

KEY LEARNINGS

- **A blog is an easily published, online diary that provides comment and unfiltered information. It enables readers to post comments and links to other blogs.**
- **Blogs can facilitate conversations between customers and corporations. They enable companies to get direct feedback from their customers, information which could be used as a new source of market research.**
- **The blogger community may be small but it is influential. Monitor what blogs are saying about your brands as this may help you spot a crisis before it happens.**
- **Bloggng needs to be transparent, interesting to read and open. Brands which attempt to hide PR and marketing efforts in the medium will be ridiculed.**
- **Bloggng is not appropriate for all brands. You need to have something interesting to say and be prepared to open yourselves up to painful criticism.**



“It’s a great way to get feedback, it’s a real-time focus group and gives us an outsider’s perspective. These comments are being read at the highest level ... some will have some impact.” **Michael Wiley – GM**

service and the former head of interactive at P&G.

He warns that consumers are using blogs to persuasively reflect brand experience for better or for worse. They’re dialling up sound files, video and photos. They’re even posting audio conversations of call centre conversations online.

Start spreading the news

So how can interested companies engage in the blogosphere and ensure their brands are benefiting rather than being penalised in this new online world? Brands can use blogs for research and insight as new sources of market research. For example, a marketer could solicit feedback on a new product before the final design is confirmed. A number of technology companies have used this approach in order to make final tweaks.

Bloggng can also be used as a word-of-mouth tool, which brands should certainly monitor. For example, an internet search of Starbucks over a three-month period showed more than 20,000 mentions of the firm in blogs alone, according to Forrester.

Brands must tread carefully, as bad news spreads more ferociously than good news in this environment. In an analysis for a large technology firm, Delahaye, a tracking firm, found that 23% of blog entries were negative, against 11% for internet discussion forum posts and 13% for news articles.

In January this year, a lawsuit was filed against Verizon Wireless, the second-largest wireless network operator in the US, for disabling the bluetooth function of one its phones. The angry customer decided to sue after reviewing numerous blog entries and realising that others had already unsuccessfully

appealed to the company.

Are all bloggers influential? Blackshaw says no: “But if you believe in megaphones then bloggers are more influential than other consumers because they’re connected to a social network.” Adriana Cronin-Lukas, CEO of the BigBlog company, which helps organisations launch their own blogs, agrees: “Prosumers and bloggers overlap. What prosumers find trendy, will become trendy in 18 months.”

Blackshaw predicts that it’s only a matter of time before expert consumer publishers emerge on the blogosphere that brands will not be able to ignore. He envisages the online appearance of a “power mum” from Arkansas, for example, who will be the authority on nappies.

Some brands such as Audi have used the ‘Blogads’ network, which enables advertisers to buy ads across relevant blogs through one contact rather than thousands. It’s the quality of the blog readership, rather than the numbers that attracts most advertisers. As the Blogads site says, “you need to impress 100,000 opinion makers ... not pester 100,000,000 nobodies.”

Cronin-Lukas warns that brands must be aware of the difference between marketing and blogging. “Marketing gives you a message. With blogging you have to write about what they’re interested in. It’s a value-for-value exchange and attention is very expensive.”

Nike launched a blog as a new form of advertising with the Art of Speed campaign, which ran for 20 weeks. It showcased the work of 15 film makers asked to interpret the idea of speed. The creative was handled by Gawker Media, a New York-based blogging publishing house led by British dotcom entrepreneur, Nick Denton.