drowning your visitor with words.” That same principle can be said with any pitch letter. Brevity is your friend. Introduce your product and call the readers to action. That's it.

Do not tell them everything there is to know about your product or service; your goal is to get them to want more information. At that point you can sell it to them in person, by offering more information or by welcoming them to the site for a trial. Mark Twain said, “I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.” Writing succinctly is difficult because it takes time and energy to write short, tight sentences. Strip out the unnecessary and get to the core of your message as quickly as possible.

Keep *relevant* and *concise* in mind before you even sit down at the computer.

Now let's focus on how to craft your message. A good pitch letter should do two things: indicate your credibility and provide benefits to your audience.

### Credibility

“Who are you, and what reason do I have to believe anything you say?” This can be done easily with a few relevant facts or statistics. For BlogTalkRadio, I've written:

The site was launched in August 2006, redesigned with social-networking components in September 2007, and released from Beta in November 2007. Today, over 66,000 shows have been streamed from the BlogTalkRadio site. January logged 2.4 million listeners across the site, a 40% increase in listeners since the site came out of Beta.

That demonstrates that we've been around, that hosts and listeners are using us, and that we're growing. I did all that in three sentences.

### Think Benefits, Not Features

Remember, end users aren't interested in how many buttons something has; they're interested in how it makes their lives better. Even if you're writing to the media, always keep your end user in mind. For example:

BlogTalkRadio allows anyone—worldwide—to host his or her own talk radio show with just a phone and computer. It's completely web-based, so there are no downloads and no recording equipment to buy, which makes it a perfect business or personal tool for today's online enthusiast, like your readers. Want to talk politics? Cover your favorite sports beat? Rant and rave about today's headlines or celebrity gossip? Now you can, from the comfort of your home—for free.

And then know when to stop (remember *concise*?). No one knows your product like you do, but you've got to stick to the core message in this initial pitch e-mail. And the core can change with each message, because each e-mail is relevant to the receiver of the e-mail.

### Call to Action

At the end you must call the reader to action with a simple way to get more information and an incentive to do so. From "Drop me a line if you'd like more information" to "Contact me today for a free 30-day trial," you must prod them to act. Watch some late-night infomercials for more examples.

### Subject Line

All of these tips won't mean anything unless someone actually opens the e-mail. Fortunately, these same guidelines apply to your subject line, which itself is a mini-pitch. It should be short, relevant, and catchy. Your subject line teases the pitch e-mail, which teases what you really want to say on your site or on the phone. Write for the end user.

### Conclusion

So do your homework and make it relevant to your audience. Keep it concise with your core information, facts, and why this person should care. Finish with a call to action, and wrap it in a punchy subject line.

Be creative. Media and end users often don't even know they want your product yet. Follow up a week or so later with a second e-mail that includes an additional feature or core message. If they say "not interested," thank them for their time and move on. But don't count them out for version 2.0 or that other application you're tinkering with.

For more information about public relations, Brian Solis has a free eBook called *PR Tips for Startups* that provides a great introduction to approaching PR. It's a must-read.

Good luck and good pitching.

## Startup PR the Right Way

So what's the bottom line takeaway from the five people we've just covered about how a startup can "generate media buzz"? Here's what I see.



1. Take the time to get to know the reporter or blogger you're trying to reach. If you don't, your chances of getting anywhere approximate zero.
2. News—something interesting, surprising, worth readers' attention because they're interested in it, not because you want them to be—is a must-have. Don't waste your time churning out PR about moving from 2.31 to 2.32. Instead, find a customer who's using your product in a surprising or moving way, a really new feature or feature set, or stats that surprise or at least intrigue.
3. Get right to the point. Zero fluff. Don't try to do their job for them—give them facts with which they can work.
4. If writing doesn't come easily to you, accept that, hire a pro, and tell that professional what news you want to release.
5. If you're funded, it's worth the outlay to hire a PR agency that focuses on building relationships with both the press and bloggers to whom your customers pay attention. But if you just hand off PR to them, you may see a lot of press releases but not much value.
6. Be cheerful and upbeat, and have a thick, thick skin. You are going to be told no a lot more than yes; your job is to first make sure you don't provoke a "Hell, no!" by angering the reporter or blogger. And keep swinging your bat at the ball.

## Your Other Title: Chief Community Officer

So far we've covered blogs, Twitter, and getting in the news, both online and off. I haven't even touched on Facebook, MySpace, Hi5, Ning's network of over a hundred thousand social networks, all of the specialized social networks (such as StartupToDo.com—I couldn't resist), all of the other microblogging startups, such as Posterous and Identica, let alone how every major online company from Amazon to Google is adding more and more social media features. My poor bleeding fingers! Let's step back and look at where all this is heading and what that means for your startup.

What it all comes down to, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, is that you'll need to fulfill a whole new role if you want your startup to succeed: *chief community officer* (CCO). Just as there was a time when there was no such box on a corporate organization chart as *chief technology officer*, because technology wasn't critical, you are seeing more and more

