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The Corporate Weblog Manifesto



Thinking of doing a weblog about your product or your company? Here are my ideas of things to consider before you start. *continued* ►

by Robert Scoble

The Corporate Weblog Manifesto

1

Tell the truth. The whole truth. Nothing but the truth.

If your competitor has a product that's better than yours, link to it. You might as well. We'll find it anyway.

2

Post fast on good news or bad.

Someone say something bad about your product? Link to it — before the second or third site does — and answer its claims as best you can. Same if something good comes out about you. It's all about building long-term trust. The trick to building trust is to show up! If people are saying things about your product and you don't answer them, that distrust builds. Plus, if people are saying good things about your product, why not help Google find those pages as well?

3

Use a human voice.

Don't get corporate lawyers and PR professionals to cleanse your speech. We can tell, believe me. Plus, you'll be too slow. If you're the last one to post, the joke is on you!

4

Make sure you support the latest software/web/human standards.

If you don't know what the W3C is, find out. If you don't know what RSS feeds are, find out. If you don't know what weblogs.com is, find out. If you don't know how Google works, find out.

5

Have a thick skin.

Even if you have Bill Gates' favorite product people will say bad things about it. That's part of the process. Don't try to write a corporate weblog unless you can answer all questions — good and bad — professionally, quickly, and nicely.

6

Don't ignore [Slashdot](#).

7

Talk to the grassroots first.

Why? Because the main-stream press is cruising weblogs looking for stories and looking for people to use in quotes. If a mainstream reporter can't find anyone who knows anything about a story, he/she will write a story that looks like a press release instead of something trustworthy. People trust stories that have quotes from many sources. They don't trust press releases.

8

If you screw up, acknowledge it. Fast.

And give us a plan for how you'll unscrew things. Then deliver on your promises.

9

Underpromise and over deliver.

If you're going to ship on March 1, say you won't ship until March 15. Folks will start to trust you if you behave this way. Look at Disneyland. When you're standing in line you trust their signs. Why? Because the line always goes faster than its says it will (their signs are engineered to say that a line will take about 15% longer than it really will.

10

If Doc Searls says it or writes it, believe it.

Live it. Enough said.

11

Know the information gatekeepers.

If you don't realize that Sue Mosher reaches more Outlook users than nearly everyone else, you shouldn't be on the PR team for Outlook. If you don't know all of her phone numbers and IM addresses, you should be fired. If you can't call on the gatekeepers during a crisis, you shouldn't try to keep a corporate weblog (oh, and they better know how to get a hold of you since they know when you're under attack before you do — for instance, why hasn't anyone from the Hotmail team called me yet to tell me what's going on with Hotmail and why it's unreachable as I write this?)

12

Never change the URL of your weblog.

I've done it once and I lost much of my readership and it took several months to build up the same reader patterns and trust.

13

If your life is in turmoil
and/or you're unhappy, don't write.

When I was going through my divorce, it affected my writing in subtle ways. Lately I've been feeling a lot better, and I notice my writing and readership quality has been going up too.

14

If you don't have the answers, say so.

Not having the answers is human. But, get them and exceed expectations. If you say you'll know by tomorrow afternoon, make sure you know in the morning.

15

Never lie.

You'll get caught and you'll lose credibility that you'll never get back.

16

Never hide information.

Just like the space shuttle engineers, your information will get out and then you'll lose credibility.

17

If you have information that might get you in a lawsuit, see a lawyer before posting, but do it fast.

Speed is key here. If it takes you two weeks to answer what's going on in the marketplace because you're scared of what your legal hit will be, then you're screwed anyway. Your competitors will figure it out and outmaneuver you.

18

Link to your competitors and say nice things about them.

Remember, you're part of an industry and if the entire industry gets bigger, you'll probably win more than your fair share of business and you'll get bigger too. Be better than your competitors — people remember that. I remember sending lots of customers over to the camera shop that competed with me and many of those folks came back to me and said "I'd rather buy it from you, can you get me that?" Remember how Bill Gates got DOS? He sent IBM to get it from DRI Research. They weren't all that helpful, so IBM said "hey, why don't you get us an OS?"

19

BOGU. This means “Bend Over and Grease Up.”

I believe the term originated at Microsoft. It means that when a big fish comes over (like IBM, or Bill Gates) you do whatever you have to do to keep him happy. Personally, I believe in BOGU'ing for EVERYONE, not just the big fish. You never know when the janitor will go to school, get an MBA, and start a company. I've seen it happen.

Translation for weblog world: treat Gnome-Girl as good as you'd treat Dave Winer or Glenn Reynolds. You never know who'll get promoted. I've learned this lesson the hard way over the years.

20

Be the authority on your product/company.

You should know more about your product than anyone else alive, if you're writing a weblog about it. If there's someone alive who knows more, you damn well better have links to them (and you should send some goodies to them to thank them for being such great advocates.)

Any others? Disagree with any of these? Sorry my comments are down. Now Hotmail is down too. Grr. Where's the "Hotmail weblog" where I can read about what's going on at Hotmail? So, write about this and link to it from your weblog. I watch my referrer links like a hawk. Oh, is that #21? Yes it is. Know who is talking about you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Scoble is one of blogging's best-known personalities. He is Microsoft's technical evangelist for the US .NET Platform Strategy. Before joining Microsoft, Scoble held a variety of jobs ranging from planning conferences at Fawcette Technical Publications, to being director of marketing for weblog software producer UserLand Software, to being sales support manager at NEC Mobile Solutions. He has a 10-year-old son and enjoys technology of all kinds, from playing with his Tivo and Xbox Live system to tinkering around with digital cameras. <http://scoble.weblogs.com>

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