



Navigating the Blogosphere: Journey to a PR Adventure

Editor, Phil Hall,
212.621.4875, phall@accessintel.com
Associate Editor, Courtney M. Barnes,
212.621.4906, cbarnes@accessintel.com
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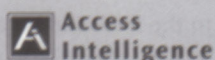
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The "blogosphere" – the world of online diarists or web-log writers – is the newest tool for relationship-building and establishing mindshare, as well as for market research and competitive intelligence. Businesses and agencies alike can use this lively environment to enhance client PR by finding out what competitors and customers are saying about their products, brands and service offerings.

Of course, in order to use it, you must first find it. For those who can't tell a blog from a blob, here's a crash course on surfing the blogosphere.

Technorati (<http://www.technorati.com>) lets you search by keyword, conversation or even tags (labels or categories for your information that others can share). BlogPulse (<http://blogpulse.com>) lets you to search by conversation and trend or "buzz" generated over time. Feedster (<http://feedster.com>) queries millions of newsfeeds several times per hour.

The more traditional services, such as PR Newswire, offer fee-based monitoring services (eWatch, <http://ewatch.prnewswire.com>).

You can search with aggregator services and newsreaders – Web- or desktop-based programs that make it easy to read many blogs simultaneously by collecting and organizing syndicated content. Try Bloglines (<http://bloglines.com>), which highlight user conversations and let you look at newsfeeds that discuss a given topic.

Google News (<http://news.google.com>) and YahooNews (<http://news.yahoo.com>) are great ways to track press releases and product mentions in real time. They offer the ability to set up a newsfeed and track searches. YahooNews now includes blogs in its news

searches, and Google offers a tool (<http://blogsearch.google.com>) that searches RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds or newsfeeds – technology makes it easy for Internet users to subscribe to Web site content (see the August 10, 2005, TIP Sheet).

But once you've found the blogs, the next question: Is anyone actually reading this stuff? Search results can give you an idea of a blogger's popularity. Technorati lets you check out the quantity and quality of inbound links and a publisher's ranking in the blogosphere. "Googling" an individual or company continues to be a good predictor of influence; advanced Google searching finds other Web sites that link to a particular blog.

You can track and gauge incoming blog traffic with tools such as SiteMeter (<http://www.sitemeter.com>) or Alexa (<http://www.alexa.com>), typically found at the bottom of the homepage; Alexa also lets you see related Web sites.

You can also validate blog content while checking out its appeal by referencing others who have written about a topic or issue through "social bookmarking" services such as del.icio.us (<http://del.icio.us>) or Furl (<http://www.furl.net>).

USING THE RESULTS

To optimize results from these tracking and assessment tools, do a search. Then, set up a Watchlist or subscribe to the RSS feed for that conversation in your newsreader or aggregator. Tracking logical keywords or even phrases will reveal each time a company or product is mentioned. You can also set-up Alerts to receive news and search results via e-mail.

To enhance lead generation, outreach efforts and con-

tent sourcing for clients, our communications firm gathers blog content by researching keywords from previous Google AdWords advertising campaigns. By tracking job opportunities, up-to-the-minute industry news and press releases, we can develop an ongoing list of opportunities and company contacts.

Searches also can be used for marketing outreach campaigns to find bloggers, and other publishers, who might be receptive to our message. Research also helps find targeted conversations in which to participate, and participation grows brand awareness, strengthens relationships, and creates a two-way dialog with passionate customers and prospects.

VALIDATING THE RESEARCH

Once you've collected information, it's time to validate a blogger's influence and value to the client.

Blogs and blogger profiles often include links to company Web sites. If this is the case, determine who the publisher works for, or subscribe to a blogger's site and then determine how many subscribers it has.

Also, take a few minutes to check out a blogger's local news and traditional media coverage. Check the frequency of postings and comments or "trackbacks" by others to determine what readers think. **PRN**

CONTACT:

Mitch Arnowitz is managing director of Tuvel Communications, based in Rockville, MD. He is also the author of his own blog, located online at <http://mitcharnowitz.com>. He can be reached at 301.545.0843 or at mitch@tuvel.com.