

NAKED CONVERSATIONS

How Blogs Are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers

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The Web site for this book is at www.nakedconversations.com.

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MAIN IDEA

When Web based logs (abbreviated as “blogs”) first started appearing, most people considered them to be quirky entities for people with exhibitionist tendencies. At first, blogs seemed to appeal to the lunatic fringe of people who wanted a personal soapbox from which they could put forward their view of the world. Then a funny thing happened. Blogs crossed over from the conspiracy theorists into the broader business community and consumers have taken to this informal channel of business communication with a passion rarely before witnessed.

In particular, keeping a blog (abbreviated as “blogging”) is fast becoming an extremely effective form of two-way communication between companies and their customers. The appeal of blogging to a customer is obvious – they feel like they are getting inside information about what’s happening from someone who really knows what’s going on inside the corporation. That’s highly alluring and fun for customers to be part of. Customers also love the fact they’re interacting with a real person who makes mistakes and occasionally misspells things rather than someone who reads from a perfect script prepared by the company’s PR department. Many consumers are sick to death of hearing automated voice-mail telling them their call is important but cannot be answered right at the moment. Blogging is the antidote to that because it provides direct human contact and interaction.

From your company’s point-of-view, running a blog enables you to engage in a candid two-way conversation with your customers and potential customers. You can find out what people are actually thinking rather than relying on focus groups or other artificial means. Even better, search engines like Google and others rank business blogs higher than ordinary Web sites. That means if you have a business blog with frequent entries and multiple feedback postings, you can often move your ranking well above that of your competitors. This is quite possibly one of the best kept secrets of using search engines to best advantage.

It seems very likely that business blogs are here to stay, and therefore it’s a good idea to work out now how best to adapt this conversational tool to meet your needs. This will pay far better dividends than hoping blogs fade away into the night. What form business blogs will actually take ten years from now still remains to be seen but there is little doubt blogging’s conversational capabilities will never become antiquated. Blogs decentralize corporate communications and wrestle control away from those who have historically controlled it. In and of itself, that can’t be a bad thing.

“Our passionate advice is that the time to join the conversation is now. The barriers to entry are minuscule, the benefits great, and blogging just happens to be fun. Enjoy. Come to our blogsite (www.nakedconversations.com) and tell us what you think. We’re always up for a good conversation.”

– Robert Scoble and Shel Israel

1. Blogging 101 – The Basic Principles of Blogging For Businesses Page 2

In simple terms, a blog is a Web site where you can put information and the reader can post feedback for everyone else to see. It is a simplified Web site which consists of a series of entries and conversations. Blogs enable a business and its customers to engage in informal conversations about whatever topics are of interest. These conversations build trust because customers can interact with real live people rather than being fed the smooth-and-refined sound bites of the official corporate spokesperson.

2. The Current State of Play – How Companies Are Already Using Blogging Pages 3 - 5

When blogging first came to prominence, it was seen as an oddball thing to do – the domain of the conspiracy theorists, attention-seekers or downright nutters. That no longer holds true. Today, blogging has begun to saturate the business community and is now starting to be adopted by companies of all sizes. It is now viewed as an essential component in the way businesses and their constituents communicate. This is openly acknowledged by many firms with an equal mix of trepidation and enthusiasm. The trepidation comes from the fact many companies are not equipped to use blogging to maximum effect. The enthusiasm reflects the fact blogging is a revolutionary new way for vendors to build better relationships with customers.

3. Hints and Suggestions – How to Do Blogs Right and How to Avoid the Pitfalls Pages 6 - 7

Like most activities on the Internet, there is no official rulebook of blogging. Nor are there any blogging police. You can do pretty much anything if you really want, but a smart approach is to take the time to find out what has and has not worked for established bloggers. At least that way, you hope you won’t have to make all the mistakes yourself. A more intelligent approach has always been to analyze what has worked for others before you plunge in yourself.

4. The Bigger Picture – What is the Future of Blogging for Business? Page 8

For better or for worse, business blogs are here to stay. Companies need to figure out how to incorporate them into the way they communicate because in the current era, conversational marketing is far more effective than mass advertising. Companies that win don’t just force-feed their clients with endless amounts of scripted advertising but actually engage in two-way conversations. They make their executives accessible and approachable. They allow people to complain when things go wrong and detail what they’re doing to set the situation right. How blogging will evolve in the future remains to be seen but one thing is very certain – blogs will be an essential business tool in the future.

