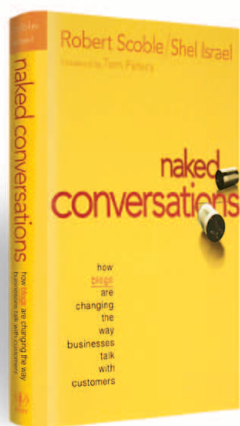




Executive Book Summaries®



How Blogs Are Changing the Way Businesses Talk With Customers

NAKED CONVERSATIONS

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Today's consumer craves human contact. We're sick to death of voicemail. Menus of options that never offer the option we need. A deluge of carefully spun "information" designed not to answer our concerns, but to influence our decisions. Mechanical voices telling us our call is important to them even as they refuse to answer it.

We're frustrated in our attempts to reach a live human being, and when we finally do, all too often it's someone who barely speaks our language and only reads from a script.

Is it so surprising that the consumer distrusts the corporation?

Into this charged atmosphere comes a phenomenon called blogging. It's interactive. It's informal. It's peppered with misspellings, grammatical errors and an occasional forbidden word.

It comes from a real person. And it allows the consumer to talk back.

In this summary, you will learn why the experts believe blogging is already changing the face of business.

This summary is based on more than 50 interviews with people at all levels in all types of businesses. The experts show readers how employee bloggers altered the public's perception of Microsoft, how company leaders use blogs to connect with customers, how small businesses and Fortune 500 companies alike can benefit from blogging and how failing to use it properly can be disastrous.

In addition, this summary will show you:

- ✓ *Where the dangers of blogging can be found.*
- ✓ *How to manage the risks of blogging.*
- ✓ *How to let consumers talk back to your company.*
- ✓ *Why your future may depend on your ability to let customers talk back to your company.*
- ✓ *How blogs can repair corporate image and lost trust.*
- ✓ *What new technologies should be watched.*
- ✓ *Why business blogging is incredibly important.*
- ✓ *What rules companies must follow when blogging.*

By Robert Scoble and Shel Israel

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NAKED CONVERSATIONS

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— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

PART ONE: WHAT'S HAPPENING

Souls of the Borg

Often perceived as predatory and heartless, Microsoft had a reputation for ruthlessly rolling over competitors, wrestling in courtrooms against government prosecutors, and exposing its customers to security flaws and frustrating glitches.

In recent years, however, Microsoft has made serious efforts to improve its public image. Walter Mossberg, author of the influential *Wall Street Journal* Personal Technology column, observes:

Since the end of the anti-trust trial, Microsoft has been on a massive charm offensive. It has methodically settled lawsuit after lawsuit with rivals and governments. It has reached out to all sorts of constituencies. [Chairman] Bill Gates himself has become calmer, less publicly combative, since leaving the CEO post. His charitable foundation has taken off in a very public way. And the company has allowed numerous employees to show a human face by blogging. All of this has improved their image.

Customers are viewing the company in more trusting terms, according to surveys Microsoft conducted of visitors to its Channel 9 blog. A growing number of Microsoft-watchers and people at mid-level desks inside Microsoft think the reason is blogging. And the people actually doing it are downright certain they are making a difference.

People, Not Borg

XML team program manager Joshua Allen acknowledges there were many factors involved in the apparent shift in perception, but he feels that “Blogging unquestionably has had the most impact.”

Looking back, Allen says, “I think Microsoft has experienced a vast softening of its image. People, including journalists, have a lot more information about Microsoft now.” Perhaps more significant, he thinks, has been the impact on employee morale and the company’s ability to attract new talent.

What does Microsoft’s experience have to teach other businesses? According to Allen, “Your whole company won’t collapse if you do this and your customers will love you.” ■

Everything Never Changes

The birth of the blog was a little-noted incident. A brilliant, curmudgeonly technology pioneer — Dave Winer — was fiddling with a project and organized a series of entries in a new way. He looked at it, thought “Wow, that’s cool,” and circled back to expand on it later. He added a variation on an emerging technology and created a syndication feature that would eventually emerge into Really Simple Syndication (RSS). Other people — such as Ben and Mena Trott, who founded Six Apart Inc., and Evan Williams, who co-founded Blogger — would make blogging tools easier so a great number of people could use them. The number of users has gone through the roof ever since.