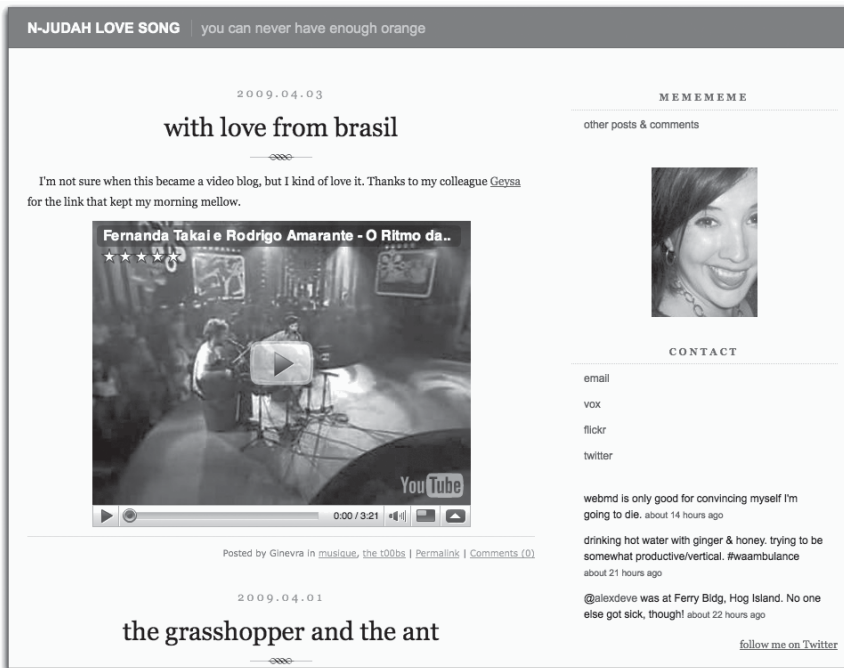
CCOs, more community managers, popping up at companies that recognize the value and importance of social media.

So what does a community manager or CCO do? Blogs. Twitter. Facebook. GetSatisfaction.com and UserVoice.com. Podcasts. All that social media work that needs to land on someone's desk if it's going to get done and get done right. Add it all up, and it's easily a full-time job that's critical to a startup from day 1. And that means either you need a partner who's going to make this rock, or you've some rocky times ahead.

Speaking of getting it all done right, let's talk to three of these community managers in the wild.

## Ginevra Whalen, TypePad Community Manager, Six Apart

Ginevra Whalen (@miz\_ginevra and <http://ginevra.typepad.com>) is the community manager for Six Apart's flagship product, the TypePad blogging service. I heard about her both from other Six Apart employees and on Twitter as the go-to person if you needed help from that company (Figure 6-11).



**Figure 6-11.** Six Apart's Ginevra Whalen

**Bob:** So what do you do as TypePad's community manager?

**Ginevra:** I do a lot of things! Mostly, I invest a lot of time and effort into building up a positive community around our products. I do the one-to-many communication via our Everything TypePad blog and one-to-one communication via Twitter, Facebook, Get Satisfaction, and many other social media channels.

**Bob:** What social networks do you monitor, and how?

**Ginevra:** Facebook, Twitter, Get Satisfaction, Yahoo Answers, and the blogosphere. I've got a complicated tangle of RSS feeds/searches that I run to see who is saying what about who. I usually reach out to customers with issues individually, and if the problem is more widespread, then I know to address it publically.

**Bob:** Is being a community manager more than just reacting to the negative comments people make about Six Apart online?

**Ginevra:** Yes, of course it is. Reacting to negative comments isn't even how I'd term it; it's listening to feedback and turning it into something useful and actionable. I see community management as the future of marketing and customer service. People really want the products they care enough to spend money on to have a responsive, personal, personable voice to speak with them like humans.

I think this is a result of a lot of innovation in the space, but also a reaction to the endless phone-tree runaround frustration people experience. I have a far better time talking with @comcastcares on Twitter than I do simply punching numbers into the phone. The connection is more valuable because of the human interaction.

**Bob:** Do you ever find yourself in the role of customer advocate? How's that worked out?

**Ginevra:** Yes! I frequently call myself "our most annoying customer." :) I've been using TypePad for five years, and I use it daily for our blogs, so I really do feel all the same delights and pain points as our customers do.

**Bob:** Given how much social media has grown in the last few years, should a startup seek out someone like you to be their community manager? Where should they look?

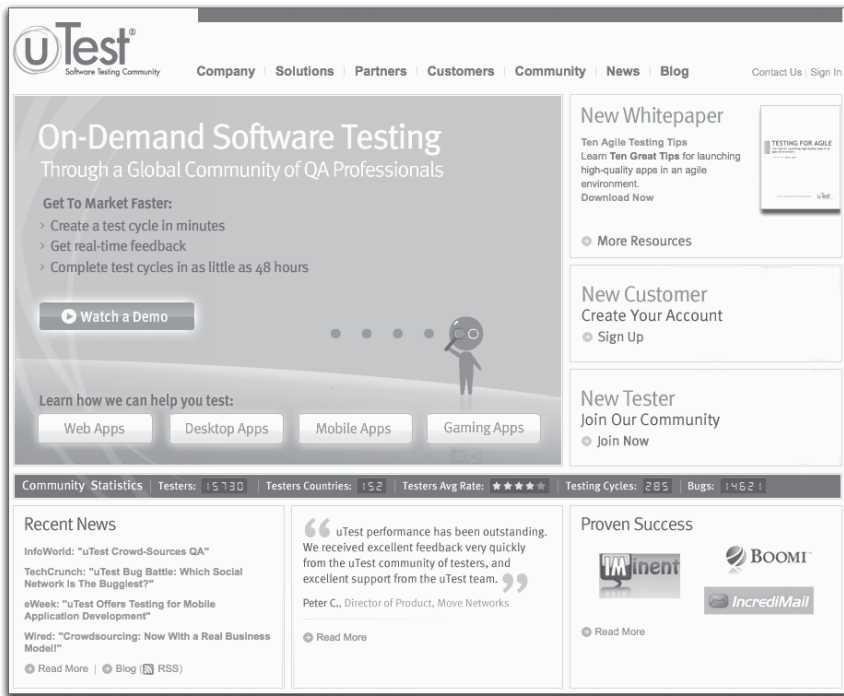
**Ginevra:** I grew my experience and aptitude for this by working in restaurants, actually. It's a very similar personality type! When I was a bartender, I ran into so many people all day long that I was invariably fascinated by their stories and how to help them solve problems. Not all bartenders are this way, of course. There's something one of our bloggers wrote that was very smart called "the service heart" that I think sums it up: [http://www.happiness-project.com/happiness\\_project/2007/07/the-happiness-o.html](http://www.happiness-project.com/happiness_project/2007/07/the-happiness-o.html)

**Bob:** Any social media advice to share with startups?

**Ginevra:** Be interested. Be genuine. Talk to people how you want to be talked to by a company you're interacting with. Be human.

