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**BLOGGING BASICS**

*Arnold Adams is the harried owner of Everywhere Signs. He has no time. His typical day is a blur of action and reaction:*

*7:12—checking voice mail while driving into work.*

*7:30—opening office and checking drop-box for orders.*

*8:00—getting work assignments for employees.*

*9:00–12:00—managing work of employees, answering phones, taking walk-in orders.*

*12:00–1:00—lunching with Big Important Client.*

*1:00–5:00—overseeing sign delivery and setup.*

*5:00–6:00—accounting work, including calling customers about late payments.*

*6:00–7:00—all other work, including answering e-mail.*

*So, when June Marzipan, his hipper-than-thou web guru, said that he needed a blog, his second reaction was, of course, “I have no time.”*

*His first reaction was, “What the hell’s a blog?”*

*After five years with a website, thanks to June, he was just starting to understand how the online world worked. He loved his website—it was colorful, well-organized, and, more importantly, brought in business. It was up there 24/7, 365 days a year, taking orders from customers who loved the idea of not having to come into the shop to order a sign. And he loved the idea of taking their money for something so easy.*

*But June was staring at him, with her disconcertingly pink hair (when did that happen?). He had to say something.*

*“Is a blog a noun? A verb? Why do you Internet people have to make up words?”*

*“Both and because,” June said.*

—Part 1 of “Blog,” a short story by Joe Flood,  
written for this book

**I**MAGINE THAT YOU COULD LISTEN, like a fly on the wall, to millions of people—your customers, employees, competitors, partners, and the media—as they talk about your business, your marketing process, your advertising, and your products. Now imagine that you could use this up-to-the-minute information to determine what your customers want, how they want it, what they will ultimately buy, and what they’re willing to pay for it. This is the power of the blog.

Basing your business decisions on customer feedback and market intelligence is probably the smartest business move you could ever make. And *weblogs*, also known as *blogs*, are allowing companies to do just that. In fact, blogs have the potential not only to change the way you communicate with customers, raise your visibility, and get you direct customer feedback, but they can also transform the way your company does business internally. Using blogs can help you reduce e-mail overload, facilitate the brainstorming process to generate new ideas more quickly, and simplify a variety of project management tasks. Blogs are so powerful that to say they will revolutionize your business is an understatement—

**Basing your business decisions on *actual* customer feedback and market intelligence is the smartest business move you could ever make.**

blogs have the power to create businesses, change the course of political history, and transform the way the mainstream media looks at itself.

Like every major communication tool, blogs expand the ability for companies to operate and ultimately to create entirely new opportunities for growth, product development, and quality control. However, blogs take this communication a step further by bringing the best aspects of mass marketing and transforming them from one-way communication into a two-way dialogue.

As I write this book in the summer of 2005, between 50 million and 100 million bloggers are actively communicating on the Internet, with the number of blog readers estimated at between 200 million and 500 million, according to *The Blog Herald*.<sup>1</sup> These numbers are difficult to pin down, mainly because the only conclusive studies are for North America; nevertheless, the number of blogs, bloggers, and blog readers is massive. In its May 2, 2005, issue, *BusinessWeek* magazine estimated that about 40,000 new blogs are posting information every day.<sup>2</sup>

Blogging grew from the ground up as a grassroots effort. What started as a few people conversing about common interests via real-time Internet postings has become a continuous conversation among millions of bloggers and readers. The most powerful thing about blogging isn't the technology; it's this massive community driving the *blogosphere*. With millions of bloggers expressing their thoughts, experiences, and information they've learned in their fields of interest, this medium has become a worldwide forum.

Part of this conversation may be about your company, which can be good news or bad. The worst news, however, would be if none of the millions of voices out there were talking about your company or its products.

## IT'S ABOUT COMMUNICATION

The reality is that blogging is a medium. Blogging is also a content style. Because the earliest blogs were built on the principles of an

authentic voice, honesty, and authority, most blogs are expected to have those qualities—this holds true even more so for the corporate blog. Blog readers (even brand new ones) are so conditioned to reading a personal voice on blogs that they expect it from companies, too. This presents unique challenges for business leaders who want to understand blogging, as the concepts of transparency and authenticity are not often associated with corporate communications practices.