Speed of Adoption

According to David L. Sifry, founder and CEO of Technorati (a Google-like service that tracks blogging topics, links and trends), the number of blogs has been doubling about every five months since 2003. Today there are about 20 million bloggers worldwide, and that number is rising. While as many as one-third of all blogs started may be abandoned within a year, the overall growth of blogging is among the fastest of any technology in history. According to Pew, one-fourth of all Web users in the United States read blogs.

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The authors: Robert Scoble helps run Microsoft’s Channel 9 Web site. He began his blog, www.scobleizer.com, in 2000 and now has more than 3.5 million readers every year.

Shel Israel played a key strategic role in introducing some of technology’s most successful products. He’s been an expert on innovation for more than 20 years.

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Everything Never Changes

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What Is a Blog and Who Cares?

A blog is nothing more than a personal Web site with content displayed in reverse-chronological order. New posts are placed at the top of the page instead of the bottom, making it easy to see what has changed. In most cases, site visitors can identify the author and leave comments for others to see. Blogs are loosely joined to each other through hyperlinks. Find one blog, and you can probably spend hours clicking links from blog to blog to blog — many of which talk about ideas and theories and rants on other blogs. This linking means that any blogger who has something to say is part of a global network called the *blogosphere*. Whether you have three regular visitors or 10,000 daily visitors and thousands of links, each posting from every blogger had a potentially huge circulation of 20 million in July 2005, a reach of almost 12 times the circulation in the millions.

The most important aspect of the blog is that it is conversational. While nothing beats face-to-face meetings, the realities of global business and relationships make it impossible to have such meetings with every customer, prospect or potential investor. Phones, faxes, e-mails, short message service (SMS) and instant messaging (IM) all extend the conversation, as do online forums, bulletin boards and chatrooms. But none of them lets one person converse with many people in multiple locations from any point where he or she has a computer and Internet access — not until blogging.

Real people are simply more authentic than actors pretending to be real people. A stammering product manager has infinitely more credibility these days than a polished official company spokesperson.

The Six Pillars of Blogging

- 1. Publishable.** Anyone can publish a blog. You can do it cheaply and post often. Each posting is instantly available worldwide.
- 2. Findable.** Through search engines, people will find blogs by subject, by author or both. The more you post, the more findable you become.
- 3. Social.** The blogosphere is one big conversation. Interesting topical conversations move from site to site, linking to each other.
- 4. Viral.** Information often spreads faster through blogs than via a news service. No form of viral marketing matches the speed and efficiency of a blog.
- 5. Syndicatable.** By clicking on an icon, you can get free “home delivery” of RSS-enabled blogs. RSS lets you know when a blog you subscribe to is updated.
- 6. Linkable.** Because each blog can link to all others, every blogger has access to millions of other bloggers.

Because blogs are also the lowest-cost communications channel, you can reach thousands, perhaps millions of people for an investment of a few cents and some personal time. ■

Word of Mouth on Steroids

While word of mouth has always been the most credible way to expand awareness and adoption, blogging fits into all this as the most powerful word-of-mouth delivery mechanism to date. Yossi Vardi, a veteran investor in technology startups, says, “Blogging is word of mouth on steroids.”

Blogging is one huge word-of-mouth engine. Instead of being relegated to the back seat, it now is efficient, powerful and fast enough to drive the whole car. Actually, two cars would probably be more accurate, because it drives in two directions — outbound and inbound.

Blogging lets you listen to what people are saying about your product, company or category and gives them the opportunity to respond. The result is that your business becomes connected to a new kind of smarter, more efficient word-of-mouth network. Blogging lets you:

- **Find and join the conversation.** Nearly in real time, people can extract comments relevant to their business through search engines such as Technorati, Feedster or PubSub, each of which tracks millions of blog sites similar to the way Google tracks billions of Web sites. These search engines are faster and usually deliver results in hours or even minutes, letting you see what people are saying — pro or con — about your market, product and company. People are talking about these things already, so it would be wise for you to participate, even if you do not maintain your own blog.

- **Feed the network.** This expression once referred to using provocative advertisements such as Apple’s 1984 Super Bowl screen-smashing commercial. Such ads can still work, although there seems to be a real paucity of ads worth talking about these days. On the other hand, blogs let you feed the network at a far lower cost and as a more credible source.