## **Matt Johnston, VP of Marketing & Community, uTest, Inc.**

We took a look at uTest in Chapter 4—crowd-based white-box testing at way below traditional cost. For uTest, building and adding to its community of over 15,000 testers (as of just a year after launching) is a must-have: no testers, no company. It's Matt's job to build that community (Figure 6-12).<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 6-12.** uTest: The community is the product.

**Bob:** What's different about running a business based on an online community instead of employees and contractors?

<sup>8</sup> If you'd like to know more about how uTest works, check out this podcast: <http://startuppodcast.wordpress.com/2009/04/15/show-22-crowdsourced-bug-detection-with-utest>

**Matt:** When you're building a traditional business that fulfills its services through employees or contractors, you only have one set of customers: your customers. In this traditional type of company, you have direct, contractual control over your employees or contractors. And so, oftentimes, companies don't concern themselves with serving the needs of these audiences.

When building a community-driven business, however, you have two sets of customers that you must serve: the companies who need work done, and the community who supplies the skills and experience. Also, when leveraging an online community, the ultimate arbiter of your best performers is made by customers who rate members of the community, not by an employer who manages and evaluates his/her employees.

**Bob:** What advice would you give those who want to build their startups based on an online community?

**Matt:** First, you have to understand, appreciate, and model around the fact that you have two customer constituencies (see preceding answer). Second, it's important to note that there is a subtle science to effective community-building. It's much more than just acquiring a big group of people who share a common interest or skill set. In order to build an effective community, you need to account for things like structured user profiles, reputation systems, carrots and sticks, and community programs to increase the level of skill and engagement.

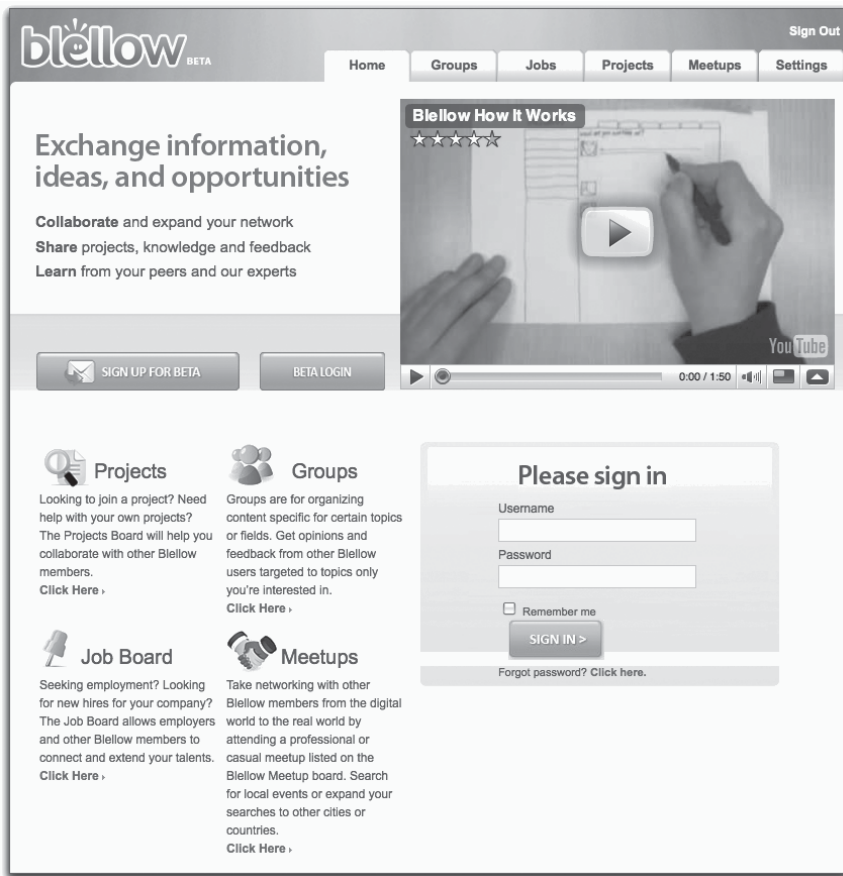
## ***Veronica Jorden, Communications Manager, Blellow***

Blellow (<http://blellow.com>) is a just-launched community for freelancers and professionals, focusing on helping freelancers, entrepreneurs, and professionals build a list of trusted friends who can help you solve problems, give feedback when you need it, and even help you find work (Figure 6-13).

**Bob:** Tell me about your job for Blellow. Are you both community manager and communications manager?

**Veronica:** I am by title the communications manager and do spend a lot of time in the typical sales and marketing type of role, but we are a small team and so we all wear many hats. In a sense our entire core staff acts as community managers. We all have different backgrounds and different work experience and so we all contribute to managing the community in different ways.

