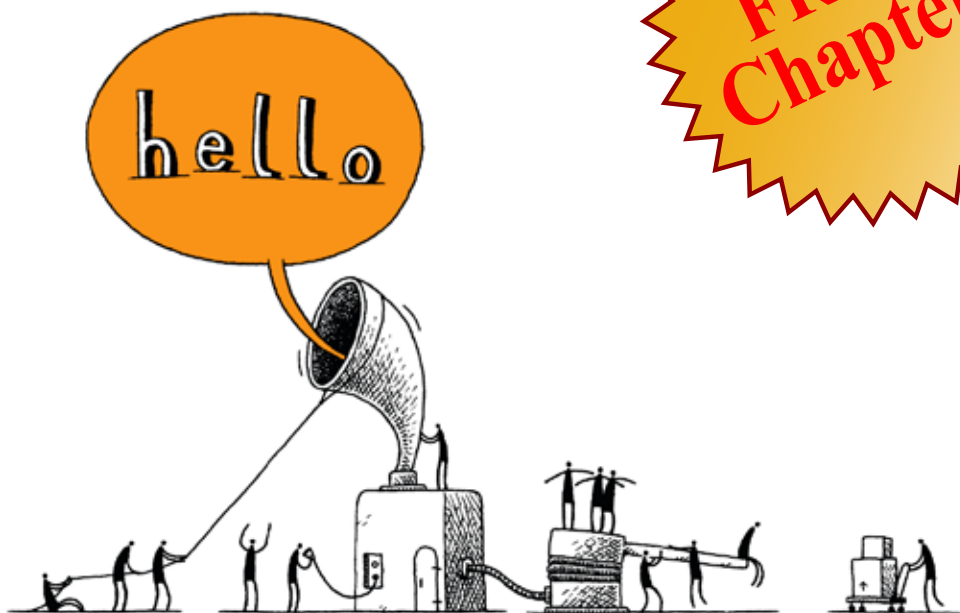


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# The **Corporate** **BLOGGING** **Book** >>> **Debbie Weil**

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**Absolutely Everything You  
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The world does not need any more boring corporate blogs. We do, however, need a great one...from you. Open this book to any page and you'll discover ideas you can use to accomplish that goal, starting right now.

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Rock solid advice and examples for anyone considering business blogging. Weil deftly shows how to avoid the pitfalls of open communications while establishing a real conversation with your customers.

– **Chris Anderson, Editor-in-chief of Wired magazine and author of “The Long Tail”**

To blog or not to blog? In business today, that is the question. And nobody is more qualified to provide the answer—and to demystify the blogosphere for Corporate America—than Debbie Weil. With incisive writing, vivid examples, and plenty of takeaways, this is \*the\* book smart businesspeople should read to understand the ins and outs of blogging. Prepare to take notes!

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Future CEO bloggers will thank you, Debbie, for saving their precious time with your book. If I'd read this book before I started blogging I would have saved 5-6 months of trial and sometimes embarrassing error. Maybe more. Great job!

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The plain-English practical advice in The Corporate Blogging Book offers the kinds of insights that took us years of trial and error to figure out...An invaluable reference.

**- Mena Trott,  
President and  
co-founder, Six Apart**



**“Rock solid advice  
and examples for  
anyone considering  
business blogging.”**

- Chris Anderson,  
editor-in-chief of Wired,  
author of “The Long Tail”

As an author and speaker on customer service, I am constantly talking to Corporate America about being more responsive to the people who buy their products and services. Establish a dialogue with customers. That’s where corporate blogging comes in. Using humor, insight, opinion and fact, Debbie Weil has produced an invaluable handbook for starting—and sustaining—the conversation between buyers and sellers.

**- Robert Spector, Author of “The Nordstrom Way  
to Customer Service Excellence”**

Debbie is at the forefront of one of the most important forces affecting corporate America: How to harness the online conversation to help build authentic and deeper connections with your customers. Most companies don’t yet get it: those who read this book will. Those that don’t are doomed over the long term.

**- Paul Rosenfeld, General manager, QuickBooks  
Online Edition**

The first clear-eyed look at the what and how of blogging as a corporate communications strategy. Both entertaining and informative, Debbie Weil’s book allays fears surrounding blogging and provides sensible advice on how to write an effective blog, who should write it and how to measure success. This excellent primer will satisfy even the most skeptical of managers. If you fear you’ll get it wrong, this book is the best place to start in order to get it right!

**- Rich Marcello, Senior vice president and  
general manager of Business Critical Servers,  
Hewlett Packard**

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# Top Twenty Questions about Corporate Blogging

So much chatter. So many blogs. So little time. The blogging phenomenon has reached critical mass. The tipping point for “wait and see” is swinging, like a metronome, toward “better do something now.” But where do you start? What, really, does blogging mean as a marketing, PR and corporate communications strategy? If you fear that entering the blogosphere is like tiptoeing into a minefield—where you’re bound to trip an explosion of controversy or criticism—how can you learn to do it *right*?