Because they're publicly available on the Internet, blogs are wide open, ready to interact with all of your customers. Blogs let customers hear what is on your mind, and they create a space for customers to tell you exactly what they are thinking about. Blogs are the next best thing to going door-to-door to each of your customers' homes or offices; they give you and your company a way to create and sustain real relationships with real people.

Past marketing efforts were always transmissions from companies—one-way communications aimed at as wide an audience as possible, such as advertisements, popup windows on the Internet, and the like. With blogs, however, you're *engaging* with your customers, as every reader is reading your blog by choice, every reader is choosing to interact with your business, and every reader wants to hear more from you. This powerful new way of communicating creates and empowers customer evangelists in ways that were practically impossible before blogs existed.

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## WHAT BLOGS CAN DO

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An open and honest public blog, written by an authoritative voice from within your company, allows your business to create a different type of experience between you and your customers: it allows you to create legitimate conversations that simply weren't possible before online blogging. Blogging means your company will no

longer need to depend on expensive focus groups, feedback forms, e-mail, and other time-consuming and tedious methods used for gaining feedback.

If you want to know why your latest product isn't selling, you can ask your customers on your blog; they'll tell you the truth. If an executive was recently fired for a corporate scandal, you can tackle the issue on your blog in an open manner. Such honesty makes an impression with your customers, which will be more real than almost any media article on the subject. Even more important is that any person who reads your blog is doing so by choice—he or she came to your blog to see what you have to say. Blogs are just about the only marketing tool for which this holds true.

One of the biggest mistakes companies make is looking at blogs as just another way to get out the same old marketing message. Nobody wants to read that kind of thing on a blog. Blogging is really about three things:

- **Information** Telling your customers what you're doing and finding out what they are thinking.
- **Relationships** Building a solid base of positive experiences with your customers that changes them from plain-old consumers to evangelists for your company and products.
- **Knowledge management** Having the vast stores of knowledge within your company available to the right people at the right time.

Without blogs, company messages can get so filtered by public relations or the media that CEOs and other senior management have decided to talk directly with customers—whether it be in the company's stores, on the company's airplanes, or at special events

set up specifically for communicating with customers. The value of direct customer feedback is obvious, and blogs provide that on a global scale.

Blogs are effectively a form of free advertising that your customers are begging for. Blogs are easy to track, provide a means to generate and measure buzz, and allow you to create positive experiences, and ultimately customer evangelists, simply by being real.

You can also use blogging for exciting internal purposes—to help employees generate and try out new ideas, involve and empower employees, and improve your ability to communicate internally. Whether you're a global Fortune 100 company or a mom-n-pop plumbing supply retailer, internal blogs can help you stay organized and external blogs can change the way people relate to your business.

## **BLOGS WILL CHANGE YOUR BUSINESS—WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT**

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One of the biggest challenges facing your company is that, like it or not, your competitors are or will be using blogs. Not only that, but by scouring the blogosphere they can get all kinds of competitive intelligence on what you're doing, what your customers think about you and your products, and where your company and the industry are going. Of course, all the same tools could be yours as well.

The question for you, then, isn't *should* you get into blogs, but *how* will you get into blogs and how will you leverage them to maximize their return to your business? *Blog Marketing* helps you decide how to develop a blogging strategy, how to launch your blog, and how to participate not only in your own blog but in the overall culture of blogging.

## WHAT'S IN A BLOG?

**W**ith so many new blogging terms in use, I could write a dictionary (in fact, I included one in the back of this book). However, if you learn the following terms, you'll look blog-savvy at your next dinner party (or corporate meeting):

- **Blog** A website comprising *blog posts*, or content written by the blogger, which are typically organized into categories and sorted in reverse chronological order. Most blogs allow readers to comment on individual blog posts.
- **Blog posts** Individual items posted to the blog (using *blogware*) by the *blogger*.
- **Blogger** The individual who maintains the blog and/or writes blog posts using the blogware.
- **Blogosphere** The community of blogs, bloggers, and blog posts.
- **Blogware** Software used to create blog posts and manage blogs.
- **The conversation** What happens when bloggers, especially millions of them, blog.
- **Permalinks** Permanent links attached to a particular blog post that remain unchanged.
- **Trackbacks** URLs that other bloggers use to cite posts or parts of posts; for example, when you, Blogger A, write about something Blogger B posted on in her blog, it's best to let Blogger B know she has been mentioned in your blog. Trackbacks send Blogger B an e-mail with a notation that her blog has been cited.