**Bob:** Blellow's "product" is its community. How do you get more people into a startup's community?



**Figure 6-13.** Blellow: building a trusted community

**Veronica:** That is our daily challenge, giving people a reason to join yet another community. During development we worked to identify what was missing from some of the other communities out there, what we wanted but just weren't getting out of them. Taking those ideas and building them into Blellow has helped us to clearly identify why being a part of our community can actually help others in their professional life. We take those same ideas and the features that resulted and use them in our marketing messages.

Getting people to sign up for another community has been tough, but we one thing we did was to use development as a way to bring folks in. We launched a closed beta to a small group of "early adopters" who were willing to take a look at our community and give us some feedback. That gave us a great base of members to start with. From there we tried to identify

the best way for us to talk to lots of people about what we were doing; for us that was the 2009 SxSWi event in Austin, Texas. Beyond that we have also embraced a very “grassroots” type of marketing strategy and use other networks, like Twitter, Facebook, and Yahoo and Google Groups, to reach out and talk to potential new community members.

**Bob:** Is it all about getting them to join? What else do you have to do to keep their attention and participation?

**Veronica:** Great question! Numbers are great motivating factors, but they are by no means the real “meat” of a community. You could have a community of 10K members, but if only a third of them are actually participating, then the community isn’t as active as the numbers would lead you to believe.

Getting people to sign up for something doesn’t necessarily mean that they will participate. For us, once we get new members, we work to keep them engaged. Because we are a community of collaboration and sharing of knowledge, we try to make sure that every person that comes into our community is acknowledged and made to feel welcome. We are very open about the core team participation within the community and offer direct and open lines of communication between our staff and the community members.

We spend a lot of our time listening to our members, what features they like, what features they wish we would add, and other ideas about how to make the community better. What is really great is that we are starting to be able to identify the community members who really are championing for us both internally and externally.

We try to recognize those people and work with them; their enthusiasm is contagious, and it is that kind of positive word-of-mouth advertising that helps us to gain new members who actually want to participate in the community. We are also working on some other projects, things like widgets for posting on other social networks and blogs, contests and community projects, guest blog postings to our main blog, and a bimonthly newsletter, just to name a few.

**Bob:** How do you deal with people who are “off message”? I noticed, for example, some posts from what looks like typical “Work at home make money on the Internet” types. What do you do?

**Veronica:** For us I honestly think the key to keeping the community “on message” is allowing the community to govern itself. In our community we have grouping capabilities, and each group has a moderator. We are almost finished developing our group management functionality, but the plan is to give a group owner/moderator the ability to delete messages that are inappropriate, to form rules for group conduct, and, if necessary, to boot or ban a member from participating in a group.

Beyond that from a total community perspective we will be implementing a process for community members to flag posts and members for inappropriate or “off message” posts. Again this goes back to allowing the community to set their own rules for conduct. That’s not to say that we won’t be involved—ultimately the power to remove messages and members lies with us and who we delegate it to—but we want to give our members what they want.

If it turns out that our community wants a whole bunch of those work-from-home type of opportunities, then so be it. On Blellow we also have job and project boards, so you question applies to us in that respect as well. Currently while still in open beta we are not charging a fee to post projects and jobs. Once we have finished building out functionality of those features, we will be charging a small fee to help keep the junk and scam postings off of those boards as well.

**Bob:** Any advice for other startups trying to build/amass online communities?

**Veronica:** I think there are really two big lessons I have learned from our process so far. One is to clearly identify who your audience is and to keep them in mind at all times when building your community. Creating new features and functionality is only a good thing if they really benefit your members; try to see things from your users’ point of view so you can concentrate on the things they most need and want.

And two, don’t be afraid to talk with people about your community. It really just takes a few people on your side to help start spreading the word, so while I don’t think it is necessarily a good idea to give your sales pitch to everyone you meet in every situation, be open to talking to people about things they are working on . . . ask for their opinion, ask for their ideas, ask for their insight. We have met so many brilliant, creative, and helpful people in this process who have given us advice that has helped us to both avoid mistakes and create a great community. You honestly never know who you are going to meet, and the most random person can sometimes be the key to getting your community to really grow and succeed.

So how do you become a community manager? It’s definitely on-the-job-training time—it’s so new that the traditional offline economy is barely aware of it. Of course, you’re halfway there if you’ve been reading the pdf version of this book while keeping one eye on TweetDeck!

## ***Maria Sipka, CEO, Linqia***

Now I’d like to introduce you to a friend of mine who lives and breathes community and is focused like a laser beam on making a better world by

