

The Corporate Blogging Book Teleconference

Edited transcript

DATE: Wednesday, September 20, 2006

TIME OF CALL: 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM, Eastern Time



Note: the nine participants on this call each purchased 5 copies of my new book, *The Corporate Blogging Book*, through 800-CEO-Read. It was a lively discussion and a great group that included non profit advocacy professionals, consultants and corporate marketers.

Thanks to Cathy Chatfield-Taylor for the quick notes summary below. Bios of those on the call who wished to be identified are at the end. Thanks to www.conferencecallsunlimited.com/chaz for sponsoring the session.

How to Find The Corporate Blogging Book

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- Download Chapter 1: <http://www.TheCorporateBloggingBook.com>

Debbie's remarks are indicated with a DW.

Questions submitted in advance by participants:

What blog platform to use?

Blog process so least amount of pain?

How do you transition from blog as content management system to blog as engaging interactive communications format?

What do you do with an ill-conceived post? How do you take it back??

How do you handle comments? Moderate? Not allow?

How do you build readership?

How do you help non-writers blog?

How can a non-profit raise money with a blog?

What should an executive think / do / feel after finishing the book?

What's not in the book?

How do you choose a blogging platform?

DW: Don't spend a lot of money on it. Hosted platforms are more than adequate. Many people use TypePad, a product of Six Apart. They have a new business class service worth looking into.

There are two differences in platforms—hosted, like TypePad, a great solution for almost everyone, they build in all the bells and whistles. www.typepad.com

The other is licensing software such as Movable Type or Wordpress, bringing it in-house and customizing on your own server. Wordpress is open source and free. Movable type has the same features as typepad. IBM and others have enterprise blogging systems. Domino and Stellent have a blogging module in their content management system. www.movabletype.org www.wordpress.org

Not having the blog hosted on your own web site won't hurt traffic. You can customize the blog template to look like your site. When you set up your blog template on typepad, for example, you can put prominent links and images pointing to your web site. Blog etiquette is to see at a glance how to get back to the main site/business.

How do you drive traffic to your web site from the blog?

DW: Use links to related reports, articles, products, etc. If it's useful, appropriate and in context, people don't mind.

Do you involve your marcomm people in the blog? Who manages it internally?

DW: The Wells Fargo blog on student loans has an enterprise blogging team leader from IT, someone from corporate comm, and a product manager. This cross functional team manages WF's new blog:

<http://blog.wellsfargo.com/StudentLoanDown/>

Who is responsible for a corporate blog? It can be communications. But it depends on your goals.



John: says he's in marketing / interactive media development, working with the corporate comm. He's the evangelist for the organization (a non-profit advocacy group.)

How do you manage the editorial side of blogging?

DW: If your goal is advocacy and fundraising, you don't need web/IT people involved to manage the technology, because the platforms are very non-technical.

Blogging technology allows anyone to *take back the Web from the stranglehold of IT*.

Bill: People go online for information. You can't hype/sell them.

DW: Blog's shtick is information, conversation, provocation, and credibility building. It goes without saying that your organization is in business. There's a way to blog with a light hand, so that there is a business result.

Larry, web editor for [the non-profit] says he's looking at Wells Fargo first blog, Guided by History, and trying to figure out the relationship / role of personality in the blog. WF's Guided by History blog is primarily written by Charles Riggs. They have other contributors as well. <http://blog.wellsfargo.com/GuidedByHistory/>

How do you identify who contributes?

DW: Where we're going with corporate blogging 2.0 is having multiple authors. The blog needs a focus and voice, but you can have several writers. You should be able to link to the bios from the name of the author, so it's clear who's writing it and what their involvement is in the organization.

You may still need a blog editor to oversee those people. That role can be behind the scenes. Look at General Motors FastLane blog. They sign some posts "editor." I don't like that although I think the blog is very well done in general. You should know who each contributor is. Give the editor a name. <http://fastlane.gmblogs.com/>

You may also need an editorial calendar, as long as it is flexible.

What do you do with an ill-conceived post?

DW: You as the author, can go into the entry and rewrite it. If you got something wrong, you can use a strikeout feature to correct it. Or you can add to it. But you should not delete the whole entry. That's considered bad form. I edit all the time, because I'm a stickler for typos, etc.



How do you handle comments?

DW: Best practice today is to moderate comments. I.e. put them on a delay, so they don't publish immediately. An editor or the blog author needs to look at them first. There is so much comment spam you have to do this.

If the comment comes and it's inappropriate, racist, profane, etc., don't publish it. But if it's critical of the organization, and it makes a point you can speak to in a constructive way, let it be. You don't have to comment back, but it makes the blog more interactive if you allow the occasional negative comment.