Let’s begin with the facts, the FAQs. Here are the top twenty questions I hear most often when I am talking to managers and executives about corporate blogging. (I use the terms “company” and “customer” throughout the book. Substitute “organization” and “member” if that works better for you.) Consider these guideposts for the rest of the book. In fact, if you want a quick synopsis of the world of blogging as it relates to business, read just this chapter and you’ll be able to go back to the office and sound reasonably knowledgeable. Really. I won’t be offended.

## **1. WHAT IS CORPORATE BLOGGING?**

Corporate blogging is the use of blogs to further organizational goals. It’s the co-opting by the big dogs of a communications tool

that has been successfully used by the little guys. Picture an e-newsletter, a viral marketing campaign, an open channel through which your customers can talk to you and your own news station all rolled up into one. Now wrap that into a low-cost, easy-to-use, always-fresh Web site. That's what effective corporate blogging is.

Blogs can be public and found by anyone searching the Web. Or they can be inward-facing, for company use only. Internal blogs are increasingly used for project management and information sharing. It doesn't matter what shape, stripe or size your organization is: for-profit or non-profit, Fortune 500, SME (small to medium-sized enterprise), small business or solopreneur. There are dozens of ways you can use a blog.

Oh, and a quick definition: on a practical level, a blog, short for "Web log," is an easy-to-publish Web site. A blog is written in an informal, conversational style that tells the "real" story. No puffery, no PR. Individual bloggers—who have largely defined the blogosphere—often use an edgy voice, dish out uncensored opinion and spread information that is not necessarily accurate. But don't dismiss them! Some of these bloggers may be your customers.

Now put on your marketing hat. Think bigger. A blog is a marketing communications channel. Picture what you might use it for. Your goals can be long-term and loose, such as improved internal communications or a closer connection with your customers. Or short-term and specific: an event, a campaign, a deadline-driven software project. Corporate blogs can be sanctioned, even encouraged, by the boss and written by individual employees. Or managed, formally, by the corporate communications department. They can be written by non-employees known as customer evangelists—customers who love your company, products and services so much they spread the word for you. Sometimes the CEO or other senior executives develop a flair for blogging.

*Business* blogging has become a broader, muddier term. It encompasses corporate blogging. It also includes the new generation of media companies that publish networks of blogs supported by ad-

vertising. And a small number of independent bloggers who earn a living directly from their blogs, as self-publishers, by running ads. In fact a whole new segment of online advertising has grown up around blogs. Business blogging is shorthand for “So what’s the business model? How do we make money with this thing?”

Corporate blogging, in contrast, is not usually about making a quick buck. Corporate blogging is a communications and marketing channel, but with a twist—it’s two-way. You can’t foresee precisely what results you’ll get by using it, although the positive usually outweighs the negative. And, again ideally, this channel connects you to a noisy, ragged, global conversation—the blogosphere.

## 2. THE BLOGO-WHAT??

The blogosphere. It’s a big, loud place. It’s the universe of blogs. It’s “the virtual realm of blogdom as a whole,” as the *New York Times* called it.<sup>1</sup> With an estimated 80,000 blogs being created worldwide every day, by the end of 2006 the total number will approach or surpass 80 million. That’s based on blog search company Technorati’s forecast in mid-2005 that the number of blogs was doubling every five and a half months.<sup>2</sup> As yet, corporate blogs make up a tiny fraction of this number. Less than 5 percent, according to a June 2005 report by eMarketer.com on business blogging.

Of course, counting blogs is rapidly becoming a quaint practice. Remember a decade ago when we used to monitor the number of Web sites? Beginning in June 1993, Netscape’s “What’s New” page reported, each day, every new site worth visiting. An entry on September 28, 1993 noted: “Stanford University now has a home page” with a link to the new stanford.edu site. Only two years later, in 1995, Larry Page and Sergey Brin met at Stanford and began the collaboration that resulted in Google, Inc. (How short the history of the Web is!) By 2000, almost every large company had a Web site. In early 2005, 7 percent of U.S. Internet users had created a blog, although 62 percent didn’t know what blogs were.<sup>3</sup>



It's what goes on *inside* the blogosphere that distinguishes it from being merely a collection of interactive Web sites. Daily, hourly, by the minute, millions of conversations are taking place. On individual blogs (between the publisher and the readers) and between blogs (when bloggers reference other bloggers). Bloggers are posting new written entries as well as audio and video. Readers and other bloggers are commenting on what's being said or shown. The ripple—or snowball—effect is huge and immediate.