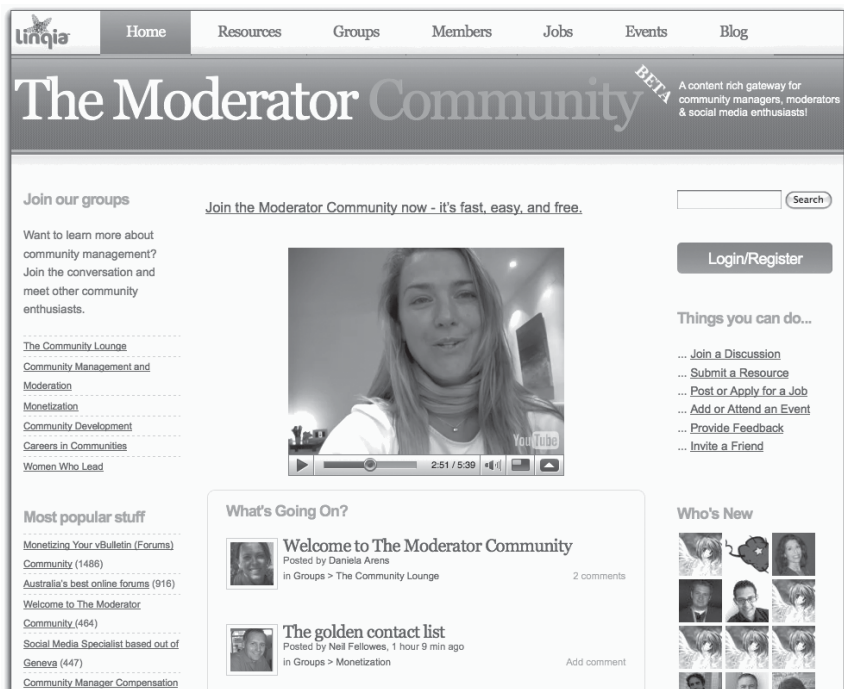


connecting people online. Maria Sipka is the CEO of a startup called Linqia (<http://Linqia.com>), about which I think you'll be hearing more—a lot more—in the next few years.

Maria's story is an interesting one. At 18 Maria set the goal of becoming financially independent in her family's adopted country of Australia. She then proceeded to build four businesses, including a property portfolio with 35 properties and a web design shop. By 28, she'd hit her financial goal, decided life wasn't just about money, and found her calling going to work for XING, a European social network platform company.

In short order, as director of community building at XING, she founded four of its most successful online communities before moving on to launch Linqia.com—a marketplace for and to online communities. And in March 2009, Linqia launched Moderator Community—the online community for community managers (<http://www.themoderatorcommunity.com/>).

Maria now makes her home in Barcelona, Spain. I interviewed her for this book via Skype (Figure 6-14).



**Figure 6-14.** The Moderator Community

**Bob:** OK. Let's talk about the Moderator Community. What is it? Why is it, and how is that going? How did you get it started? You know, good stuff like that.

**Maria:** OK. With the Moderator Community it was always part of our core vision when we started Linqia [<http://www.linqia.com>] to provide an independent place where we could capture all of the value that we were stumbling across, because many people within our company are community builders as well, and we have been working with clients all around the world, helping them build their communities.

It's a space that we have spent countless hours researching, so we are continually reading blog articles, we are reviewing presentations, listening to podcasts, we are conversing with experts. You can say that the people within Linqia are at the forefront of what's going on in the community space.

We've listed over 700 resources, probably close to 800 or 900 with blogs and podcasts and presentations. Anybody can upload those resources. Right now, we are doing 95% of the activity, like, within any community. In the first six months, most of the activity is the people who have been championing it right from the beginning, and then you reach that tip where the community starts to generate the discussions and upload the content.

We are also listing all the events that are related to communities and social media, but it does have a community edge to it. We are also scouting around what jobs are available. I mean, that's one of the most popular sections. Funny enough we have only been launched for a month and we have a look at our Google Analytics. A lot of people are searching for community management jobs, and, yeah, as I said, it's just a rich, resource bustling place where people can come to and extract a lot of value without any expectation in return from us other than just contributing and drawing upon those resources.

**Bob:** Yeah, the thing that strikes me is that, let's say two years ago, if you asked people who their community manager was, they would go "Huh?" Tell me what you think has led to this rise of the community manager role within companies.

**Maria:** Well, I've just finished reading Seth Godin's book *The Purple Cow*, and he talks about marketers and salespeople and how both of those roles have now evolved. The days of just pushing out communication messages via press releases, via newspapers, television, radio, and spending bulk amounts of money, those days are gone because people no longer have the attention to be receptive to that, no matter how targeted it is.

The bulk of the people that they want to target are spending so much time in social networks. The numbers are astounding. We have got 1.4 bil-

lion people that are on the Internet, of which 700 million belong to social networks, of which over 300 million belong to communities and groups. And they're spending more time in platforms such as Digg, such as Twitter, such as bookmarking via del.icio.us [now Delicious.com]. People are really changing their whole way of communicating with each other and with brands and companies and absorbing information.

And so, many of these companies come to the realization of "We have to join the conversation. This is no longer about just having a blog and one person or a number of people within the company who are just publishing blogs and have a following. It's a holistic approach. We need to have blogs. We need to have communities and groups. We need to have Twitter."

To cut a long story short, the short answer is that companies realize they need to start conversing with their key stakeholders. They need to establish relationships with them. It's no longer about pushing their company or their products or the benefits of their products. It's about understanding the behaviors of their key stakeholders and fulfilling on the needs of their key stakeholders by adding value and sparking the conversation that then has them have a loyal following. Because it's so transparent. The days of just having a database and attracting e-mail addresses and then pushing messages is no longer there. If somebody follows you on Twitter and you're not interesting, they're going to immediately disconnect. If they're following your blog and you're publishing just commercial-angled stories, they're going to disconnect.

It's extremely cutthroat. So, that's why a lot of these companies now are employing full-time community managers, Twitter reporters. Like, Dunkin' Donuts is really the best example of people that represent the brand, but their intention is not to sell, but rather converse and say, "Hey, I'm just like you. How can I reach the small attention span that you're willing to dedicate towards my brand or business?"

**Bob:** So, it really is a battle for attention. That's what it comes down to.

**Maria:** Spot on. Spot on.

## **Building Your Pre-Community**

**Bob:** OK. Let's talk about startups and community here for a moment. Let's say that you were doing a startup, a software startup of some sort. What should be your first move in terms of community?

