

## **The Truth About Blogs**

### **Blogs: “hot air” in cyberspace or a “must have” business tool?**

Calling all business owners who are:

- leading small to mid-sized (SMB) business,
- in the greater Chicago area,
- feeling “pressure” from staff and/or vendors to have a blog and,
- wondering what to do?

If you are going to invest in a blog, wouldn't it be interesting to know if anyone will be reading it? We dared ask the question “*Who cares about blogs?*” and got some really interesting responses.

*Have you wondered about the value of a blog for your business?*

*Since the beginning of this year, we've asked 100 local business owners if they read and value blogs.*

*You may be surprised by what they said.*

### **What your providers won't tell you about blogs.**

Are you left scratching your head every time you hear the hype about blogs? Does your marketing and ad agency, media partner or web developer insist you step into the blogosphere in order to acquire or retain customers? It seems that everywhere we turn, people are talking about blogs and, while statistics on blogs are easy to find, they are hard to validate and interpret. Estimates of the number of US blog readers can be as high as 57 million (about 39% of the online population) while the number of blogs is touted to be well over 12 million. But a closer look at the *behavior* behind the numbers raises some legitimate questions for small to mid-sized companies considering investing time and resources into having a blog as part of their business marketing.

### **Everyone's into blogs. Or are they?**

We were curious to find out which of our clients, colleagues and business partners are blog users; who reads them, views them as a good resource and values them. After all, if you are going to put your business time and dollars into a blog, it pays to answer the age-old ground leveling question: Who Cares?

For the small to mid-sized business in our marketplace — the greater Chicago area — we wondered if, in fact, blogs are everything they're cracked up to be. Are the key decision makers taking time to read them? Are blogs valued by decision makers as vehicles that influence their thinking and/or cause them to take action?

Our curiosity motivated us to conduct some first-hand, primary research. In January 2008, we started asking business owners a few questions about blogs. Since we are in the business of helping clients achieve profitable growth through highly effective marketing programs, we wanted to know if blogs were *really* the great new frontier of cyberspace so we can advise our clients accordingly.

### **We asked. Here's what we found.**

Over the course of four months, we spoke with one hundred local business owners and executives—people who are representative of our clients and their businesses, as well as *representative prospects*—typical buyers of products and services that our clients provide.

We believe that fast and frugal techniques can yield great insights—the type of information that a focus group might uncover but without the time and expense involved. So we got busy with inquiry activity like talking with the various groups we participate in such as Vistage (the world's largest CEO membership group) and the President's Resource Group (a unique networking venue for mid-market business owners) and others. We conducted our casual inquiry with a range of small to mid-market business owners whose companies provide a wide variety of products and services, resulting in, what we believe, is well-balanced feedback. Here's what we asked: two quick yes/no questions and an "open commentary" question:

1. Do you read blogs?
2. Do you think of blogs when you need to solve a problem or find information?
3. What are your thoughts about blogs?

The responses to the two yes/no questions, were a resounding 98% weighing in with "No". Need we say more?

The open commentary question elicited remarks that were interesting to us and largely boiled down to these representative comments:

"Well, maybe I should read a few, but I don't have the time."

"I have a friend who likes a particular blog—but I can't remember what it's about."

"I've been told we should have a blog...but don't have the time to write it and don't particularly relish paying to have one done for us."

It seems that those who are most bullish on blogs are all in the business of selling the services needed to host and maintain them—content developers, marketing providers, SEO-related service providers and media companies. The business owners we spoke with never personally used blogs as a business tool. Yet, some were still considering it and uncomfortable when asked why they didn't have one. They simply didn't have the facts to contradict hungry suppliers who pushed them to indulge.

## **To Blog or Not to Blog?**

Contrary to what you may think at this point, we are *not* nay-sayers about blogs. During these past months of curiosity-driven and open-minded research and evaluation on the topic of blogs, we have come to believe that they have appeal and value for specific niches and industries. For instance, political blogs seems to be white-hot as our national campaign season rolls on. It appears that the retail, education, or entertainment industries, where very young consumers are often the primary target, value blogs. Even so, the number of blogs created has slowed. We were not completely surprised to learn that most are abandoned soon after creation and few are regularly updated. And, in a world where content is still king, blog content must be unique, useful and current to have any value at all.

Based on our insight, we conclude that a blog may have a place in your SMB operation in the future, but for now we recommend taking a wait-and-see stance as their business value is far from proven.

## **About Marketplace Partners**

For more than a decade we have successfully served B2B Services Business organizations in the greater Chicago area. Our business consulting and marketing services are designed specifically for business owners and executive teams committed to accelerating the profitable growth of their business. Leveraging our proprietary and on-going research with C-level buyers of services, we propel our clients into new services, new markets, more sales, better margins and timely results. We assist our clients in closing the gap between their business plan and the strategic marketing and practical performance required to effectively grow in a competitive market.

**Contact Us: 877.250.7524 or learn more at: [www.marketplace-partners.com](http://www.marketplace-partners.com)**

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