The blogosphere is often called a collective conversation. Think of it “as communities where information, links, opinions, videos, audio files, photos and other forms of media are easily and frequently shared, where elaboration can be offered, disagreements can be aired, and comments can be posted.”<sup>4</sup>

### **3. WHY HAS BLOGGING ATTRACTED SO MUCH ATTENTION?**

The media blitz is one reason. Mainstream media (MSM as it's called in the blogosphere) picked up blogs as a story in 2004 and never let go. But underlying the news coverage is a real phenomenon built around three things: scale, speed and impact.

#### **Scale**

The explosion in the number of blogs is mind-boggling. When Technorati launched in November 2002, it counted just under 13,000 blogs. Exactly three years later, in November 2005, the on-line service was tracking over 20 million blogs. The 10 million mark had been celebrated just six months earlier. That's a whole lot of words, pictures, audio files and video clips written, produced and posted by folks from work or home. Naysayers had said that TV-bred couch potatoes would never make the effort to create all this content. They were wrong. And while the first wave of blogs was personal—many written by self-indulgent diarists—the second and third waves

have been written by consultants, academics, small business owners and, increasingly, by bigger companies and corporations.

## Speed

Blogs are instant and always-on. (By “always-on,” I’m referring to the 24/7 nature of the Web. Accessible anytime, anyplace, through any Internet-connected device.) Whether it’s a political scandal, a natural disaster or a terrorist attack, people increasingly turn to blogs to get the most up-to-date news and, in turn, to post their version of events. Someone is always listening. We experienced this, live, on September 11, 2001. The major online news sites were overloaded and stopped working. Blogs supplanted mainstream media for on-the-scene reporting, for what was *really happening*. “The need to connect is intense,” Donna Hoffman, a Vanderbilt University professor, told the *New York Times*. “While the network TV stations blather, the Internet carries the news and connects the masses in a true interactive sob.”<sup>5</sup>

Late that night on 9/11, pioneer blogger and technology entrepreneur Dave Winer wrote: “We got first-hand reports from people who were there . . . real-time human touches that are hard to capture in a print pub with a lead time. There’s power in the new communication and development medium we’re mastering. Far from being dead, the Web is just getting started.”<sup>6</sup> He was referring, of course, to the dot-bomb era that began in 2000 and was in full flower by late 2001.

Turning to Web search is now a reflexive response. If you’re frantic with worry about a family member being caught in the path of a hurricane or a tsunami, where do you go online to get more information? A blog, of course. Do a quick Google search by typing in the name of the disaster followed by the word “blog.” Choose a blog that looks credible to you. Type in a comment asking the blogger to post the name of your relative. Other readers may see it and pass on a tidbit of information. This underground network of

seekers and finders erupted after the Asian tsunami of December 2004 and after Hurricane Katrina, which wreaked havoc on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in August 2005. Of course, the same instinct to Google applies if you're buying a new car or researching a vacation.

## **Impact**

Bloggng began a decade ago as an online outlet for personal musings. Then something happened. Blogs burst into mainstream consciousness in the summer of 2004. Democrat Howard Dean's BlogForAmerica.com, the first-ever official blog for a presidential candidate, helped the candidate raise millions of dollars from online donors during the primary—a first. Hundreds of individual bloggers were granted press credentials at the Democratic and Republican national conventions—a first. By late 2004, it seemed that blogs were beginning to fulfill the promise of the Web as a participatory phenomenon. Now everyone could be a journalist or a reporter (although you weren't guaranteed credibility or readership). Citizen journalism, an emerging concept, was a reality.

## **4. HOW IS A BLOG DIFFERENT FROM A WEB SITE?**

On a practical level, blogs are more engaging than static Web sites. They offer something new to read, view or listen to almost every time you visit. They offer a way to interact online that's easy and quick. It's safe to predict that blogs—or something akin to them—will replace brochurelike home pages.

In the meantime, forward-looking corporate Web sites are including their blog as part of the site's core design and/or including a prominent link from the home page with a bit of enticing copy. Here's the text link one Web design studio used to direct visitors to their blog:

The very best way to get to know us, how we think and what we're passionate about is to read our blog. In addition to offering useful and timely information, it's a fun, entertaining read.

A blog is different from a conventional Web site because it is

- interactive.
- written in a conversational voice.
- created using instant publishing software; usually no tech expertise and no techies or IT staff are required.
- offers an efficient way to alert interested readers every time something new is added—without using email.
- frequently updated, so that it almost always gets higher rankings in search engine results than a static site.
- a form of viral marketing.

As a marketing strategy, blogs are often more effective than traditional Web sites. Blogging is a powerful, low-cost way to get found by the search engines—one of the biggest reasons marketers are paying increasing attention. Prevailing wisdom goes something like this: get found in Internet search results and your voice will count. Be absent online and your company, product or service (unless you're a Fortune 500 brand with a mega marketing budget) practically doesn't exist.