## WHO'S BLOGGING TODAY

Companies are blogging at a phenomenal rate. From large companies, such as Microsoft and Boeing, to small companies, such as Thomas Mahon's tailoring business and Elisa Camahort's marketing and public relations firm, businesses of all stripes are using the revolutionary power of blogs to create positive experiences, increase influence, and provide continual dialogues. Some of these businesses will be your competitors, others will be your partners, and some blogs might even be written by your employees.

From GM's increasingly popular and respected series of blogs to the Disney Channel's use of blogs as an internal communications tool, more and more companies are turning to the diverse power of blogs to meet their current and future challenges head on. Blogs allow their customers and partners to see what companies are doing on a daily basis, which can be a powerful motivator for customers to continue doing business with blogging businesses.

GM's popular FastLane Blog (Figure 1-1) spreads news, provides information for enthusiasts, and creates a community space where thousands of aficionados can discuss what is important to them. GM has also created a special Smallblock Engine Blog to engage customers with even more specific interests. Creating a place where customers can talk about what's important to them is only one of a large number of ways your business can use blogs to increase communication, redefine your brand, and change the way you do business.

Microsoft, arguably one of the largest and most successful companies in the world, knows the power of blogs. Thousands of Microsoft product managers, developers, testers, and executives use blogs to talk directly with customers in a clear and authoritative way; to listen to customer complaints, suggestions, and ideas; and to track what customers and partners are saying. In fact, Microsoft uses blog research so thoroughly that each product development



**Figure 1-1** GM's popular FastLane Blog directly engages customers' passions, fueling a dynamic, feedback-driven community.

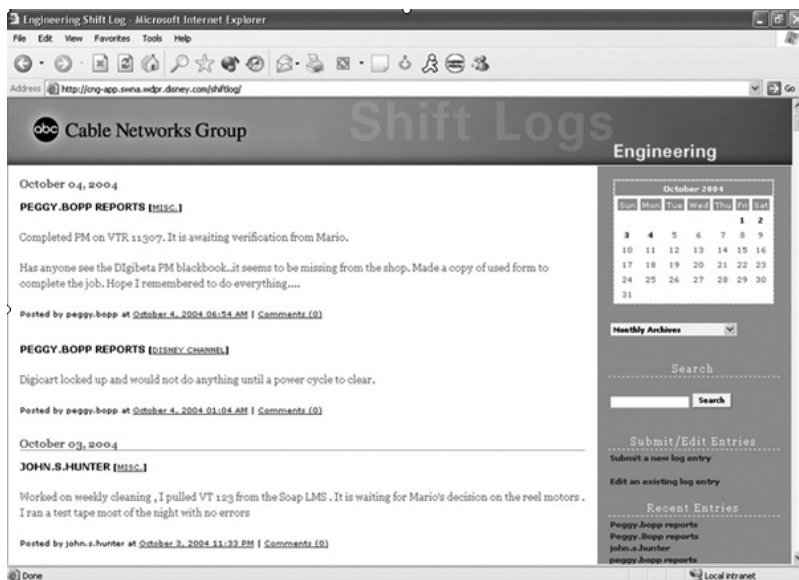
team is directed to look for blog feedback *before* making significant changes to applications. Blogs don't run Microsoft, but they do provide an unprecedented level of feedback for a company that needs to get real consumer information about products before it's too late to do anything about it.

Dallas Mavericks basketball team owner Marc Cuban started blogging because he was tired of "giving in-depth responses to a media question only to have the result be what the reporter or columnist intended to write and I was just fodder to help them make their point." He saw blogs as an ideal way to "present my position on a topic in its entirety and not have to worry about how they condense a two-hour conversation into 500 words."<sup>3</sup> Cuban built a blog that allowed him to express his thoughts regarding issues and interests. His blogging passion served to energize his team's fan base even further.