You can email a wacko on the back channel and ask them not to post.

How do you avoid what you see in online forums, where there are arguments about something that's marginally relevant to the topic?

DW: Unless you're a well-known brand or company, you won't get that much interaction. But it's ideal to have that kind of conversation going, because it makes your blog the place to be to engage in a debate.

Getting comments is the bigger challenge.

How do you build readership?

DW: There is no magic bullet here. If you try too hard, like issuing a press release, you look foolish. It doesn't make people want to access your blog, unless you're a Fortune 50 CEO.

To get more traffic, you start blogging and don't tell anyone about it. Build up some good, interesting, useful content. Then, go leave comments on related blogs, and put in the URL of your blog with your name. People read your comment, wonder who you are, then visit your blog.

Another way is to use the back channel. After you've launched your blog, send an email to a list of influential bloggers and tell them about your blog. (Wells Fargo sent an email to 10 bloggers when it launched the Student LoanDown blog recently.) Anyone who might be interested in what you're doing, including clients and customers. Even better, personalize it by sending individual emails. Publicizing your blog needs to be an organic process. You want others to spread the word for you.

The blogs that get traction have been going for a while. www.technorati.com ranks blogs based on how many other blogs link back to your. Another measure of success is number of comments – how interactive is your blog. But don't obsess over your number of comments. There is a statistical correlation, of course. The better known



your brand and the higher your traffic (visitors and hits), the more comments you're likely to get.

Someone suggests: When you comment about an organization, reach out to them and tell them you've mentioned them.

DW: Be sure your contact information is visible, including a phone number, address and email. You may have reporters who want to contact you.

Success will depend on how well is the blog written, how useful is it? Who your readers are and what they want to know.

Kip's planned blog for his company. Kip, who would be your readers?

Kip: We have a specialized skill set, with high-end engineering. The skill set is top of mind. E.g., a medical device company needs to integrate wireless tech into a device. We want to be top of mind when they're looking for that expertise.

DW: That's a very specific market. The engineers are full of knowledge, but they can't write. The next generation of blogging may need to be more practical. You need a blog editor. If you have a couple of engineers who want to write, have the editor translate into English.

Or have the editor do a Q&A with the expert on wifi, then translate that into a post.

A blog is an interactive web site. It makes sense to have a content editor. You may or may not need a Chief Blogging Officer (CBO), but you can have a managing editor.

Kip: Recall the exchange last November at NE University on "synthetic transparency" – look at the thread on Debbie's blog. The masters level communications class said a corporate blog is like McDonalds employees greeting you. It's synthetic sincerity. Blogs are vulnerable by implying a look into the org, when they don't really.

http://www.blogwriteforceos.com/blogwrite/2005/11/synthetic_trans.html

DW: sometimes a new corporate blog sounds dry and stilted. Dell's new Direct2Dell blog listened to feedback, then adapted to get it right. If a blog sounds completely artificial, you'll get a smack down. If no one notices, it's a moot point.

<http://www.direct2dell.com/>

If you know the best practices, you'll avoid the fakeness of synthetic transparency.

How to transition a blog from being essentially a content management system?

DW: A CMS, where you post things you've read and resources, show off your knowledge and expertise—there's nothing wrong with that. If you want interactive conversations, you have to find out what your audience wants to talk about.

Dave Kellogg, CEO of MarkLogic, posted an esoteric essay to his blog recently on knowledge management ("Knowledge is good.") He links to lots of other sources, refers to Gartner's Trough of Disillusionment and so on. His blog entry got zero comments. Why didn't anyone respond? Maybe they were so dazzled by his smarts they didn't know what to say. Sometimes you just don't get a response.

<http://marklogic.blogspot.com/2006/09/knowledge-is-good.html>

What are you working on next? Where are we going with this?

DW: Two things: first, blogs are next generation web sites. Corporate web sites will have a blog-like component built into them, a little window on the home page where visitors can interact and leave a comment. Or perhaps the whole site will be built on the next generation of blogging software. Second: we're moving to the unhooked version of the Web. Unhook from your computer, read it on your PDA or cell phone. Listen on your iPod.

There are hundreds of blogs doing things I didn't even think of/know about when I was doing the book. But CEO blogging is potentially – I think – a new way to do business, to circumvent the PR/comm dept. I find Sun Microsystems' CEO Jonathan Schwartz's blog very authentic. <http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan/>

Georgia: at the CEO level, where I'm trying to take it, is getting CEO-to-CEO communication, and creating a community of innovation. Continue the conversation started at summits/conventions, in the blog.

