




Published: July 01 2009

5 outstanding corporate blogs

By Chris Baggott

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Corporate blogging is a great marketing tool -- but not one that should be launched lightly. Like other marketing initiatives, a company's blog is an investment that should produce a measurable return. Thus, as I illustrated in an [earlier iMedia article](#), much thought should be given to ways in which companies can enhance the value of these programs for both their consumers and their own bottom lines.



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When contemplating this article, the first question I had to address was what exactly qualifies a corporate blog as being "outstanding." To me, an outstanding corporate blogging program is one that accomplishes the clearly articulated goals of the organization.

Under that lens, let's take a look at five business blogs that fit this definition.

GK from Elite Sportswear

[GK from Elite Sportswear](#), a widely recognized manufacturer of gymnastics apparel around the world, proudly sponsors many national and Olympic teams and has been an industry leader for more than 25 years. In 2008, the company turned to business blogging as a means of increasing organic search traffic and converting more business.



Last December, GK Elite launched 30 blogs with titles targeting specific keywords that the company knows its prospects are using to search. Long experienced with PPC, GK already had a handle on which keywords drive the highest conversions.

"Our website wasn't appearing in blended search results for key and common phrases related to our business, but now our blogs are," says Andrew Foss, ecommerce manager for GK Elite, which conducts about half of its sales online. Since launching, the blogs have increased GK's revenue from organic search by 39 percent, and the net online revenue increase as a result of the blogs is 30 percent.

Carhartt: Tough Jobs

[Carhartt's Tough Jobs blog](#) is a terrific example of a company that leveraged its customers to tell stories about its products in a way that the company itself never could. Many blogs fail to generate enough relevant content to help drive the traffic necessary for any kind of measurable success. But as a result of its UGC blog strategy, Carhartt's blog does not suffer from this problem.





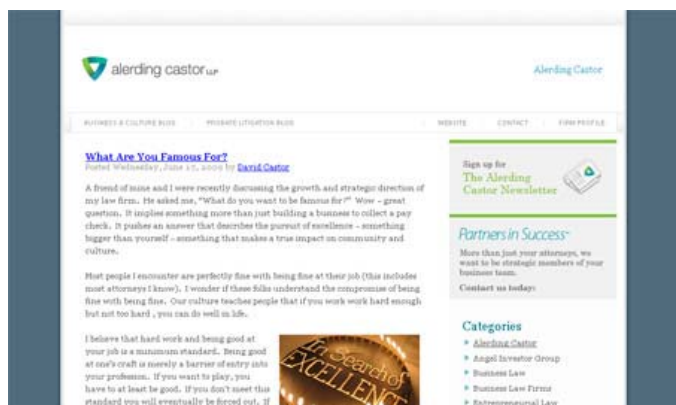
Most user-generated content efforts fail due to a "build-it-and-they-will-come" mentality. The result is usually disappointing volume compounded by the other issue of reviews getting buried deep in the site. For most businesses, prospects only see a review after they have navigated to a specific product.

Carhartt turned this status quo model upside down by soliciting customer feedback and creating a specific landing page for its "Tough Jobs" network of blogs. By asking customers to tell the company about their "tough jobs" and placing that content directly on its blogs, Carhartt puts its happy customers at the front of its online marketing efforts. Furthermore, this extra content drives significantly more search volume, which in turn earns Carhartt more customers... which, in turn, drives more content on Tough Jobs, and so on. In short, you see what makes this a great corporate blogging program.

Alerding Castor

[Alerding Castor](#) is a relatively small law firm with a narrow practice area but a broad vision. While most law firms focus on local geography, Alerding Castor is focused on specific issues, and client location is unimportant.

To succeed with this unusual yet highly profitable strategy, the firm needs to have a broad reach over literally thousands of keywords. Additionally, since clients are not used to consuming legal services long distance, the firm needs to not only show up in the prospects' searches, but also be able to demonstrate credibility and establish the right to take the next step in determining if there is a fit.



