

## SOCIAL MEDIA: IN FOCUS

# 10 ways to boost the value of your corporate blog



By **Chris Baggott**  
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- Learn how to optimize your blog to drive organic search traffic
- Read why you should blog like a 5-year-old
- Check out the reasons you should encourage widespread employee blogging

## The hope for corporate blogging

This past year was a tough one for corporate blogging, especially considering the bashing business bloggers took from two separate Forrester reports. The primary problem with blogging in 2008 originated from a focus on the wrong objectives. The result was pretty much a big disappointment from both the readers of corporate blogs and the companies that supported them, which began asking the question, "Why?"

However, all is not lost. Many companies did in fact find the successful formula for both high ROI and reader satisfaction. As we move deeper into 2009, these trends will accelerate and the maturity of corporate blogging will become both scalable and sustainable, while actually contributing to the bottom line.

The following are my predictions for the top trends in corporate blogging this year.

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### Trends 1 and 2

#### Trend 1: A focus on what's important

The healthy thing about a bad economy is it forces us to get focused on the activity and investments that actually drive our businesses. The days of tweets or Facebook occupying our brains are long gone. In online marketing, we have to focus on high-return activities. Vince Lombardi said that football was about two things: blocking and tackling. Likewise, online marketing is about two things: email and search. Since more than 90 percent of the internet population engages in a search every day, businesses should focus on this instead of how to measure ROI on blogging.

#### Trend 2: Blogging for search

Organic search is driven primarily by the formula  $(D + C) \times V = OST$ . That means data plus content multiplied by volume equals organic search traffic. In the case of online marketing, the data are your targeted keywords. Content is based on target to those keywords. The magic enumerator is volume. The more web content you create specifically around your targeted keywords, the more organic search traffic you will drive.

This is where businesses really start to appreciate the power of corporate blogging. We must forget about RSS feeds or comments as the measure of success and realize that blogging is a target marketing strategy based on delivering a message to a keyword, just like email delivers a relevant message to an email address.

When you consider the three main traffic sources to corporate blogs (direct navigation, referrals, and search), search is the only measure you should focus on because it's the only one you can control and, more importantly, scale. You can't increase the number of referrals or direct navigation; it either happens or it doesn't. But on the other hand, when discussing search, if you want more organic traffic, you simply have to add more blogs targeted specifically to your keywords and write more content.

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## Trends 3 and 4

### Trend 3: Rethink everything you hear about social networking

As marketers, we are often attracted to things that are new and shiny. In a market like the one we are experiencing, coupled with the decline in just about every other marketing medium (newspapers and other print, TV, radio, banner ads, mobile, online video), it's fun to imagine that if you "only join the community" all your marketing problems will be solved. (That last sentence sounded a little angry didn't it?).

During my presentation on this topic, I often reference a graphic from Jack Herer's book, "The Emperor Wears No Clothes." I'm not saying you shouldn't participate -- you should absolutely be listening to what is going on regarding your company and industry. But relative to the things that actually scale and really drive revenue, this is a sideshow compared to the big event.

I heard a talk the other day in which a marketing person from a big brand-name outdoor retailer was discussing a major initiative for the company's marketing department this year. Building a social network. Great. "How many members would you consider a success?" "Oh anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 would be huge." Doing the math, to make \$50 million from this endeavor would require achieving 100 percent of the membership goal and having each of those members influence at least \$1,000 each in increased sales. I wonder how many businesses do this math.

### Trend 4: Content and volume

We talked about this a little bit earlier, but it's worth addressing as a separate trend. The simple math shows that the more content you create, the more organic traffic you will attract.

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## Trends 5 and 6

### Trend 5: Keyword awareness

Blogging for search acquisition is a data-driven strategy. What's great is that the data are easily available with very solid metrics and value. The data are your keywords. People are telling you exactly what they are attempting to find. Every industry has hundreds, if not millions, of people getting online and entering keywords specifically asking for your product or service. These keywords are easy to find, simple to track by volume, and easy to value. What's great about the pay-per-click world is there is a fair marketplace, just like the stock market, where people bid and compete for keywords every day. There is no ambiguity about any of this; it's a database marketer's dream.

Keywords imply buyer intent. Whether I'm looking for a bankruptcy lawyer or a toaster, when you see me searching with those terms, you can be pretty certain that I'm a worthwhile prospect (compared to if I happened to be watching 30 Rock or something). Search is a target marketing strategy. The marketer's job is to deliver a message to the hundreds or thousands of keywords ready to serve that message when someone makes the search.

