

BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS IN 2008

By now you should be familiar with the word "blogging" or at least familiar with the concept of a blog. Blogs have been around for several years and thousands have been published. Almost all are personal blogs, even the ones that are maintained by large companies. They are personal because that is the very nature of what a blog entails. But more than just the personal aspect of a blog, there are several extraordinary benefits of what a blog can do for your business, especially if you start blogging for business in 2008.

Recently, I started a blog (www.youngcopy.com/blog) to discuss professional writing, marketing, and other tidbits of information to help companies increase their revenues. But before I jumped on board with the blog craze, I did my homework and analyzed several highly successful businesses. I studied their products and services, their corporate websites, but the real studying was done by reading their blog posts. Three of my personal favorite blogs belong to Peer1, Mailtrust, and MailChimp, names you may already be familiar with if you pay attention to what's going on in the hosting and software industries.

Okay, so you are probably asking "what's so great about these companies and their blogs?" I took the time to interview the people behind these successful blogs. The responses I received are quite intriguing. Rajan Sodhi, vp of marketing and communications at Peer1 (www.peer1.com), started "BIG marketing for small businesses" and has been posting to his blog (bigmarketing.wordpress.com) since August 2006. Sodhi said, "My blog has been successful in giving me an opportunity to discuss, share and engage with others about my favorite topic – marketing."

Sodhi enjoys discussing ideas and concepts in marketing on his personal blog. However, blogs are able to do more than just communicate your personal thoughts on whatever interests you the most. For example, Pat Matthews, president of Mailtrust (www.mailtrust.com), a Rackspace company, said, "My blog has helped us generate business as well as recruit more effectively." Matthews has been posting in his "Small Town, Big Ideas" blog (patsweblog.com) for over 2.5 years. He believes potential customers and employees like to read about the company they are going to do business with or work for in the future. Matthews added, "My blog has made a big impact on both levels."

Sodhi and Matthews' blogs are independent of their company's websites and still help them build business. What happens when you fully integrate your blog within your corporate website?



Ben Chestnut, co-founder of MailChimp (www.mailchimp.com), an email marketing solutions firm, has fully integrated "MonkeyBrains" into their corporate website. Chestnut has been posting in his blog (www.mailchimp.com/blog) since 2004 and says the blog has "linked us up with some prominent media people in our industry." Adding to that, "Two of our blog readers eventually became employees, who have helped our company tremendously," said Chestnut.

Chestnut said his new employees already came with an understanding of MailChimp's branding and personality due to the blog's success.

Aside from branding and recruiting new team members, these blogs have something else in common. They drive organic traffic from search engines, especially Google. Sodhi said the majority of his traffic is from search engines. For example, he wrote a post on Starbucks a few months ago and receives traffic on a daily basis from people searching for 'Starbucks.'

"Small Town, Big Ideas" receives much of its traffic from Google. Matthews did say that most of the keywords are obscure words. "I think that most of my traffic comes from links off of our corporate website from people that want to learn more about Mailtrust or the people behind the company." Matthews often posts about his views on the company and the inside functions as to what makes Mailtrust a great company.

MailChimp's "MonkeyBrains" receives 38% of its traffic from search engines. Chestnut said the blog is one of the top five traffic sources for MailChimp.com. "Before migrating the blog to our own domain, we had a blog at TypePad that received 58% of its traffic from search engines," exclaimed Chestnut.

Getting started with a blog requires a bit of planning. You need to find the right blog software. A popular blog software platform is from WordPress (<http://www.wordpress.org>), a free program updated regularly by a team of blogging enthusiasts. You need to develop when and how often you plan on posting to your blog. And you need to create a list of items you want to discuss in your blog.

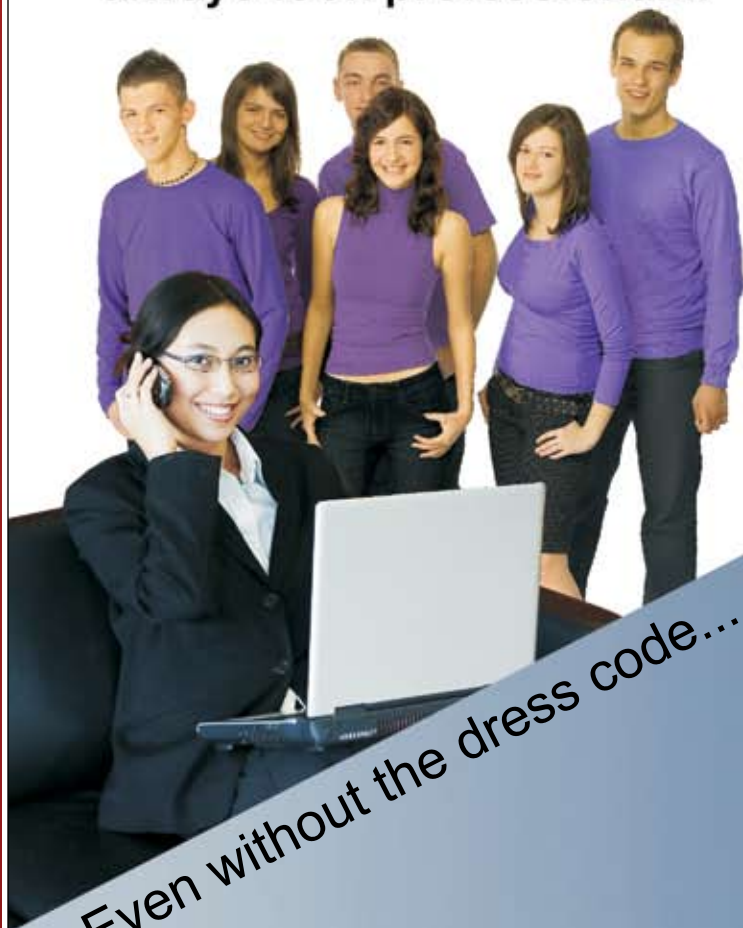
To reduce obscure searches, include keywords and key phrases in your blog that attract your target audience. Add your "voice" to your blog. It may be difficult at first, but once you get started, and you stay consistent, your voice will start to appear in your posts. Educate your audience, but make it fun. Plan on posting to your blog at least once a week. If you post more than once a week, divide your posts between educational posts and "fun" posts. Both will attract visitors to your site and significantly boost overall traffic.

At the time of writing this article, I am about three weeks into my new blog, posting at least once a week. Not only has traffic picked up significantly, my blog has also helped me network with other great companies. I know, it seems quick having only been three weeks, but the fact is, and you can prove it yourself, blogging for business works.

Instead of thinking blogs are a trend, take a step forward and do something beneficial for your company. Peer1, Mailtrust, and MailChimp did. They are professional, successful bloggers who do it for fun, but also generate business, new partnerships, and even new employees. Blogging for business in 2008 should be one of your top priorities. **P!**

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