**Maria:** I'm so glad you asked that question, because we've been experimenting a lot in the last month, specifically on "How do you really start out?" OK? The trick here is that, depending on what your focus is . . . I mean, I'll share the example of us. In a way, we're a startup. We haven't done any major push to position ourselves in the marketplace until we're

confident that we actually are building a product that's going to be of value and we know how we're going to execute on that. So, we're at a stage of certainty, of we know what we're doing is going to be valuable.

We've pinpointed who our key stakeholders are, and we want to build a relationship with these people. We know that these people . . . I'm sorry?

**Bob:** In other words, you know who you want to talk to.

**Maria:** We know who we want to talk to. And, Bob, we know that these people have limited attention. They are scratching around for minutes. OK? The issue becomes how do we position ourselves? How do we get credibility? How do we gain their trust? How do we gain their loyalty? How do we become a go-to point, specifically that's going to benefit us and benefit them?

We are not going to go and create a group around Linqia and start to push our product or the benefits of using our product. Sure, we might have a Facebook fan page around Linqia, but that's . . .

**Bob:** That's different, yeah.

**Maria:** That's different. That's more just affiliation. It's more just gathering people that already know who you are to say, "Hey, yep," on the side. It's on a badge. It's just wearing a badge on a jacket.

**Bob:** OK.

**Maria:** What we want to do is we want to deepen the trust and the loyalty with these people. What are the channels to our key stakeholders? Where are they living? They're living on Twitter, they're living on LinkedIn, some of them are on Facebook, and then special-interest blogs and communities that are out there. How do we reach and put our tentacles into all of those different spaces and, at the same time, add significant value to those people? The Moderator Community is very generic and very broad. OK? Those people who are joining our Moderator Community, it's more like a very, very big umbrella. I want to get focused.

So the expertise that's at the core of what we're offering is around influence in marketing. OK? Because we're building a channel that will be able to offer the connection between what Seth Godin calls these *sneezers*, these highly influential people. And our technology will be able to pinpoint exactly what the members of those communities and groups are talking about. But at no point in time are we going to mention our product.

So, I've created a group, in LinkedIn, called Influence in Marketing, and it's around that topic. And again, I'm sharing a lot of resources that are related to influence in marketing, so I'm uploading reports. I'm uploading blogs, news articles. I'm sparking discussions around the topic so that people see this group as a go-to place to, number 1: learn, and number 2: also connect with other people that are interested in that topic.

It took me two hours to create that community, to think about it, to write the short description, long description, find a logo, think about “What’s the content? How often am I going to contribute?,” invite the people within my network. And overnight, 50 people joined that group. And we’re talking very high-profile, key, key, key stakeholders. This is not about getting the masses. This is about getting the most important people.

Every day, we have now 5 to 10 people who join that are not even part of my network but that have seen, by other member profiles, “Oh, what’s this Influence in Marketing?” Or they’ve searched for “influence in marketing.”

And we’re getting, again, the most high-profile people that are joining this group. And it’s like honey to the bee. You’ve got this captive, captive audience. You’re contributing content and valuable resources into that community, and every week these now 70-odd people are “A newsletter from LinkedIn. Here are all the discussions that are taking place.”

And then those people are coming back into that group. They’re reading that content. And every single second that they have an interaction with Influence in Marketing, they’re going to relate that to me as a person as well as to our company. And when the moment is right, you can activate that network to say, “Hey, you people are special. We’ve spent the last six months together learning about influence in marketing. Here’s a special invitation. As a very exclusive group, you get a sneak peak at what it is that we’re creating.” You can blend in one of your commercial messages.

**Bob:** Well, not to be crass about it, but it sounds like the first step is to engage in conversation with these people and establish some value with them. In other words, before you even talk about your product or your service, you’ve got to establish some value.

**Maria:** Yes. And we’re talking real value. OK? This is not just like something on the surface.

**Bob:** OK.

**Maria:** It has to be, like, “Wow! I have not read this before” or “Yes. I’ve read five of these articles already. Then this group must be . . .” “It’s this group’s like me.” That’s the kind of value.

**Bob:** In terms of a strategy for establishing the value, are we really only talking about acting as sort of an Internet editor, where you’re pooling resources that they may not have seen together? Or is it a question of your own, original content? Or is it a mix of both?

**Maria:** Well, not all of us are great writers. Let’s face it. Most companies, most individuals don’t know how to write. They don’t even know how to articulate what it is that they know.

So, it goes back to Malcolm Gladwell’s “Tipping Point.” Are you a maven? Are you a connector? Are you a super-spreader? What are you?

What's the value that you have as a person? If you, as Bob Walsh, have the capability to articulate what it is that you know and you can write a blog every week, then great. You're going to be able to add even more value to that group.

I can half-write, 50% of your capability. So I will, for example . . .

**Bob:** You're too kind.

**Maria:** [laughs] So I'll spark discussions. I won't go and write blog articles, because I just don't know how to research or articulate the message. But I know how to ask good questions. So you've got to know what value either you have or somebody in your company has, and gather those people together to say, "Right, this is how you're going to contribute to this particular community here or this particular group." And then you need to do it consistently. OK? So that means being habitual about, if you stumble across a resource, the first thing that comes to mind is, "Oh, I want to share it with the group!"

So it's about saying, what value, what gifts do we have, and how can we present that and share that with this following of people to gain their loyalty and trust?

**Bob:** OK. So, in terms of the life of a startup, that actually begins before they release, before they launch. This is because, to be a little bit mercenary about it, they want to have that community in place when they're about to launch because they're the people who are going to launch too.

**Maria:** Exactly. Yeah. They're the people that become the early adopters, the sneezers.

## The Post-Startup Community

**Bob:** OK. Now, let's say that you get to that point where you've launched. You've got your core community of people who have found value in what you had to say about the things that you're interested in, which probably are about the things that your startup is interested in. Is it just, from there, rinse, lather, and repeat? Do you just keep doing what you're doing, or do you need to change focus?