A blog should resonate with the look and feel of your main site. In fact, visitors to your blog page don't even need to know that it's a blog. The blog should be easy to interact with, even for those unfamiliar with blogging's many conventions. Increasingly, entire Web sites are being built on blogging software. This is a low-cost alternative to a pricey content management system (CMS). And often just as effective. Ask your Web consultant about this. If you get a blank stare, hire a new techie.

## **5. QUICK! WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BLOGGING IN ORDER TO GET STARTED?**

**1. Companies don't blog; individuals do.** That means a corporate blog needs to be written in a human voice. This can be a challenge. It goes against the grain for many companies. Still, if your corporate communications department is responsible for your blog, they can often find an in-house blogger with a lively, distinctive voice. It doesn't have to be your CEO (but it certainly can be; read about CEO bloggers in chapter 5). It might be someone in product development or customer service. He or she doesn't need to wear an official communications hat. You can also hire a blog editor, as Stonyfield Farm, the New Hampshire-based organic yogurt manufacturer, has done. And there are networks of bloggers-for-hire you can tap into.

**2. Savvy bloggers read other blogs.** Whether or not you choose to launch a blog, you need to be reading blogs. Your employees and/or competitors are most likely already blogging about your industry niche—or possibly your company, products or services. Get used to it. Make use of it. Track what's being said about your company in the blogosphere and you've just discovered next-generation focus groups. It's easy to do. You don't need to hire a market research firm. Although you can: a new breed of market research firms specializing in blog analysis has sprung up. You can use free blog search engines like Blogpulse, Google Blog Search and Technorati. Also, reading other blogs is the best way to dip your toes into the blogosphere and get a feel for what kinds of business blogs are engaging and ring true. And which aren't.

**3. Blogging is not a replacement.** A blog doesn't replace other forms of on- or offline marketing. But they're fast becoming an adjunct you shouldn't ignore. Blogs are a quick, easy way to commu-

nicate and make a connection with your customers and the media. You can still send out press releases, publish an e-newsletter and maintain a corporate Web site. Think of blogs as a low-cost, high-impact add-on to whatever you're doing now to communicate with your key constituencies.

Blogs are a new way to close the gap between you and your customers. And to organize the smart thinking and reams of archived information inside your organization. Finally, blogs are a remarkably effective way to get high search engine rankings. When someone Googles the name of your company or product—or enters keyword phrases that describe what you do—your blog is more apt to come up at the top of the page than your home page. That's because a blog is constantly being refreshed with new content.

Finally, blogs and blogging *are* symptomatic of the next generation of the Web. Web 2.0—as it's being called—is the new participatory Web. It's defined by the abundance of user-generated content—those millions of blog posts, photos, audio and video files, as well as uploaded documents created by users. The new Web is also about real-time collaboration.

## **6. WHAT MAKES A GOOD CORPORATE BLOG?**

It's updated frequently (preferably a couple of times a week). The writing voice is authentic, friendly and conversational. You hear passion and authority (to borrow a phrase from Microsoft's chief employee blogger, Robert Scoble). The writing style has a light touch but it's cogent and grammatically correct. The blog is credible and informative and stays on topic. If you're accepting comments, readers are interacting with the blog by typing in their feedback or questions. Maybe you see trackbacks (links) from other blogs. A good blog serves up a hard-to-quantify mix of information, opinion and controversy. Er, controversy? Yes, even if it just means acknowledging a problem with your product or service. And then listening to the feedback from your readers.

## 7. WHAT ARE THE LEGAL RISKS OF BLOGGING?

If you boil down the key legal risks of blogging, they fall into two buckets:

- stuff you don't want to reveal (trade secrets, financial information)
- stuff you can get sued for (copyright, libel, privacy issues)<sup>7</sup>

Of course, the lawyers make it more complicated than that. But that's probably what's keeping you up at night if you're worrying about legal liability. You should assume you have employee bloggers, by the way. If you're in a company with 100 or more employees, chances are at least a handful are blogging already.

My advice on the legal front: be aware of the risks—but don't muzzle your bloggers. Instead, work with them to craft corporate blogging guidelines that specifically address the legal issues they should be aware of. It's not that difficult, really. The maxim "be smart" used by Microsoft to guide its bloggers will go a long way. Observing copyright means understanding what fair use is. (As a general rule, never quote more than a few successive paragraphs. If it's a poem, not more than one or two lines.) Refraining from libel or name-calling is common sense and adult behavior. Divulging proprietary or financial information is an obvious no-no.

Companies like Hill & Knowlton, IBM, Intel, Sun Microsystems, Thomas Nelson Publishers and Yahoo have published public blogging guidelines. Your approach to creating guidelines and your requirements will be different depending on whether you are a small private company or a public Fortune 1000. See chapter 3 for some of the finer points to consider. Also consult the Bonus Resources section at the back of the book for examples of blogging policies you can copy from and for legal resources related to blogging.