### Trend 6: Dumb it down

The polite way to say this is "write for the web." To date, blogging has been about thought leadership and CEOs' grand visions. This has been a hindrance to SEO. When you over-think your content, you create a lot less of it. It becomes a lot of work.

Seth Godin gave me this advice when I first started blogging: "Be pithy." Words of wisdom. People don't read the web, they scan. They are looking for themes, credibility, or an idea. Think about your content in terms of search. When people have a problem, they enter their keywords into that little box looking for help. Are you the one to help them? First you have to show up. We already talked about how that requires targeting and volume. Are they looking for journalism? Most likely they are looking for a quick source for an answer. By writing simply, enthusiastically, or talking about specific problems and solutions, you stand a much better chance of not only winning the search, but also winning the conversion.

One of my co-workers wrote in her blog that we should blog like a 5-year-old. If we did we would:

1. Be honest
2. Be humorous
3. Be humble
4. Keep it basic
5. Talk at a level that everyone can understand
6. Never run out of things to say

This is great advice for every corporate blogger.

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## Trends 7 and 8

### Trend 7: Widespread employee blogging

A big part of the problem with corporate blogging has been that it's been too corporate. People don't necessarily care or, more importantly, trust what the CEO, PR team, or brand says. The good news is that your employees are in a position to tell the kind of stories that foster both trust and engagement. Last year, Richard Edelman said, "Employee bloggers are five times more credible than a CEO blogger."

People don't care nearly as much about your opinions as they care about their problem. Employees are in a much better position to discuss things the customer cares about. Things like applications, use cases, customers, and the problems they solve every day. Employees are human, engaged, passionate, and want to participate and feel valued. If you give someone a business card and let them talk on the phone, you should let them blog.

Additionally, the huge benefit of widespread employee participation is the content volume. By sharing the load among everyone, you naturally generate an increased volume of content that is timely, relevant, and will drive more traffic.

If the social media phenomenon is telling us anything, it's that people like people. You hire smart people, they enjoy their jobs and customer interaction -- so let them write.

### Trend 8: Get local

Blogging for search is a great strategy for anyone, but it's rocket fuel for local search. The simple reason is that there is less competition. Most local searches are won by directories like online yellow pages because nobody is competing for them at that level.

The reality from a search standpoint is that an estimated 20-50 percent of all search has "local intent." Local search grew 76 percent last year, according to comScore. This gives a huge advantage to those local and national companies that focus on a local strategy. Do people really want to search, find a directory, and then have to search again? Of course not, they just want to find you. Blog about your location and blog about your products and inventory. And don't forget your keywords.

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## Trends 9 and 10

### Trend 9: Coupons and other offers

Think about your traffic now. What do you want the people to do? Read your wisdom? Maybe, but that is hard to monetize. Think about transactional calls to action (CTAs). These keyword-targeted blogs have the same responsibility as any other web property. They have to convert that traffic into action. Whatever you expect from your site, you should challenge the blogs to perform the same or better in conversion.

### Trend 10: Measurement and metrics

Are my blogs doing me any good? The only way to find out is to measure them. Blogs, like any other web marketing initiative, have a huge advantage in that they are all measurable. The key is what to measure.

A great measure at the top of the funnel is the relationship of blog post volume to overall traffic volume. As you see the correlation between the traffic increase as you increase your content, it absolutely supports engaging more bloggers.

You should also measure your keyword traffic against the value of that traffic if you were paying for it. We discussed earlier that there is no ambiguity when it comes to the value of search traffic. Google and others quite clearly indicate a marketplace for keywords that is designed to squeeze out the real value of every keyword you can imagine. When you are looking at your organic traffic, you need to measure what that traffic would cost if you had to buy it.

By measuring the value of keywords, your organization can focus on converting that traffic into actionable business. Tell your boss you drove \$20,000 worth of organic traffic last month, and I promise the first question out of his or her mouth will be, "How much business did that translate into?"

And, at the end, that's the most important measure, right? You increase the top of the funnel so you can increase what comes out the other end.

This year's corporate blogging trends will be all about what's coming out the other end -- the ROI of blogging.

*Chris Baggott is co-founder and CEO of Compendium Blogware.*