Caveat: what about writing ability? Jonathan Schwartz and GM's Bob Lutz are engaging writers. But what if you can't write? And what if you get criticized for blogging?

Well, the contrarian view is that the CEO should be managing the business.

Should you use ghostbloggers?

See the discussion I'm moderating on the IAOC blog on this topic.

http://www.blogwriteforceos.com/blogwrite/2006/09/is_it_ok_to_gho.html

Professional copywriters tend to think ghostblogging is OK.



Kip: one issue not addressed is the nature of the business that the company is involved in. Does it mandate a dialog? If so, you need to engage in social media to get the dialog going. If it's an extension of your website, CMS, etc., it's ok.

Bill: if you don't have the guts to write it and take the criticism, you shouldn't do it.

Katie: for an accounting firm CEO the blog postings would have to go through marcomm for editing.

DW: If you have a ceo with native writing ability and is willing to go around legal, then he/she should write it. A corporate blog can also have multiple authors.

What if the ceo can't write (but thinks she/he can)?

Some discussion on this. Agree that it's a problem. Emperor with no clothes syndrome. Ultimately, when it comes to writing a CEO or corporate blog, it comes down to execution. It's either practical or not for the CEO to blog.

How do you manage the blog process to minimize the pain of editing and maintaining?

DW: Set up clear expectations for yourself and your readers. Posting once a week is ok. Once every 10 days or so is a minimum. If you blog in august and then in september, that's too long a gap.

Set the expectation with readers. Post an explanation: this blog is about x, we post from time to time, etc.

Keep a draft file going. When you run across something bloggable, put in the URL and come back to it. You'll have some fodder for future posts.

Sometimes you just don't feel like doing it. Just don't let it happen for a month.

Which social media should you choose?

DW: I think of podcasts and videocasts as a subset of blogs. You post a podcast to a blog and normally write up a brief summary. If you have an exec who doesn't want to write, you can interview him or her and create a podcast that you post to the corporate blog. Video casting has other issues, such as how long to make it, production values, etc. (DW: informal, less polished is better.)

John: cites Jupiter research that says only a small percentage of the public are using the new social media tools. If that's the case, how do you focus people's attention on blogs, etc. inside your organization?



DW: No one talks about SMTP, but that's what email is. People will be reading blogs and not realize it. RSS is being built into the next generation of browsers. Eventually using the tools will be a seamless process.

Kip: uses FeedDemon (his RSS newsreader) for 20-30 minutes every morning. It's part of his routine. <http://www.feeddemon.com/>

Steve: one audience that uses blogs is the press. They look at blogs to get ahead of the curve on what's coming from a company.

DW: Yes, and in turn, companies can use blogs to find out what the influencers in the market are thinking.

The bigger phenomenon is the blurring of big media with blogging as a place where people get their information and news. The long tail, as Chris Anderson calls it. In Washington Post Online, blogs with relevant keywords are listed next to news stories. (The Post is using Technorati.com to power this.)

Intelligence gathering by looking at other blogs is another way companies are using blogs

You can circumvent PR with a blog, get higher rankings in search engines.

Length of blog entries? What is the optimal length that keeps attention?

DW: Visually, it's best practice to have each post not scroll too long. Or use a continue reading link for long posts.

The occasional one-sentence entry is good. Look at Seth Godin. He does little zingers.

Denise: Do providers allow you to queue up blog posts? You can set them to publish later on.

Can you do e-newsletters through a blog?

DW: There is no one perfect technical solution for combining an e-newsletter and blog. Don't give up your e-newsletter. Some people send out a roundup of their blog entries in an email. Conversely, you can link to the latest issue of your e-newsletter on your blog.

What belongs in e-news and what belongs in blog? They're different mediums. You write differently.



If you have an email list that you've grown, that's a valuable asset.

Kip: MarketingSherpa.com is integrating blogging and e-news content. They post about topics. They give away case studies, which you receive in email newsletter loop. The blog makes the reports findable. But the case studies are for sale after being open to the public for 10 days.

DW: You can put your e-newsletter into an RSS feed.

See marketingsherpa's format for combining blogging, e-news, case study writing, etc. SherpaWeekly summarizes the blog in the lead of the e-newsletter. (DW: MarketingSherpa's e-newsletters are always a great resource.)
www.marketingsherpa.com

Georgia: my company combines e-news and blogs with interwoven / integrated content. This is what we do the most work with at Associations (her key clients). Subject matter experts contribute to the blogs. The editor coaches.

DW: See media examples like businessweek.com, where their reporters blog as well as write, for how blogs and articles work together as different kinds of content.

Strategies or tactics for using the blog to become the subject matter expert?