## **8. WHAT IF MY EMPLOYEES ARE BLOGGING AND I DON'T KNOW ABOUT IT?**

You can find out pretty quickly by doing a Google search on their names or using Google Blog Search. Or just asking. But don't panic. A lot of "real people" (as they say) are blogging these days.

Employee blogging is fast becoming a topic included in employment contracts and employee handbooks. However, in the fall of 2005, close to 70 percent of companies had no blogging guidelines, according to one study.<sup>8</sup> If your organization doesn't have a company-wide blogging policy, take the lead on crafting one. No, don't leave this up to Legal. If you're not blogging yourself, start by consulting with a few blogging colleagues. They'll help you understand blogging etiquette and key questions to consider. Should employees acknowledge their association with your company? Should they offer a disclaimer that views expressed are their own? Can employees blog on company time if theirs is an officially sanctioned blog and part of your company's marketing strategy? (Consult the Bonus Resources section for examples of blogging disclaimers.)

## **9. HOW DO I GET OVER MY FEAR OF BLOGGING?**

First, reassure yourself that it's normal to be a bit nervous about publishing to the Web where anything you write is permanently archived and publicly accessible. It's true that blogging can have unintended consequences—both positive and negative. If your job is to manage and control and package and measure, it's only natural you'll find the uncontrollable aspect of blogs a bit unnerving. Here's what you legitimately can (and should) be worried about:

- employees leaking news of a new product release via their blogs
- employees who are chronic complainers kvetching about what goes on inside your company



- bloggers (they might be your customers?) who take delight in trashing your company, product or service, rightly or wrongly
- Mean-spirited or profane comments left by readers of your company blog (Note: you can easily delete comments. Or review them first and choose not to publish them.)

And on a more personal level, if you're the one who's going to do the blogging, you may be worried about any or all of the following:

- Can I write well enough?
- What will I write about?
- Will I make a fool of myself?
- What if I don't understand blogging etiquette?
- How will I find time to keep the blog updated?

All of the above can be dealt with sensibly. In fact, I devote a whole chapter to confronting fear of blogging (chapter 3) and another on how to write a blog (chapter 7). I hope this book will give you a clear understanding of how the blogosphere works and what other companies are doing. That alone should dispel some of your anxiety.

How else to eliminate the fear factor? Take proactive steps. Start reading a dozen or so blogs on topics you're interested in—either personally or professionally. Type your company or product names into one of the specialized blog search engines and see what comes up. Are you being talked about? If yes, it's time to make the jump into the blogosphere. No? Stay alert. Remember, a blog is nothing more than an interactive Web site. Visitors to your site will increasingly expect to see a blog component on your home page. Don't make this blogging thing more complicated than it needs to be.

## **10. WHAT KIND OF STAFF / RESOURCES / BUDGET WILL WE NEED TO KEEP A BLOG GOING?**

It depends on what kind of blog you launch, how much traffic and interaction you get from readers and what the purpose is. GM's Fast-Lane blog gets hundreds of thousands of page views a month and often hundreds of comments in reaction to a single posting. (Americans care passionately about cars!) If your blog gets this much attention, you're going to need a separate support team to monitor and maintain the blog. It could be one or more people in-house or something you outsource to your PR firm. GM uses their Web agency. The monthly fee for blog maintenance is mixed in with the firm's overall retainer so it's in the range of \$5,000 a month. Intuit's Quick-Books Online division appointed a "community manager" to oversee their blog as well as online discussion boards. Stonyfield Farm, the organic yogurt maker, hired a Chief Blogger for \$40,000 annually<sup>9</sup> to edit and write the company's blogs.

## **11. WHO IN MY COMPANY SHOULD BLOG? CAN IT BE MORE THAN ONE PERSON?**

Absolutely. If your company has sanctioned—and encourages—employee blogging, you may have dozens, hundreds or thousands of staffers communicating daily through blogs with customers, partners, developers and other stakeholders. IBM, Macromedia, Microsoft and Sun Microsystems are just a few examples of companies who publicly boast about their thousands of employee blogs. It's common for such companies to maintain a public Web page listing all the blogs.<sup>10</sup>

If you've decided to launch an official company blog, you can assemble a group of writers. PR firm Hill & Knowlton created a Collective Conversation blog with multiple authors at [blogs.hillandknowlton.com/blogs](http://blogs.hillandknowlton.com/blogs). A handful of staffers at Clif Bar (the natural energy bar) blog at [clifbar.com/blog](http://clifbar.com/blog). They call it the Blah,

Blah, Blog. If your CEO or other top executive isn't the "writing type," you can interview her and create a podcast (downloadable audio file) that you post to your blog. In addition, some creative person on your tech or communications staff can put together a video clip to add to your blog, turning it into a Vlog. You can also hire a professional blogger or blog editor to oversee your company blog. Just don't let someone ghost blog for your CEO. That's a no-no.