Bloggng at GM

When Bob Lutz, GM vice chairman and a blogger, posted a blog just prior to a big auto show where a spiffy new Saturn was introduced, the blogosphere exploded with conversation on the fact that Lutz was blogging, on the fact that he responded to comments on whether the new car was real or prototype and so on. At last count, there were about 100 comments under his posting and almost an equal number of links to it.

Vardi was right. Blogging is indeed word of mouth on steroids. Unlike major league sports, where steroids have caused a multitude of scandals, word of mouth on steroids builds credibility, enthusiasm and customer evangelism. ■

Direct Access

GM's Bob Lutz says, "Blogs can be ... an equalizing force when dealing with media criticism. It is fantastic because blogging is a self-regulating media."

Direct access, Lutz emphasizes, is a larger issue than just bypassing unsupportive reporters. According to Lutz, his blog has started to chip through the crust of GM's stodgy image by demonstrating some passion in corporate leadership and "a willingness to listen to everyday people."

Lutz uses staff to manage the enormous flow of comments. They send him e-mail digests that eliminate some redundancy, but they don't censor the negative comments. The highly mobile executive peruses the summaries in airports and in-flight through his trusty BlackBerry handheld computer.

Transparent and Authentic

To most people, Lutz comes across as both transparent and authentic, two essentials for successful blogging. Lutz also scores highly on the two most fundamental rules for blogging about a subject: passion and authority. He sounds corporate enough, but he doesn't use corpspeak. We can't picture him getting help from a ghostwriter, and his occasional typos and grammar gaffes give the reader a sense of an intelligent executive writing in a hurry.

And he is a guy in a hurry. Yet he takes the time to blog even during the busiest of times. Direct access is what makes this investment worthwhile.

Unless you work for a private or public intelligence operation such as Homeland Security, or have a job couched in enormous privacy or have a company whose behavior is unethical, chances are likely you will benefit from direct conversations not couched in terms devised by committees of lawyers and marketing consultants.

Most companies of all sizes will be wise to follow the advice of Dave Winer, father of blogging technology: "Come as you are." Talk as you talk. Let people who matter get to know you through a blog and listen closely to what they tell you. ■

For additional information on the press, blogs and mistakes, go to: <http://mj.summary.com>

Little Companies, Long Reach

For those who have businesses that are less than globally monolithic, blogging is the best option to have your own words heard worldwide. It also gives you the opportunity to listen to people you might not otherwise have met.

Most people in business have trouble getting their names in the newspaper, and their budgets often cover little more than Yellow Pages ads. Blogging gives such small businesses global reach at an extremely low cost.

Five Success Tips

Successful business bloggers give these five tips that seem to work for each of them:

1. Talk, don't sell. Blogging was born in an environment of anti-pitch sentiment. People visit blogs to see what others care about and know. Over time, they will either come to trust you or they won't. If you talk to them, they get to know you. If you sell to them, they'll just leave — if you're lucky. If you're not, the blogosphere will buzz with allegations that you are abusing the new communications channel.

2. Post often and be interesting. Treonants' Andrew Carton says he forces himself to blog at least once daily. This doesn't mean you have to become a writing factory. Many bloggers just link to other blogs in the category where they are trying to establish their own authority. Posting often helps you with search engine ratings, and being interesting is what motivates others to link to you.

3. Write on issues you know and care about. A good blog is passionate and shows authority. It may be unwise to sell on a blog, but showing what you know and what you care about is part of why you should blog.

4. Blogging saves money but costs time. A good blog reduces or eliminates the need for both advertising and PR support of goods and services. You need to join the conversation by reading other blogs, linking to them and putting comments on them. Research what you write about, and check and recheck your facts.

5. You get smarter by listening to what people tell you. As Dan Gillmor emphasized in *We the Media*, "My readers are collectively smarter than me." So are your customers. ■

The Three Impacts of Blogs on Fellowship Church

Brian Bailey is the Internet manager for the Dallas-based Fellowship Church. He sees three areas where blogs have impacted Fellowship Church:

1. Internal. This is where the most dramatic change has occurred. Blogging has improved multiple communications levels. The church vision has added transparency to how ideas develop.

