Blogs, From Leisure to Business
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Although the blogs started out as a pastime, they are quickly becoming a business and indeed have given rise to the profession of blogger. Most big enterprises have webpages to collect messages, but is this a tool of the future?

They began as a hobby and, little by little, have spread out and are now invading companies. They are known as “blogs” or “weblogs” and are defined by Wikipedia.org, the free content encyclopaedia, as “a web application which contains periodic posts on a common webpage. These posts are often, but not necessarily, in reverse chronological order. Such a Web site would typically be accessible to any Internet user. The author of the blog is free to publish on the webpage whatever he deems fit”

A complement
The blog is a complement to the traditional communications media, although it is much faster and simpler; a new model of websites, with their own variations such as wikis, photoblogs (to hang photos) and, more recently, moblogs (they can be updated from GPS or UMTS mobile phones), which are becoming more and more popular and even more profitable.

This is the case of Instapundit.com, a weblog whose slogan is “If you’ve got a modem, I’ve got an opinion”. It was created in 2001 by Glenn Reynolds, a law professor at the University of Tennessee. From the outset, his purpose was purely personal entertainment until one day his political comments came to the attention of Blogads.com. This company intermediates between the blogs and the advertisers. It pays the authors of the sites up to 5,000 dollars a month depending on the volume of visits, which has given rise to the profession of blogger. The huge user segmentation in each blog is something that marketing is starting to take into account, as it allows effective messages to be sent to a very specific audience. Websites like Blogger (bought by Google in February last year), Six Log (from the SixApart company) or TypePad receive income for services, apart from what they get from advertisers.

Specific knowledge of the html programming language is not needed to publish a comment, nor is it necessary to create the entire weblog. As far as software goes, there is a great difference between software for individual weblogs (like Blogger’s Pyra Labs) or software for enterprises (SixApart’s Movabla Type or pMachine’s ExpressionEngine are much more sophisticated).

Corporate business
Corporate blogs still account for just a tiny percentage of the millions of blogs that are hung on the Internet, but the growing demand for direct information by consumers will make them increase exponentially. Barbara Payne, founder of ReallyGoodFreelanceWriter.com, wrote, in her article “Blogs for Business”, about the
benefits of letting customers read the blogs written by the salesmen from the company: “the customers will feel special and will learn about the company, while the salesmen will enjoy the whole process and be delighted to be more in contact with the customers”.

Bill Gates gave the blogs his “blessing” last summer, during the Microsoft CEO Summit, which is directed at top executives: at least 700 Microsoft employees are authors of weblogs, which they use to inform other users about the projects that they are developing. At American Airlines, only 20% of their travelling staff have a corporate e-mail, but all of them have access to the blogs of the company. Today a company does not “exist” if it does not have a webpage. Who is to say that the same will be true in the future for those who do not have weblogs?

How can companies control the content of weblogs?

**Lluís Renart, IESE professor**

By definition it is very difficult to control a weblog. This can even be impossible when they originate outside the company. Although enterprises can set norms for the blogs their employees create while at work, they should pay more attention to getting content that is favourable to them. On this point, the new relationship marketing is divided into eight steps: identifying, attracting, selling and delivering the product or providing the service. What is left is to satisfy customers, to later make them loyal, build up a relationship with them and lastly create a community of users in which customers and managers participate. In this last step the blogs could contribute to creating and maintaining a certain sense of community.

However, there is always the risk that an unhappy customer or a chain of mistakes by the company can trigger blogs with highly negative content, potentially dangerous for any company or community.

**Francisco Javier Núñez, PwC Manager**

Controlling weblogs can be quite complicated, precisely because setting up mechanisms to control their content threatens their very essence, which is based on three fundamental points: ease of use, capacity of diffusion and the people’s need to communicate freely. This is why we should turn these communication tools into transmitters of the company’s culture and take advantage of the trust placed in them to get closer to our own environment. In this way, we can offer an additional mechanism of communication, through which our people can express the company’s culture in a much less formal language, provided of course that we believe that this idea will be favourably perceived.

The approach that answers our questions is the same as the one that dominates the strategy of many of our decisions: turn our weaknesses into strengths. What is our limit? It is none other than our own intelligence.