## **12. HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE TO WRITE AND MAINTAIN A BLOG?**

This is my favorite question. I could counter with a Zen-like pronouncement ("How much time does it take to breathe?"). But I won't. Here are a few practical tips on how much time it takes. You might be surprised by the answers. (And see chapter 7 for more writing tips.)

So how much time does it really take on a daily or weekly basis to write and maintain a blog?

- Less time than it takes to put together a professionally designed HTML (i.e., looks like a Web page, not just text) e-newsletter containing multiple articles.
- About as much time as it takes you to skim through your favorite industry news sources and note to yourself what's worth commenting on. In other words, blogging can be an adjunct to keeping up with the news.
- Fewer hours than it takes you or someone in your organization to write a carefully crafted op-ed piece (which may or may not get published).
- The equivalent of half a day a week to write posts for the blog; more time to monitor reader feedback if yours is a highly-trafficked blog like General Motors' Fastlane.

- The same amount of time it takes to write emails to multiple colleagues. How many emails do you write to business colleagues in a day?
- Microsoft blogger Robert Scoble's one-word answer: "Starbucks." In other words, if you're connected to the Internet at your local Starbucks, you can be doing something related to blogging. For example, saving tidbits in draft form that you'll come back and publish later to your live blog.

### **13. HOW DO I CONVINCe SENIOR MANAGEMENT—OR MY BOSS—THAT OUR COMPANY SHOULD BE BLOGGING?**

How about this: start by emphasizing the risks of *not* blogging. That will get their attention.

- If you don't blog, you're not part of the conversation in the blogosphere. In other words, bloggers may be saying bad things about your company and if you're not listening to the conversation you have no way to respond quickly and appropriately.
- You're missing out on a fast, efficient communications channel with your customers, the media, investors and other important constituencies.
- If you don't have a blog, your company Web site will soon look, er, so 1990s.

Then make a sensible business case using examples of what other organizations (perhaps your competition) are doing. In broad brush strokes, blogs offer an organization a way to:

- communicate with customers in real-time.
- get positive and negative feedback from key constituencies.

- achieve high search engine rankings without spending a fortune on search engine optimization.

Internal blogs enable your company to capitalize on the enormous amount of knowledge possessed by your employees. They enable real-time and systematic collaboration on software development, product development, sales and other activities. And your kicker: by not blogging you may be hurting your brand. Without a blog as part of your Web site, your company may appear walled off and disinterested in being open to comment and criticism. See chapter 9 for a cheat sheet to make the case to your boss (or employees) for blogging.

#### **14. I'M NOT A TECHIE; HOW MUCH DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE TECHNICAL FEATURES OF A BLOG?**

Not much. Blogging software is really just a user-friendly publishing tool for the Web. If you can send an email, you can compose and publish a blog entry—and update your blog instantly. The software creates date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order, with the most recent appearing at the top of the page. It also does some other neat stuff behind the scenes, such as notifying the blog search engines to tell them you've updated your blog and archiving your entry by date and by category automatically so you, and others, can find it later.

So what makes a blog interactive? Often, a blog includes comments typed in by readers, along with links left by other bloggers (known as trackbacks). These become a permanent part of the blog's content. The technology underlying blogging software is what connects blog to blog. Think of it as a giant snowball that picks up all the connections—between blogger and reader, between blogger and blogger—as it rolls forward. The result? The rapidly expanding blogosphere.

## **15. I'M A *LITTLE BIT OF A GEEK*: WHAT ARE THE MAIN BLOGGING PLATFORMS AND TOOLS I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?**

The number and type of blog platforms have proliferated over the past several years. The two main categories are hosted (on a blog service) versus non-hosted (in-house). Larger companies generally prefer non-hosted blogging solutions because of privacy and security concerns and to ensure that the blogging platform integrates seamlessly with whatever software system is powering their corporate directory, email, etc. A new generation of corporate blogging platforms is also emerging. (See chapter 8 for more information.)

RSS (also referred to as a Web feed) stands for Really Simple Syndication. It is an essential feature of a blog. An RSS feed enables readers to subscribe to a blog via an RSS newsreader such as NewsGator, Bloglines or NetNewsWire (for Mac) and get automatic updates whenever new content is added. The benefit is that no email is involved, so the updates are not blocked by spam filters or lost in a clogged inbox. Users also like the privacy of not submitting an email address in order to subscribe. See the glossary for a more technical definition of RSS.

## **16. WHAT WRITING STYLE WORKS FOR A CORPORATE BLOG?**

In a word, non-corporate. A human voice. The voice of an individual who is passionate and authoritative about the topic at hand. A good company blog sounds like it's written by one person (or a small group with each blogger being identified by name). An effective blog post is what überblogger Doc Searls calls "an email to everyone." The blog is not written in corporate-speak, nor as a dry memo or press release.