2. Personal. Bailey feels that his blog has made him wiser by exposing him to new ideas. He has become better known and, by writing every day, more articulate. Like others, he says he's learned to listen better to people with opposing views.

3. Community. The increased openness has given people a closer sense of connection with the church, whether they are members, "curious seekers, or leaders of other churches with whom we exchange ideas and advice."

Consultants Who Get It

Consultants are important to blogging for two reasons:

1. Consultants who blog are building reputations that make them category leaders, whether that category is defined by geography or niche. Their opinions are becoming more important in influencing markets.

2. Consulting expertise has started to evangelize and deliver blogging into other businesses. They are now seeding blogging into corporate strategies the way they previously germinated PCs and Web sites. Experts believe they will play key roles in the phase of blog adoption that has started to occur.

Consultant-Bloggers

In Europe and North America, there are many bloggers who consult businesses. Consultants are wisely using blogs in decidedly different ways than they use their Web sites. The consultant-bloggers gaining the most notice are building reputations, not selling services. Many emphasize that they started blogs because of a need to express themselves, rather than as an action item on a business plan. Some go out of their way to avoid self-promotion. Many are quick to point away from themselves and to others in their field.

For some, blogging has changed their community status because of recognition generated by their blogging. Through their blogs, many people are getting to take a series of small, frequent glimpses at who these consultants are and how they think — and in some cases, the reader may become a customer. But at this point, the blogosphere is a better place to market your reputation than sell your goods, and in the end that will prove more valuable.

Ernest and Open

Attorney Ernest Svenson is better known as blogging's Ernie the Attorney. He says he writes to discover "insight about myself. People just want a story: What's the deal? Just tell me how it works. The best thing you can do, if you want to market on a blog, is *don't*. Just talk."

Ernie the Attorney is not trying to sell you legal acumen. He is allowing you to see and know a real person experiencing a real-life vignette. Over time, you realize the guy is smart, funny and seems pretty trustworthy.

While blogging has landed Svenson a few referrals, there's been no great windfall. But blogging has boosted his legal community stature. More than 1,000 people visit his site daily, including a couple of judges on the New Orleans bench. They've asked him to serve on a committee to determine courthouse WiFi options.

Svenson marvels at how blogging has taught him to listen more closely and tolerate opposing views. While blogging might help him in his legal practice, he says that on a larger scale "it helps me get through life." ■

Survival of the Publicists

Richard Edelman, president and CEO of Edelman PR, the world's largest independent PR firm, is in a position to evangelize blogging into powerful offices where blogging's relevance to date has been generally discounted and most of today's blogging denizens don't get invited. Edelman oversees a worldwide organization of nearly 2,000 employees in more than 40 offices on four continents.

In September 2004, Edelman started his blog, Speak Up. He advises PR agencies to have their clients speak for themselves instead of using outside celebrity or PR spokespeople and for agencies to be transparent on who's funding campaigns. Regarding the blogosphere, he commented that PR agencies had better understand how it works and what it does. He says those in PR "have to be very much part of the conversation by reading key bloggers in each relevant product category, [to] be prepared to contribute to the conversation by smart posts and to keep key bloggers updated by having relationships akin to those we have with reporters."

He explains, "Blogging is not a passing fad. Any brand, business or organization that fails to grasp [that] fact may very well be. It's essential to any company seeking to connect in a spontaneous, continuous fashion with its publics. It affords a window into a company unlike any other — more credible because it lacks the dimension of control, more sustainable because it is rooted in reality, more powerful because it can be connected to comments of others having primary experiences with a company's product or service. Smart companies will take heed of what they learn from online critics, amending the product or process by being committed to continuous improvement from whatever source."

Shut Up and Listen

As head of the Voce Communications Digital Advocacy (DA) practice, which focuses on online communication, Mike Manuel says his job is to help companies listen and understand what is being said, see where opinions are being formed and figure out who their core influencers are. He helps clients, particularly Yahoo!, determine the best way to get into conversations.