**Maria:** Yeah, the communities evolve. Because what we're talking about are startups that haven't launched a product. If you have a look at a Twitter that is already launched, well, one of their communities might be purely all about educational resources around how do you Twitter. And another community may be . . . It's understanding the different needs of your key stakeholders. The second version is, "How do I use this product? And how is it really valuable in maximizing the experience?"

Another community might be, for example, the bigger brands, like the Procter & Gambles. They've created nonprofit communities. So it's all

about positioning themselves as being the saviors in the world, and it's about gaining the loyalty of these people as "Hey, we don't only offer you education, we don't only offer you a great product, but we're doing good in the world. And here are some of our initiatives. Come and participate in supporting teenage girls in developing countries."

So community-building has to serve the business needs. There's no illusion about "Hey, let's just go and do good and invest all of this money and time and not be clear on what the business outcomes are." OK? So you've got to be able to set a very clear purpose and set up multiple communities that meet different needs and try not to mix them together, because otherwise you start to dilute the experience of those key stakeholders.

**Bob:** So you might end up with, actually, a couple of different communities, depending on exactly what your focus is. I mean, doing good for good's sake is one thing. Doing good to get attention on the Internet, because good things do tend to get attention, is another, and perhaps something more that startups should be thinking about.

**Maria:** Exactly. Procter & Gamble have 2,000 communities.

**Bob:** What? [laughs] Wait a minute. Huh?

**Maria:** They have 2,000 communities.

**Bob:** What are these people talking about? Procter & Gamble, I mean, they make soap.

**Maria:** That's the point. They have one of the most successful communities that's ever been launched. It's called *BeingGirl.com*, and it's for teenage girls. Procter & Gamble wanted to create a community around hygiene. OK? But, hey, are you going to create a community where you're going to sell your tampons and all of these are areas that teenage girls like, "Oh my God, I don't even want to hear that word"? It's a very, very sensitive topic.

But what Procter & Gamble found was that these teenage girls want a place where they can talk about "What happens when I first get my period? What do I do here?" Because they're too afraid to talk about it either among their friends or to their mother. So this community has attracted hundreds of thousands of girls that have found a way to communicate with one another and to share their stories and ask the questions.

Procter & Gamble has doctors that are in there that are, like, "Ask Anne." And then that doctor has to respond to these messages. And then, very subtly, in a signature, it is, "Oh, by the way, use Tampax." It's because Procter & Gamble know that the lifetime value of one of their customers is around about \$4,000. So they know that they can afford to spend a certain percentage, say, per member, to create this community.

And this community has become one of the most successful and most profitable communities. And you could never achieve the same results if you were to go to Stardoll or Piczo or one of the other teenage sites, because they're too generic and broad.

So what they've done is . . . Procter & Gamble is one of the largest packaged-goods companies in the world. They have hundreds of products. So they've gone and created either these big, massive, official communities like BeingGirl, or what they've done is they've sponsored smaller groups or communities so that they get a positioning in there. And what they do is they purely focus on adding value. None of their communities are heavily product-focused, unless the customers want product conversations.

## The Build-or-Buy Decision

**Bob:** OK. Well, what's your recommendation right now for a startup? Should they build their own site, or should they go with Ning or one of Ning's competitors? Or does the software for this really matter?

**Maria:** This is the big misconception about community-building. The first question that I often get asked is "What technology should we use?" And it's, like, forget about the technology. Have a look at the purpose, have a look at the people, have a look at the whole community experience, and then think about the technology that you need. For example, we've just built our own community. It's expensive. We've even used a free software. We've used Open Source Drupal. But it cost us around about 30,000 euros just to get it to this point. It's expensive.

We have one full-time resource that's on the community. We have another resource that spends 20% to 50 % of her time on the community. I spend 20% of my time on the community. It's really expensive, because once you've set up the community, you then have to nurture it, and you have to keep iterating, whether it be by features, whether it be by content.

So building your own community, I would only recommend if it's absolutely core to your business, because building your own community has its upsides, in that you then get to retain the IP of that community, whereas you get to retain the database of that community. If you go and set up a community on Ning or Facebook, then they own that database. They own the content. It depends on the conditions and the rules. But if you have a look at the fine print, most of those community platforms own that content.

So once you have gone and identified what your purpose is and really identified what value this community is going to add: What are the metrics that you are going to sift for success? If your community is going to be the place where you can confidently retain all of your key stakeholders



and converse with them on a regular basis, then what are those key stakeholders worth to you?

Are they potentially worth 100,000 euros per annum because you're spending that sort of money? OK. Then you might invest into building your own community and building your own community will cost you anywhere from 10,000 euros to a million Euros. It's like how long is a piece of string?

There are so many solutions out there. There are 120 different white label platforms that you can build your community on. That's really the most robust side of community building. But if you realize that you just want to build some special-interest groups like what I did with influence in marketing, and that's really for our marketplace. It had nothing to do with the Moderator Community.

Then that took me two hours. It was free. I had already built my network over the last three years. So it was overnight I activated that community, and it's very straightforward and extremely powerful. So that's the other end of the extreme.

**Bob:** If I were to summarize your advice, I think what you are getting to here is this. We're talking about business and community, so the first question is, what is the lifetime value of one of your customers? You should know what that is.