Here's an example of the sleeves-rolled-up voice of a good corporate

blogger. Sun Microsystems COO Jonathan Schwartz blogs at [blogs.sun.com/jonathan](http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan). In June 2005 he wrote:

One of the big upsides of my job is hobnobbing. I clearly didn't check with our corporate communications team before saying that, but let's be honest—it's cool to sit with a head of state, or a head of a corporation, or a CIO with an IT department bigger than Sun's entire employee base.

Kind of fun to get an inside glimpse of what a Fortune 500 executive is thinking, isn't it?

## 17. SO WHO'S BLOGGING IN THE FORTUNE 500?

Only a handful of these mega companies, so far. In fact, just 24 (less than 5 percent of) Fortune 500 corporations as of March 2006, according to the Fortune 500 Business Blogging Index. This online resource is a wiki (a group-edited Web page) that you can visit and add information to at: [www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi](http://www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi). Also see the accompanying book blog at [TheCorporateBloggingBook.com](http://TheCorporateBloggingBook.com) for easy access to these and other links. The number of Fortune 500 blogs will undoubtedly be higher by the time you visit the Fortune 500 blogging wiki.<sup>11</sup>

Note that the best Fortune 500 blogs tend to be authored by one or more high-profile executives, not by corporate communications. (Google's official blog is an exception. More on that in chapter 4. Google was just shy of the Fortune 500 list at this writing.) In addition, thousands of midlevel employees at IBM, Microsoft and Sun Microsystem write independent but officially sanctioned blogs. Some say these voices from the trenches are more effective at putting a face on a mega corporation. The best example is the prolific, friendly and authoritative Robert Scoble, known as Microsoft's chief blogger. Robert, whose official title is "technical evangelist" (go figure), is consistently listed on any Top 100 list of best-read blogs.

You can visit his blog at [scobleizer.wordpress.com](http://scobleizer.wordpress.com) for one of the best examples of how to do it right.

A partial list of Fortune 500 corporate blogs as of press time:

- Amazon Web Services Blog at [aws.typepad.com](http://aws.typepad.com)
- Boeing's blog written by VP Marketing Randy Baseler at [boeing.com/randy](http://boeing.com/randy)
- Cisco's High Tech Policy group blog at [cisco.com/gov/blog](http://cisco.com/gov/blog)
- Cox Communications' Digital Straight Talk ("Your inside guide to broadband communications") at [digitalstraighttalk.com](http://digitalstraighttalk.com)
- EDS's Next Big Thing blog at [eds.com/sites/cs/blogs/eds\\_next\\_big\\_thing\\_blog/default.aspx](http://eds.com/sites/cs/blogs/eds_next_big_thing_blog/default.aspx).
- General Motors' FastLane blog written by GM vice chairman Bob Lutz and other senior execs at [fastlane.gmblogs.com](http://fastlane.gmblogs.com)
- Hewlett-Packard's executive and technical blogs at [www.hp.com/go/blogs](http://www.hp.com/go/blogs)
- Sprint's Things That Make You Go Wireless at [businessblog.sprint.com/1/1](http://businessblog.sprint.com/1/1)
- Sun Microsystems' COO Jonathan Schwartz's blog at [blogs.sun.com/jonathan](http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan)
- Texas Instruments' Video 360 blog at [blogs.ti.com](http://blogs.ti.com)
- Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center PlayOn blog (exploring the social dimensions of virtual worlds) at [blogs.parc.com/playon](http://blogs.parc.com/playon)



## **18. WHAT ABOUT EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE BLOGS BY SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES OR ORGANIZATIONS?**

Selecting only a few is hard, as there are thousands of blogs in this category. But here are some good examples. I chose them because they are particularly well written and engaging. They range from one-person shops to large trade associations. Again, find these links (and additional examples) at [TheCorporateBloggingBook.com](http://TheCorporateBloggingBook.com).

- Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCABuzz) at [acca.blogs.com](http://acca.blogs.com)
- Designwear e-tailer Bluefly.com at [flypaper.bluefly.com](http://flypaper.bluefly.com)
- English Cut (Savile Row tailor Thomas Mahon) at [englishcut.com](http://englishcut.com)
- Seth Godin's blog at [sethgodin.typepad.com](http://sethgodin.typepad.com)
- Indium Corp.'s Dr. Lasky's blog at [indium.com/drlasky](http://indium.com/drlasky)
- Intuit QuickBooks blogs at [quickbooksgroup.com/webx/blogs](http://quickbooksgroup.com/webx/blogs)
- Lincoln Sign Company's JD Iles at [signsneversleep.typepad.com](http://signsneversleep.typepad.com)
- National Association of Manufacturers at [blog.nam.org/pat-cleary.php](http://blog.nam.org/pat-cleary.php)
- Steve Spangler Science at [stevespangler.com](http://stevespangler.com)
- Stonyfield Farm at [stonyfield.com/weblog](http://stonyfield.com/weblog)

