



## Does Your Business Need a Boost? Blogs and Podcasts May Be Your Answer

BY PETER KOEPEL

Just when you think you have it all figured out in terms of marketing your business, along come some new technologies that revolutionize your company's ability to promote itself to prospects and existing customers. And while most people have heard of these technologies by now, namely blogs and podcasts, **few are taking full advantage of what these marketing media can offer their businesses.**

Remarkably, as little as two years ago, blogs and podcasts were viewed as nothing more than places for opinionated people to rant and rave or assert their viewpoint. But today, the tide has changed, and both blogs and podcasts are the most explosive marketing vehicles to emerge since the Internet itself. Consider the facts: BusinessWeek reports that more than 40,000 new blogs are popping up every day. And in 2006, the number of podcast feeds exceeded the number of radio stations worldwide, says the CIA World Factbook.

What does all this mean for your business? Namely, that **you have a wealth of marketing opportunities that require little to no out-of-pocket expense.** Use the following suggestions to make the most of your blogging and podcasting efforts.

### Blogs

Blogs are short for "web logs." They are easy to use and simple to set up, and they are a great format for promoting businesses. Think of a blog as a mini web site that you post comments to on a regular basis. Blogs are a powerful medium for delivering information, because when they're done correctly, the information on a blog comes across as informational and less biased. Consider the following key points:

- ▶ **Blogs enable you to get consumer feedback** in an unfiltered environment. Sure, that can create some challenges, but if you get negative feedback on your blog, at least now you can address the issue and be aware of it. So in a sense, a blog

is often like an instant focus group. Being receptive to getting customer feedback on your blog positions your company as being accessible and interested in customer concerns. That's a great selling point in today's environment.

- ▶ Because **blogs are updated regularly**, search engines like blogs and display them at the top of the search results. Construct your blog properly by using keywords the search engines will pick up within your blog entries. That way, when someone keys in a particular term about your business into a search engine, your blog will come up naturally in the results. This not only helps promote your business, but it also helps position your company as an industry leader.
- ▶ **Blogs are almost like an online community.** Therefore, it's a great way to talk about your company, its culture, and any industry trends. Blogs provide an easy forum for delivering information to customers about new products or offers, and for building relationships with customers. Likewise, if there were some sort of crisis occurring in the company, it's a way to get the facts out there so you can deal with the situation quickly.
- ▶ To make your blog more relevant and non biased, **reach out to people who will contribute to your blog.** In other words, you can have people from within your company post entries, as well as outside experts or customers. Be careful, though, as a blog makes it easy for a disgruntled employee to post information that should not be public

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knowledge, such as proprietary information or trade secrets. Therefore, if you allow employees to post entries, establish some controls over the content.

- ▶ Whatever you do, don't create fake blog entries, where you pose as a customer or outsider and say wonderful things about the company. That approach usually backfires because people see through that. Be honest in all your entries.
- ▶ You can find a number of inexpensive blogging services online that can help you set up and maintain your blog.

### Podcasts


A podcast is essentially your own radio show on the web. It's an extension of a blog, whereby you make your entry more personal because you're actually speaking the words, not just typing them. Before you dismiss podcasts as something only children listen to, take note: According to a comScore study, people between the ages of 35-54 make up about half of the podcast listeners, and they are more likely than average to download podcasts. As such, podcasts are a great choice for small businesses because they can help boost the company's credibility and sales without having to invest much. Consider the following key points:

- ▶ The first step to developing a podcast is to think of a unique concept or angle for your show. Since this is essentially a radio show dedicated to your business, you'll want to give information that relates to your industry or company that your prospects and listeners would find informative and entertaining. Address the challenges your customers or prospects have and they'll tune into your podcast.
- ▶ Podcasts also allow you to appeal to niche audiences, because you can cover certain topics in more depth. You can make your podcast any length (30 minutes to an hour is common), and you can address specific or even obscure topics that you know your customers will find interesting.
- ▶ To actually create the podcast, all you need are recording/mixing software and a microphone. Both of these items are installed on your computer, so there's no need to go to a recording studio. With the software you can edit your podcast and include intro music. You can even put commercials into your podcast to sell your own products, or sell air space to others and include their commercials.
- ▶ The beauty of podcasts is that people can listen to your show over and over, whenever they want. All listeners need to

tune in is an mp3 player. And according to recent surveys, more than 65 million people worldwide have mp3 players.

- ▶ By creating podcasts and being informative, you can quickly become a leader in your industry. Prospects and existing customers who listen to your podcast will likely think of you when they are in need of what you offer or your area of expertise.
- ▶ Make it easy for people to find your podcast. You can do that by submitting your podcast to different feed directories, such as FeedBurner or PodcastValley.

### Blog and Podcast Your Way to Profits

When it comes to blogs and podcasts, the key to success is to be informational. You need to give people lots of relevant information in order to keep them reading or listening. Yes, maintaining a blog or doing a regular podcast takes time and discipline. But when you consider the amount of credibility and exposure to new customers these technologies give you, no company can afford not to use these tools as a vital part of their online marketing mix. 



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