10 Blog Marketing

If having an open conversation with customers outside your company can transform your business, allowing *employees* space to share their interests and work ideas and build relationships can be even more powerful. In mid-2005, IBM turned to internal blogs to serve its employees. IBM's official blogging policy states that the primary goals of this blog network are for employees to learn and to contribute.

The Disney Channel has also made innovative use of internal blogs (Figure 1-2). While the company once used massive paper logs to keep track of engineering changes and issues, several years ago Disney began implementing blogs for these tasks. Now the blogs present an integrated, employee-driven solution to the impracticability of paper. I discuss Disney's use of blogs in more detail in Chapter 4.



**Figure 1-2** The Disney Channel uses internal blogs to manage engineering shifts as well as other tasks.

Many employers who allow blogging internally find that employees who blog change their workdays and attitudes. They enjoy their work more, they connect more with people outside their teams, and they share and receive information on a whole new scale. These companies are seeing their products, processes, and quality of service increase as a result of employees being more communicative, more involved, and more outwardly focused.

Throughout this book, we'll look at companies that use blogs to make a real difference in business. A fair number of these companies are in the technology sector, purely because this industry is where blogging got its start. However, the growth of blogs among every business is astounding—from churches to rail yards, from yogurt and ice cream companies to retail stores, and from jewelers to a major cable company; all are using blogs in innovative ways to transform their businesses.

## **BLOGGING HISTORY 101**

The history of blogging is a long and convoluted one. Blogging has been around in some form since the earliest days of the Internet. In fact, one of the first web pages was similar to a blog in that its author, Internet creator Tim Berners-Lee, regularly updated it with a list of all websites (only a few dozen at the time).

Blogging eventually evolved into a means of sharing both personal expression and other information that individuals found valuable. Since its beginning, blogging has enjoyed a slight duality: on one hand, it serves as a great online diary, and on the other, it's a fantastic communications tool.

Until 2004, blogging was a fairly specific activity, with only about 5 million bloggers worldwide—most of them fairly secluded in their own little niches, blogging about pets, businesses, and tech-related issues. Then came the US 2004 presidential election,

and blogs suddenly began getting mainstream attention. Bloggers unearthed issues about candidates, blogged about all kinds of events that journalists couldn't be bothered to attend, and even received press passes to the Democratic party's national convention.

Overall, 2004 was a huge year for blogging, as business thought-leaders such as management guru Tom Peters, author and lecturer Malcolm Gladwell, entrepreneurial expert Guy Kawasaki, and leadership authority Steven Covey woke up to the power of blogs. In fact, these days, no business author's work is complete without starting a book blog. As a result, the business magazines of the world such as *Fortune*, *Business 2.0*, and *Fast Company* have awakened to the power of the blog and businesses around the world are taking notice. While blog-related inquiries to marketing and PR companies were initially met with blank stares, these companies quickly caught up to the idea, and now blog consulting is a staple of consultants large and small.

The early twenty-first century has been marked by mergers and acquisitions in the blogging space as well as a number of scandals—but more than anything, it has been marked by *growth*. If 5 million bloggers were online in 2004, more than 50 million were blogging by the start of 2005, and that growth won't slow down anytime soon. In fact, the collective number of blogs has grown so rapidly that no one service has been able to keep up with it, which is one of the reasons that nobody is entirely sure how many people are actually reading blogs. Suffice it to say that a lot of people are writing them, even more are reading them, and more still are being influenced by them. These days, the question isn't "Do you know what a blog is?"; it's more likely "What's your blog?" or "What's your favorite blog?"

The growth of blogs among businesses has been astronomical. Thousands of new business blogs are being created by companies

of every size, in every industry, for just about every purpose imaginable. So, what will you do with your blog?

## **WRAPPING IT UP**

Now that you have a clearer understanding of what blogging is, where it came from, and—in broad strokes—what it can do for you, what's your next step? Get into the blogging mindset. As mentioned, hearing what customers *really* think can be intimidating, but it's an even more intimidating proposition for your business if you bury your head in the sand and choose not to listen. It takes most companies some time to get comfortable with the blogging way of thinking, so in Chapter 2, we'll discuss more about the blogging mindset and how you can learn to value your customer interactions.