His advice: "Shut up and listen. Listening is hard for companies, and ironically, it's hard for communicators too, especially the command-and-control types accustomed to ... well, talking. It's really in our professional interest and the interest of our clients to take the time to ... determine how the blogosphere is — or is not — impacting public opinion and brand perception. And you do this simply by listening." ■

For additional information on three trends being driven by blogging, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Blogs and National Cultures

Germany, Europe's most populous country and a leader in engineering and IT, is far less active than its smaller neighbor, France. Likewise in Asia, business blogging is far more prevalent in Japan than in China.

Loïc Le Meur is a Six Apart Inc. executive who is also arguably Europe's best-known blogger, writing in both French and English. He says the reason for these apparent disparities can be summarized with a single word: culture. "Some countries are conducive to the openness required in a successful blog. Others are less conducive," Le Meur says. "We French are accustomed to expressing our thoughts as individuals out in the open. So are you Americans. On the other hand, Germans tend to be more reserved."

Technology and Mobile Blogs

Of course, technology is also a factor and always will be. For example, we assume that the reason mobile blogs — blogs generated from handheld devices often featuring photos — are so much more popular in Korea than text ones is that most people there have cell phones but fewer have personal computers, particularly at home.

Still, culture is clearly playing a role in how blogging develops. It can be national, ethnic, corporate or departmental. Where people are encouraged to speak their mind, and those in power trust the people they oversee, blogging flourishes. There are reasons why political blogging in the United States has taken off wildly, whereas in China it has not. ■

Thorns in the Roses

Blogging also has its prickly issues — some real and some imaginary. Some companies and people should not blog, period. For others, determining whether the benefits outweigh the potential drawbacks can be a tough call.

Culture is the prickliest thorn. Target executives explain that blogging is unlikely to start up inside America's fourth largest retailer because being personal in public is just not Target's way. That's a cultural thing.

The 'Echo Chamber'

Another thorn can be called the "echo chamber." Blogging can fool you. You may think you are conversing with the world, when it's just a few people talking frequently, back and forth to each other, creating the illusion of amplification. The echo chamber can deceive a business into thinking it is either more widely successful or further off the mark than it is in reality, because a few people are making a lot of noise.

If you are a genuine bad guy, or are part of an organization of bad guys, don't blog. Blogs have so far worked extremely well for companies and people with do-the-right-thing cultures. They will probably fail in cultures that have public-be-damned attitudes. Other companies that should not blog are those that intend to victimize customers and supporters, such as fraudulent charities, and companies engaged in sensitive and confidential information, such as those involved in financial consulting, stock brokerages, private investigators and defense law. Dullards and those with awful communication skills should also avoid blogging. ■

PART TWO: BLOGGING WRONG AND RIGHT

Doing It Wrong

Although no one wrote the official blogging rule book, one simple rule for doing it right is *be real*. If you are going to blog, be authentic. Keep your conversations *naked*. Let people know who you are and where you are coming from. If you don't, blogger vigilantes will form torch-lit mobs to expose your false or character blog, and they will continue their assault until they have driven a stake through the heart of your deception. There may be no rule book or designated enforcement squads, but the blogosphere is filled with members committed to keeping it a "clean channel," unadulterated by clever, cute or contrived entries.

If you are coming to the blogosphere from Madison Avenue, or with the heart of a traditional marketer, and you just cannot avoid the temptation to crank it up just a wee bit now and then, DON'T DO IT! You will regret it if you do. More than a few people and companies have managed to mangle their reputations by attempting to extend traditional marketing tactics into the blogosphere.

Mazda's Unfortunate Trip

Mazda's brief, unfortunate road trip into the blogosphere serves as an effective cautionary tale. Mazda had some very slick professional footage of one of its cars doing some extreme driving stunts in an urban setting. The footage was filmed for a series of 30-second TV spots that failed to win over the Gen X drivers the company targeted. The company's ad agency reworked the slick footage into a blog allegedly authored by a chronically hip young urban driver. Within hours, the blogosphere caught the deception, and the video became perhaps the first to fail in two media. More importantly, Mazda lost credibility with precisely the audience it was trying to reach.

In contrast, Vespa, the motor scooter people, launched VespaQuest, a blog written by authentic urban customers who describe their lives and how scooters fit into it from day to day. The blog is getting warm mention, and its readership has been steadily rising.