That's what a thought leadership blog is. It takes work. The writers may need editing, guidance on what to write about. It takes time and consistency to claim that title as expert.

You can't publish once every few months.

How to you develop the content and what about blogs that make money?

DW: Dave Kellogg at Mark Logic publishes essays, but – at least on that one entry – wasn't triggering a conversation. Or you can offer a trigger response to issues, in the news or on Capitol Hill. The National Association of Manufacturer's Pat Cleary (he's Senior VP Communications) does this and is phenomenally prolific in his www.shopfloor.org blog.

Edelman VP Steve Rubel's www.micropersuasion.com blog is more like a news service. He filters the news and puts his spin on it. But he spends hours doing that every day. The point is not to sell ads but to get new business for Edelman PR.

Blog networks that run context sensitive ads are money makers. Weblogs Inc. that AOL bought is probably the best-known example. They write in very narrow



specialized niches. They're little mini media empires. And they don't pay their writers well.

Bill: Small is the New Big –the new book by seth godin – has short chapters that appeal to a short attention span. It's a model for blogging.

DW: Bill, the book is actually based on his blog entries over the past three years. Interesting, huh?!

DW: Thanks everyone. This was a lot of fun and I loved your questions and comments.

MORE ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS ON THE CALL

Cathy Chatfield-Taylor is a San Francisco-based freelance writer/editor doing business as CC-T Unlimited since 1989. When she's not on deadline writing white papers, case studies and technology reviews, she blogs about e-communication strategies and tactics at <http://cctblog.typepad.com>. Visit <http://www.CC-Tunlimited.com> for the skinny on working in slippers.

Steve Knowles is principal of Marketing Acumen, a marketing products & consulting firm that turns X into 2X with every marketing investment. www.MarketinAcumen.com

W.T. (Bill) Brooks is a Boston-based burgeoning blog critic.

Denise Clancey is with Teledirect Partners which works with companies to launch, rejuvenate, or reengineer their Telesales, Inside Sales, Lead Generation, and Customer Service functions. www.teledirectpartners.com

Kip Meacham is a self-described product strategist, international technology marketer, standards-body hack, public relations survivor and The RSS Pundit blogger since September 2005. He is VP marketing for Card Access, a Utah-based engineering services and products firm. <http://www.thersspundit.com/blog>

Georgia Patrick is president of The Communicators, Inc. www.communicators.com She writes for national publications on business leadership, communications, credentialing and professional development. She also creates "Web sites that really work and don't frustrate the owner" as part of her ongoing passion for connecting with and through people, every day, without pause or detours. She's a member of the Duct Tape Marketing Blogging Channel at <http://service.ducttapemarketing.com>

Larry Short is Web editor for World Vision in the United States, working with a team of writers who provide content for the organization's homepage and other web properties (more than 2.3 million page views per month) as well as its blog <http://blog.worldvision.org>, and monthly e-Zine, sent to 700,000



World Vision friends and donors. He and his photographer daughter, Amanda, blogged from Africa this summer.

John Strobel is the Director, Business Development for the Interactive Media team at World Vision. Along with his responsibilities, he is the Evangelist who has been instrumental in igniting and keeping the "blogging" fire lit by working working unilaterally within the organization. www.worldvision.org

Susan Trinter is director of TrinterNational and a corporate strategist. www.trinternatl.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debbie Weil is a corporate and CEO blogging consultant and author of [The Corporate Blogging Book](#) (Penguin Portfolio 2006). She shows the big dogs how to use blogs as a next-generation marketing and communications strategy. She also writes [BlogWriteForCEOs](#), considered one of the most influential blogs about business blogging.

Debbie has a unique background as a veteran journalist with an MBA and corporate marketing experience. She has worked as an Internet marketing consultant with startups as well as Fortune 500 companies for over a decade. She's the publisher of award-winning [WordBiz Report](#), an e-newsletter read by close to 20,000 subscribers in 87 countries.

She has been quoted on the topic of corporate and CEO blogging in Fortune Magazine, The New York Times and numerous other publications. A graduate of Harvard with a degree in English, she has an MBA from Georgetown University and a Masters in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin. She is based in Washington DC.

IF YOU WANT DEBBIE TO LEAD A GROUP TELECONFERENCE FOR YOU

Would you like to do a similar session with your own group – to get your specific questions answered? The session is limited to 10 participants so we can have a real discussion. If you don't want to purchase a minimum of five copies each of the book, I can lead a teleconference for a flat fee. Call or email me – there are several options.

- Your own private group
- 10 participants
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Email Debbie at wordbiz@gmail.com. Or call direct +1 202.364.5705 Eastern.