## **19. WHAT ARE SOME GOOD CEO BLOGS?**

These are growing in number and often consistently smart. Makes sense, doesn't it? Top executives often get there because they're incisive thinkers. As one CEO blogger—Zane Safrit, of Conference Calls Unlimited—put it: “Blogging helps me articulate and refine ideas in a linear fashion . . . ideas I may be thinking about for our com-

pany. So blogging improves my ability to communicate with my employees.” ([zane.typepad.com/ccuceo](http://zane.typepad.com/ccuceo))

This list goes a long way, on its own, toward answering the question: Should the CEO, or senior executive, blog? (One caveat: it helps if the CEO likes to write and possesses some blogging DNA.) I’ve chosen the following list because these folks really “get” blogging. I’ve omitted Boeing’s Randy Baseler, GM’s Bob Lutz and Sun Microsystems’ Jonathan Schwartz because they are mentioned above as examples of Fortune 500 blogs.

- Matt Blumberg (ReturnPath) at [onlyonce.blogs.com](http://onlyonce.blogs.com)
- Karen Christensen (Berkshire Publishing Group) at [berkshirepublishing.com/blog](http://berkshirepublishing.com/blog)
- Mark Cuban (Dallas Mavericks) at [blogmaverick.com](http://blogmaverick.com)
- Richard Edelman (Edelman PR) at [edelman.com/speak\\_up/blog](http://edelman.com/speak_up/blog)
- Michael Hyatt (Thomas Nelson Publishers) at [michaelhyatt.blogs.com/fromwhereisit](http://michaelhyatt.blogs.com/fromwhereisit)
- Alan Meckler (Jupiter Media) at [weblogs.jupitermedia.com/meckler](http://weblogs.jupitermedia.com/meckler)
- Bob Parsons (Go Daddy) at [bobparsons.com](http://bobparsons.com)
- Dave Sifry (Technorati) at [sifry.com/alerts](http://sifry.com/alerts)
- Fred Wilson (Union Square Ventures) at [avc.blogs.com](http://avc.blogs.com)
- Irving Wladawsky-Berger (IBM) at [irvingwb.typepad.com](http://irvingwb.typepad.com)

See chapter 5 for more on CEO bloggers.

## **20. SO REALLY, WHAT’S THE POINT?**

Fair question. Because, in truth, creating and maintaining a blog takes work. It requires real thinking, good writing, the right touch

and persistence. In addition, the ROI isn't precisely quantifiable. And there are legitimate legal issues that need to be thought about ahead of time and conveyed to executive and employee bloggers. Here's a three-part answer:

**Blog or be blogged.** Either you join the conversation in the blogosphere or you're deaf to it. If you choose the latter, you've lost control. You can't respond to what's being said about you; you can't proactively initiate conversations. You'll look like you're clueless and/or stonewalling. If you choose the former, you can shape what's being said about your company even if you can't entirely control it.

**Think of blogging as a three-legged stool.** The legs are the search engines, your customers and the media. If you've got a blog, you'll rank high in search engine results. If you've got a blog, you're taking advantage of a remarkably low-cost way to communicate with—and get feedback from—your customers. Finally, if your company is blogging you will likely attract media interest. It's still early days in blogdom. Be the first in your niche and you'll be noticed. If you're a Fortune 1000 company with a recognizable name, you'll get calls from reporters without having to use your PR agency.

**Blogs are part of next-generation Web sites.** They are the real-time, interactive part of a site. They may not be known as blogs in the future. They may evolve into something bloglike that enables reader participation with your site and with your company. But if you don't embrace blogs now—or at least start thinking about incorporating a blog into your site—then you're stuck in the old, static Web. Can you afford that? Online search is driving business results these days, whether you're a local business or a mega corporation. You want to be found. You want your online presence to be memorable. Don't get left behind.

# How to Order

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# About

## debbieweil

Debbie Weil, aka the [MonaLisaOfBlogging](#), is a speaker, marketing consultant and publisher of award-winning WordBiz Report. She has a unique background as a veteran journalist with an MBA and corporate marketing experience.

Her consulting company, WordBiz.com, Inc., shows large companies how to brand themselves as customer- and employee-friendly – as well as media-savvy – by using blogs, RSS, podcasts, vodcasts, wikis and other social media as next-generation communications tools.

Her clients include Edward Jones, HP, Wells Fargo, Intermec and top 100 law firm Arent Fox. She also works one-on-one with CEOs and top-level execs as a blogging coach.

Her blog, [BlogWriteForCEOs](#), was recently named #8 in a list of the top 25 most influential authorities on the topic of business blogging.

She worked at Network Solutions, Inc., the original dot com company, and has several decades of experience as a reporter and editor with major newspapers, including The Atlanta Constitution and Roll Call which covers Capitol Hill.

Debbie has an MBA from Georgetown University, a Masters in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin and a B.A. with honors from Harvard in English.

## Good Blog Bad Blog

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