The blogosphere is changing every day. New people

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How Being ‘Really Cool’ Boosts Employee Morale at Boeing

Good blogs go far to boost employee morale. Adam Phillabaum, who recently joined the aeronautical giant Boeing after getting his computer science degree from the University of Idaho, says, “I happen to work for a company that [once] had a blog that basically everyone thought was lame. Boeing is freaking huge, and sometimes it may be hard to change something in a company this large. But as soon as they heard from the blogosphere that they were lame, it was fixed right-quick. I always thought that was really cool.”

Doing It Wrong

(continued from page 6)

and emerging technology are bringing new ideas that extend how blogging will be used. The rules are changing because no one, thankfully, has the power to enforce them. France’s Michel-Edouard Leclerc seemed to address a common sentiment when he spoke passionately of the “humanization of communications” and warned bloggers not to let corporate interests muck it up.

They may be less dramatic than the “muckers,” but the greatest number of people and companies blogging wrong are guilty of no crime greater than being dull. Being bland will hurt you and the company you represent.

Forced and Unselfish Blogging

Busy professionals who had full plates *before* a company higher-up told them to blog often compose in a style that feels hurried and forced. Such blogs come through often as joyless and rushed — even when the author’s expertise on a particular subject is apparent. Tom Foremski, who blogs full time for Silicon Valley Watcher, noted in June 2005 that “Forced blogging comes across as such, and cannot be disguised. You know it when you see it.”

There are no absolute rules on the blogosphere, and no enforcement squads. But there are fundamentals such as transparency and authenticity. Companies that want to do it right in the blogosphere would be wise to adhere to these fundamentals. ■

Doing It Right

Here are the top 11 techniques and guidelines that have worked for other successful bloggers:

Tip #1: What’s in a name? Search engine results. Before you enter a title, spend some time, perhaps an hour, doing some search variations to find out what words bring up results similar to what your blog will contain.

Tip #2: Read a bunch of blogs before you start. Read a wide selection of blogs, so you understand what’s out there.

Tip #3: Keep it simple. Keep it focused. It’s best to

have each post contain just one idea or one set of links.

Tip #4: Demonstrate passion.

Tip #5: Show your authority. Tips #4 and #5 are separate components but should be inseparable in your blog. A good corporate blog is both passionate and authoritative.

Tip #6: Add comments. A good blog is a conversation, not a one-way PR channel. Get over the fact that you won’t have full control. Instead, embrace the extension.

Tip #7: Be accessible. If you want something nice to unexpectedly happen to you, make it easy for people to contact you through your blog.

Tip #8: Tell a story. Corporate blogging is all about telling a story. *Your* story. Think about the elements of a good story. Case studies also work well.

Tip #9: Be linky. Link to your enemies. Link to your competitors. Link to everyone. Instead of being sticky, be *linky*. Be the absolute best resource you can be for your readers, and they will reward you with many inbound links.

Tip #10: Get out into the real world. If the only way people know you is through your blog, you become one-dimensional. There’s a reason why industry conferences and trade shows are still well attended. Nothing beats face-to-face meetings.

Tip #11: Use your referrer log. There’s a simple tool to listen in on what people are saying about you: your referrer log. The referrer log is the technology that keeps track of who’s linking to your site and how much traffic those sites are sending to you. ■

For additional information on passion, authority and telling a story, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

How to Not Get Dooiced

In the blogging world, getting fired for something in your blog is called getting “dooiced.” Web designer Heather B. Armstrong coined the phrase in 2002 after she was fired for blogging on Dooce.com, her blog about her work and colleagues at Yahoo!. According to the Blogger’s Rights Blog, nearly 50 companies have disciplined or fired people for something they did on their blogs.

To avoid blog-based mistakes, you need to know your corporate culture and what it is and isn’t willing to accept. Danger zones include not matching up with the company’s PR image; leaking financial or other confidential information; disrupting the workplace by angering co-workers and bosses; breaking news in advance and generating unexpected work for the PR team; exposing dirty laundry; creating legal liabilities; and damaging the company’s relationships with partners, competitors or other entities that affect its standing.

Good bloggers have to be good employees if companies are going to not only tolerate but encourage blogging. ■

Blogging in a Crisis

In recent years, blogging has played an increasing role in providing fast, valuable, striking and comforting information in times of crisis. In a crisis, blogs play a fundamental role in the sharing and spreading of information, and they do it with unprecedented speed. Blogs enable businesses to jump in quickly, and effectively control, reduce or eliminate damages.

