

Title:

5 Ways Blogging Can Help Your Business

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A Web log can serve as an inexpensive marketing tool

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Article Body:

Not long ago, a diary was a deeply personal thing – a journal of thoughts and observations, kept under lock and key and often buried in a dresser drawer.

The Web has a way of changing things. Now, a diary of thoughts, observations and insight – posted on the Internet – may be a way to boost your business.

Web logs, or "blogs" as they're better known, have become a way to engage readers and potential customers of businesses big and small.

A blog is a journal posted on a Web site, updated on a regular basis and containing news, opinions, ideas and brainstorming. It might also have links to other sources of information, other Web sites and other blogs.

Many blogs cut both ways, inviting readers to post feedback on what they see. While that can apply to everything from sports and entertainment, it can also generate interest – and, ultimately, income – for your business.

No, blogs aren't for everyone. But see how they can accomplish these five basic business objectives.

1. Expose a new or little-known product or idea

For Grant Smith, blogging makes a world of sense on a number of levels. Smith operates a business that provides streaming video e-mail and related video communications products. Since many prospective clients might know little about video e-mail, Smith says his blog is a natural way to provide specifics.

"I began blogging to get established in the technology," Smith says. "It can have a positive impact for business. Readers are always looking for more ways to find out information about companies and for ways to interact."

That, in turn, can lead to a more informed customer and a more time-effective sales process. Rather than taking time to pitch your product or service to a client who may not need it, a blog supplants you as an information source. If a prospect contacts you, that's great. If not, you've wasted no time in explaining something that generates nothing in return.

2. Improve your search engine rankings

Blogging also puts you in touch with prospects in other ways. As any company with a position on the Internet realises, Web site visitors that come via Google, MSN and other search engines can provide numerous leads. Blogs can add to the frequency with which search vehicles identify you and your company, particularly if your blog allows readers to post a response. </p>

<p>If done properly, blogs have a tremendous benefit relative to search engines, according to Brad Fallon, president of SEO Research, a search engine marketing firm. "With blogs that allow comments, every new post and every new comment becomes an additional Web page filled with additional keywords to be picked up by the search engine spiders," he says. </p>

<p>3. Position yourself as an expert in an industry or field

Blogging also can also prove an effective marketing tool to establish yourself as an authority in your field. Not only can that generate leads, it also sends a positive message about your credentials through the marketplace and also gives your business a face and a personality. </p>

<p>4. Influence public opinion

Blogging also allows users to bypass traditional journalistic venues and, in effect, become a publisher of their own thoughts and viewpoints. For Steve Rubel, vice president of client services at a public relations firm, blogs are also fast becoming a powerful influence on public opinion. </p>

<p>"Blogs have evolved into legitimate alternative sources of news on niche and micro-niche topics," Rubel says. "Anyone with a passion and dedication could become an amateur journalist. I feel some of these sites – in aggregate – are having just as much sway on public opinion as larger, more established media brands." </p>

<p>5. Engage in a forum openly with your customers

Just as important, blogs that solicit reader comments can provide a sense of immediacy with your customers. In one respect, that's a ready source of feedback on what you're doing right and what you need to improve. </p>

<p>"My blog provides a forum for customers to give feedback after plunking their money down," says Fallon. "The result? While the normal market is lucky to have one-half of 1% of customers send an unsolicited testimonial, I have already collected glowing testimonials from over 15% of my customers." </p>

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