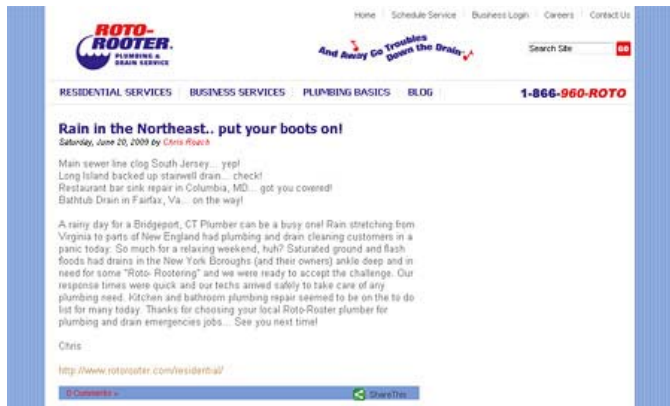
"In our view, business blogging was the only answer," says partner Dave Castor. "We knew that properly titled blogs are ideal for SEO, and we also knew that online, most of our competition would come from either directories or sites that may appear spammy to visitors. We also don't need high volumes; we are looking for high-quality relationships."

Alerding Castor has to walk the line between drawing a lot of qualified traffic while at the same time telling its story in such a way that it completely differentiates the firm from the online competition.

Having established a network of 50 blogs, the firm generates around 900 visits a month through search traffic and has successfully acquired several new clients from around the country. "Just this morning we commenced with a new client, a SaaS company in a Southern state who found us through a Google search on 'SaaS law,'" Castor says. "One of our blogs with that title came up as No. 2 on the search."

Roto-Rooter

[Roto-Rooter](#) is North America's largest provider of plumbing and drain services, with business locations serving approximately 90 percent of the U.S. population, one town at a time. Not one to be complacent with the changing marketing landscape, Roto-Rooter knew it had to adopt a creative strategy to increase its web presence, drive website traffic, and cement its position atop the industry. According to a recent Nielsen survey, 50 percent of consumers turn to search engines to find local businesses versus 24 percent who still use the Yellow Page books.



The challenges for a dispersed franchise organization like Roto-Rooter is that there are thousands of terms a potential customer might use (e.g., frozen pipes, leaky tub, kitchen plumbing) when searching, and those have to be multiplied by literally hundreds of geographies.

Paul Abrams, Roto-Rooter's public relations manager, has been very pleased with the results of the company's blogging strategy thus far, and attributes the success to the way blogging has humanized the company in the eyes of consumers. "No one would expect home improvement service industry professionals like plumbers to utilize Web 2.0 marketing techniques, and that's exactly why we started blogging," Abrams says. "Blogging has been an ideal way to differentiate ourselves from the thousands of other players in this market. The quick return on investment has far outweighed the expectations I had when starting our blogging program."

Targeting between 25 to 50 blogs per geography, Roto-Rooter is achieving an ROI of about 135 percent. In addition to the SEO benefits, Roto-Rooter has further differentiated itself from the competition by blogging about the way its plumbing service professionals double as superheroes to rescue family pets, needy animals, and prized personal possessions for customers.

"One of the aspects I've enjoyed most about blogging is its ability to give Roto-Rooter a true personality," Abrams adds. "We've blogged about everything from cats rescued from underground pipes to customers' diamond anniversary rings that our technicians recovered from deep inside sewers. Blogging gives us a platform to showcase the lengths our service professionals will go to when customers need our help."

HH Gregg

[HH Gregg](#) is one of the nation's leading retailers of home appliances and consumer electronics, with more than 111 stores. In a competitive environment, HH Gregg competes by having a highly trained and professional sales staff, along with same-day delivery and low prices. HH Gregg also knows that much of its products are researched online before customers ever make a trip to the store.



According to Yahoo Research, 88 percent of sales revenue generated from online advertising is derived from consumers who have done their research on the internet, then made their purchase in a brick-and-mortar store. [eMarketer](#) says that as much as \$500 billion in offline purchases were influenced by the internet in 2007. Meanwhile, [BigResearch](#) reports that 89 percent of consumers making in-store purchases in key categories have conducted research online.

Armed with this knowledge, HH Gregg has established several hundred blogs focused on both its products as well as its community involvement. Content is created through an intranet by the people closest to the products and the customers -- the company's employees. By winning search traffic over literally thousands of search terms with content that is specific to the query and written by smart, passionate employees, HH Gregg is in a position to be the educator when prospective customers are doing their product research.

Conclusion

All of these examples represent great corporate blogs because they were initiated with specific goals in mind. These organizations have all looked to leverage social media to help build their business in ways that are both human and mutually beneficial to both their clients and their companies.

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