Steve Rubel, at CooperKatz PR, has been a vocal advocate of being prepared for a crisis. He has devised a crisis management blogging lockbox, along the lines of “In case of emergency, break this glass.” The agency works with its

clients to anticipate the crises that could possibly occur. Together they plan and design a “failsafe” blog — a blog to be used only in case of emergency. Clients know who will speak for their organization, what issues will be addressed and what some of the toughest questions will be.

The day might come when such blog lockboxes are simply part of corporate management toolkits. ■

If you liked *Naked Conversations*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Cluetrain Manifesto*** by Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls and David Weinberger. The authors present a revolutionary way of looking at working that challenges corporate assumptions about the nature of online business.
2. ***Does IT Matter?*** by Nicholas G. Carr. Carr argues that IT can be used to supplement and improve strategy implementation, but it is not the foundation of a competitive advantage.
3. ***The Anatomy of Buzz*** by Emanuel Rosen. Here's how to make word-of-mouth marketing work for your product.
4. ***Building Brandwidth*** by Sergio Zyman and Scott Miller. Zyman and Miller explain what it takes to close the sale online.
5. ***The Customer Revolution*** by Patricia B. Seybold with Ronni T. Marshak and Jeffrey M. Lewis. The authors explain how to survive in the customer economy and respond to customer demands for changes in the design and delivery of products.

PART THREE: THE BIG PICTURE

Emerging Technology

Blogs and social media are now fueling a new Age of Subscription. Instead of you going to the information, it comes to you. Instead of having access only to what the company has to say about itself, you can see what people have to say about the company. When they occur, updates are fed to you as news breaks. Blogging has fueled this change, but the enabler is the syndication technology Really Simple Syndication (RSS), and its full implications are just being realized. RSS is a data distribution protocol that lets you subscribe to almost any blog. If you have the appropriate RSS support in your Web browser, you can simply click a Subscribe button when visiting an RSS-enabled Web page that interests you, and that page is added to your subscription list. You then start receiving all updates to that page as they occur. Other new blogging technologies include:

- **Memeorandum** is the first technology to link together old and new media, offering single-screen views of prominent headlines from traditional media merged with commentary from popular bloggers.
- **Mobile blogs** are blogs posted from handheld devices.
- **Tagging** makes you more discoverable. At the bottom of a blog post, you simply write the words “Technorati Tag” and then keywords covering the subject you wrote about. ■

blog policy tells outsiders a great deal about how a company sees its employees and its customers.

Companies like Google that discourage blogging could start to lose talented people and already are revealing other cracks in their veneers. Discouraging employees from blogging neither builds internal morale nor attracts talented people.

Blogging is smart business. Blogging is cheaper and more effective than most marketing programs in use today. Sun Microsystems President Jonathan Schwartz says he could reach more people through his blog than with a full-page ad in a trade magazine — and they could reach him as well.

Small, independent merchants are part of what makes every community unique, and blogging is proving to be an enormously useful tool in the hands of independent shops and artisans. Patrice Cassard, a French T-shirt maker, started a blog-based business that profits and grows by letting customers decide almost everything. Blogging offers enormous opportunities for small businesses, whether they want to reach the immediate neighborhood or customers around the world.

Blogging is more than “conversational marketing.” It impacts marketing but also transcends it. Blogging is vital not just to outbound communications, but inbound as well.

Blogging has ended one era and ignited another. In this new era, companies don't win just by talking to people. They win by listening to people as well. It is the Conversational Era. It doesn't change everything, but something has changed, and blogging is impacting businesses of all sizes in most parts of the world. It has made the world a smaller, faster place. And business is the better for it. ■

The Conversational Era

Blogs are here to stay and companies need to figure out how to incorporate them into the way they communicate.

Blogging is a tool of a very significant revolution, one that has become virtually unstoppable, something that shifts the balance of relationships between companies and the communities in which they operate.

The influence of culture, both in business and countries, cannot be underestimated. Quite simply, some cultures are open and others are closed. Some leaders trust those under their watch, and others don't. And that difference becomes increasingly important as more people realize that corporate