If it's a small amount, if you are in the consumer space, that by its nature leads to one type of approach. If it's a large amount of money, let's say you're more the enterprise space, where you are going to have fewer conversations and the conversations you are having are, quite frankly, worth a lot more to you, then maybe it makes sense to build something where you own the IP, where you can absolutely customize it to the conversation that you want. Is that a fair summation?

**Maria:** Exactly. You are spot on it. It's identifying who your key stakeholders are, what the value of those key stakeholders is. What's the purpose of building your community? What is it that you have to offer? On a scale of 1 to 10, how much of a need is there for your offering? Like "Influence in Marketing" is the hot topic, so people are going to bust down the doors to get into that group. But if you've got something around dental care, then maybe it might not be so exciting. Maybe your key stakeholders spend very little time on the Internet. So you've got to identify the risk of what your purpose is. What's the need for the marketplace, and how receptive are they going to be to that?

It's about building satellites in multiple different platforms where you are going to be to attract those people who are interested in your topic. So you might have a group on Facebook, a fan page on Facebook, a group in LinkedIn, a community on Ning. You might have seven different places, a Twitter following. You could have a Flickr group or a YouTube group.

There are so many different platforms out there. You have got to choose: Where are we going to be? Who's going to take care of this? What budget are we going to set? What metrics are we going to set?

And then you might start off really small. You might just start off with something really straightforward like a LinkedIn group and then that might grow into a much bigger community where you do invest money to build big.

## **Finding Your Community Manager**

**Bob:** OK, well let me ask you one last question. Let's say you're a developer/founder. In other words, you're a software geek here. You've decided that, yes, a core part of what your company needs to do is to be talking to people online. You need to build all these conversations. You need basically a community manager.

What experience or characteristics should you look for in, let's say, a cofounder whose main role is going to be community manager?

**Maria:** Community managers are very special people. And not everybody can do it. Because you need, first and foremost, somebody who's very good with people and can connect and communicate with people. That's something that has to come naturally. You want to find somebody who is natural at that. If you find somebody who's an extrovert who just rubs people the wrong way, it can be disastrous. So finding that person is . . . it could be internal. It could be, hey, if you can have the CEO or founder of the company play that role, wonderful. But then the other thing is that that person is going to need to be consistent. Consistency is the second biggest key to community, being a community manager.

If you are going to be sending a message to people to say, hey, come and hang out with me, then those people are going to want to hang out with you; and if you are not in your community for two weeks, then that starts to have a detrimental effect on your community.

Then thirdly it's being a good manager. Because as your community starts to grow, you need to juggle a lot of plates. You are going to be needing to welcome people, respond to people's comments, making sure they are posting in the right categories, posting the right type of resources.

You yourself are going need to gather valuable content to bring back into your community. So eventually, the bigger the community grows, you

can pretty much almost spend almost full time just managing or moderating your community.

Then the question becomes, well, where do you find those people if you don't have them in-house? The Web works with companies where they have been shared by 10 different people within the company. So we have identified all the different roles that need to exist for this community, and then each of those people has been responsible for contributing a bit into that community.

So it's been shared among many, many people, and it hasn't been a full-time role of any one person. If you are a company that wants to hire somebody, my preference would be to just hire one person that has a lot of those, who can wear all of those hats.

The best place to find those people is within those communities and groups. These people need to already understand social media, understand the rules of engagement. They would have built their own community or group or participated in at least 8 to 10 groups. They would have spent at least one or two hours a day discussing . . . that's a breeding ground for finding these community managers.

Although they might not see themselves as a community manager, if they get approached by somebody to say: "Hey, you're really good at what you. I've noticed that you belong to a number of groups. You're posting a lot of content. You seem to really understand this topic. We would like to hire you." [laughs]

**Bob:** OK, so first off they have to be great with people. Second, they need to be consistent. They need to be able to work this day in and day out. How would you summarize that third point, though?

**Maria:** Good with people, they need consistency. Third is experience. They need to be experienced with social media. They need to know how to use the tools and leverage the tools. And join the Moderator Community, for example, so that they're at the forefront of knowing how to maximize the value and the experience of the members of that community and group. The manager or motivator can make or break a community. If you aren't getting it right, you can say goodbye to that community.

## Recap

In this chapter we've been exploring the make-or-break question for a startup: How do you get attention in an uncaring world? Without that attention, nothing happens. Without that attention, no matter how long your financial runway, you're going to crash and burn.

The way to get attention in this business used to be through traditional news organizations, such as trade magazines and newspapers. Those

still work, but less and less so. Whereas newspapers are falling over like porcelain dolls in a 7.5 quake, online news blogs are coming on strong and very much want to hear your story.

But they don't want their time wasted. Clueless PR efforts are worse than no PR efforts—you're going to need to take the time or buy the expertise to know who in the news business is interested in what, and what they—not you—define as news.

Meanwhile, when hundreds of millions of people start spending their attention and time in social networks, social media, social ways online, that is something you as a startup founder cannot afford to ignore.

The bad news is that connecting to this new social media thing—this arc of change and disruption, from Twitter at one end to blogs, to “socialized” major sites, to social sites the size of countries—is a full-time job. It's a lot of work spending the time to scan your social media radar and participating in hundreds—thousands—of overlapping conversations. You are going to need help. That means either bringing in a partner who's going to do this 24/7 or making your first hire, not another developer and certainly not a VP for marketing, but a community manager who gets it.

The good news in this era where attention is dear and markets are conversations is that the social media playing field favors tiny companies with passionate people on a mission to bring something new into the world. That's you—if you're willing to jettison the whole marketing mentality with which big companies blanket our lives.

Next up, we dig in deep on exactly how to communicate your startup's message. This is a subject that has tripped up many a startup. I don't want your startup to end up on that casualty list.