



Widen Enterprises incorporates blogging into search effort

By Christopher Hosford

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Every company wants to be found online in better, more immediate ways. That's a lesson fully appreciated by Madison, Wis.-based Widen Enterprises.

Widen specializes in the management and archiving of rich media (video, audio, PDFs and print-to-Web) for health care companies, universities, manufacturers and other organizations that create this kind of nontextual content.

And these customers, when they search the Web, are looking for expertise. Knowing that decision-makers read and appreciate blogs having to do with their own subject areas, Widen provides this expertise in the form of employee blogs.

"Blogs have become a very strong component of our overall search-engine marketing efforts," said Jake Athey, marketing coordinator at Widen, who manages the company's blogging outreach. "We're marketing to other marketing people who are reading blogs more. It's humanizing our marketing, allowing our experts to talk about software as a service, for example, or about color theory and management, or about the intricacies of managing video files."

To use blogging to enhance its search marketing, Widen turned to Compendium Blogware, whose software helps companies set up employee blogs that can be discovered more easily via search.

Compendium enables corporate bloggers to label their posts vertically, geographically, by product and topic, and in a wide variety of other ways that drive the blogs up high in organic search result lists.

The software offers a "keyword meter" that keeps track of how well the blogger is labeling his blog and its topics, "which is helpful for us people who aren't professional writers and have had to learn to write for both search engines as well as for our readership," Athey said.

The company launched its blogging campaign in support of search marketing in November 2007.

"We were reluctant at first," Athey said. "We didn't know how to write blogs, but we discovered it was just like writing an e-mail or letter, just putting down ideas for someone who wants to read them."

So far, Athey and six colleagues post several blogs each week on all aspects of Widen's technologies and services. (Athey's blog is called Ask Dr. DAM, referencing one of Widen's most important keyword phrases, digital asset management or DAM.) The Widen blogs can be viewed at <http://blog.widen.com>.

Athey serves as a gatekeeper of the blogging program, going over his colleagues' posts for accuracy.

“But sometimes we like to post views on things that somebody might disagree with,” he said. “It becomes part of sparking the conversation.”

The company also has guest bloggers from throughout the company and outside contributors.

With each blog tagged with a passel of preselected keywords and phrases, the likelihood of marketers finding Widen comments on digital file management is greatly enhanced.

“People want to trust you, to see that you are the subject matter experts and have competency about what they’re looking for,” Athey said. “People are looking for solutions, and the blogs show that we have all the main business values that go into finding a trusted partner.”

Determining the ROI of Widen’s blog program takes some care, because it is part of an overall online marketing strategy that consists of several Web domains and both paid and organic forms of search optimization.

Nevertheless, the company has been able to track results attributable to the blogs alone: 33% of all inbound leads since the program was launched have come directly from the blogs, found as a result of Widen’s aggressive use of blogs as a search-marketing tool. Further, 20% of all revenue-generating opportunities have been attributed to them.

The blogs feed into the company’s lead-generation efforts, Athey said; the bloggers themselves often have passed along an interesting post to the sales department for follow-up.

As a result, incremental sales increases of 7% have been directly attributed to the company’s blog leads. To date, the financial return of the program is 3.5 times its expense, Athey said.

In addition, blogs have found a place within the company among the richer forms of customer outreach, Athey said, and today inform several parts of Widen’s overall program.

“The blogs are often an entryway into other areas, including client testimonials, video demos and other resources intended to provide searchers and researchers with enough support for their cause before they contact us,” he said.

As the company steps off into its second year of blogging, Athey said, it plans to add video and audio to augment the experience; these rich media also offer potent sources of added keyword-search opportunities.

“We want to be ahead of the curve,” Athey said.

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