



CONTROL THE “INK” IN YOUR INDUSTRY

PART 2

by Verne Harnish “Growth Guy”

www.gazelles.com



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“Without a doubt, the blog we started (www.communitysecurity.blogspot.com) has been met with the most incredible reaction from our clients,” exclaims Mike Jagger, President of Vancouver-based Provident Security.

I continue my campaign to get CEOs and their firms to control the INK in their industry. Last column I pushed books. This column I’m pushing leaders to start a blog, create a Squidoo page (as the expert in your industry), launch a column, or start a wiki. Not only are these powerful tools to drive your message externally, but I’ve been surprised at how important internal blogs and wikis are at facilitating internal communications.

BLOGS

Slowly plugging away at a book about home security, Jagger, founder of one of Vancouver’s largest privately-held commercial and residential security firms, was egged on by his brother to start a blog.

Why do you need a blog (think diary on the web that everyone can read – it’s all about communicating)? You need one if popping high on search engines is important to your business. And the guru of CEO blogs is Debbie Weil www.BlogWriteForCEOs.com – download her free “7 Tips to Write an Effective

Business Blog” and/or just hire her (and her network of friends) to set one up for you – less than \$1000. Plus her site lists several top CEO blogs – a great way to see how CEOs are using them.

In March, after Jagger initially sent out an email with a link to his blog to a controlled list of 100 clients, he was amazed to see that more than 70 of his clients followed the link to the blog within 12 hours and 41 asked to be set-up for an auto-notification every time he added a post.

“Since launching, we have generated quite a few additional sales based on specific posts and we have had clients actually call us to thank us for the ‘service’ that the blog provides,” explained Jagger. “In our business, one of our challenges is that we tend to only talk to people when there is an incident or something bad happens. The blog is allowing us to proactively communicate to, and add real value for our clients without having to wait for a security issue to arise.”

“One of the most amazing and powerful things that has happened is that the blog address has been forwarded on to many businesses and neighborhood associations by third parties as a ‘great community resource’, literally quadrupling our exposure over the course of a couple weeks... essentially, we are getting our marketing done for us, for free. The power and snowball effect of this thing is absolutely incredible and I cannot believe that I did not do it last year when I was first hearing about blogs,” adds Jagger.

Jagger set the blog up for free using blogger.com and then signed up for a free metrics tracking system called www.sitemeter.com. It gives Jagger a real time dashboard showing how many people are checking out his blog, what they are looking at, where they are located, what browser they are using, all for free (although he’s recently paid \$59 for the full statistics package). Check out his April 26, 2006 blog where he shows a world map update of his latest visitors.

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Concludes Jagger, “We have literally started our most successful communication and marketing campaign ever for less than the cost of a single stamp.” And as this column was going to print a major Canadian newspaper was talking to Jagger about doing a semi-regular column on home security tips!

WIKI'S

“We’ve been using an internal wiki since December 2004,” notes Andrew Duthie, President of Nashville-based Duthie Associates, an e-learning and marketing presentation creation company. “It’s primarily a knowledge base for us, incorporating a wide array of topics.”

A wiki is a specific kind of website that allows users to easily update, edit, and add information. This ease of use makes wiki’s excellent for team collaboration. For Duthie Associates, its wiki includes:

- Procedures
- Competitor information
- Customer information
- Internal meeting minutes
- New employee orientation info
- Notes from webinars
- Ideas in general

Everyone in the company is able to create and edit any of this information. In addition, they’ve accumulated 253 articles in

their wiki; the last three have included two technical articles and a marketing article with research on their upcoming Google AdWords campaign.

Duthie used MediaWiki to set up his wiki, the same web engine used by Wikipedia, the highly popular online alternative to the brand-name encyclopedias. “I’m a geek, but not a hard-core Linux geek,” explains Duthie. “But I was still able to set it up on our Linux server in about an hour. So in our case, it (the wiki) has been completely free, other than the time we put into the articles.”

AL Systems, a Rockaway, NJ provider of distribution automation systems, is using both blogs and wikis extensively throughout the organization. “We have a company-wide blog that is used for the broadcast of all our information internally,” shares Paul Lightfoot, CEO. “We never use emails or memos anymore because neither can be easily searched or archived or categorized.”

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AL Systems’ blog was launched in early 2005 and Lightfoot claims it has dramatically improved communications. Being a “transparent” organization, all good news, initiatives, progress reports, including financial information is sent out via the blog. Like with monthly financial reports, a blog makes it easy to list and then read through several of them to see a year’s progress. And he reminded me that everything is password protected to prevent outsiders from peering into the inner workings of his company.

Lightfoot also uses a blog for his board of directors. This enables agendas and related materials to be posted in advance and feedback shared among board members. He also has a leadership team blog where metrics are posted in advance of his weekly and monthly meetings along with progress on their various priorities.

“We use wikis for Project Management, Software Development, and Customer Service,” explains Lightfoot. “This is becoming an

essential tool! It enables collaborative information sharing in a way that is archived and accountable.”

Lightfoot notes that the wiki is particularly great for customer service because of the collaborative nature of the tool, but he believes it will dramatically improve project management as they use the wiki more. And he’s probably going to convert his leadership team blog to a wiki.

Again, the key is the collaborative nature of the underlying technology that supports wiki-structured websites. It’s an excellent tool for capturing “the wisdom of crowds,” the idea behind James Surowiecki’s breakthrough book by the same title. If ten brains are better than one, and Surowiecki makes a well researched case to prove this, then wikis allow you to tap into the collective wisdom of your organization and apply it to all aspects of your business.

In fact, Microsoft used this notion to delay the release of their highly anticipated Vista program. They asked their programmers to bet when the software would actually be available vs. the announced December 2006 release date and they put their money on February 2007. So Microsoft adjusted the release date!

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SQUIDOOS

Create a Squidoo page NOW! Seth Godin, the marketing genius of our time (Purple Cow, Permission Marketing, All Marketers are Liars) has launched a new site for experts. Instead of searching Google and having to sort through what’s good or bad, search Squidoo and find someone who has 20 years of expertise on a subject and let them guide you to the appropriate resources. Squidoo is still in Beta, but jump in and be the “corrugated box” guru.

Jagger has jumped on the bandwagon and created a Squidoo lens on community security at www.squidoo.com/communitysecurity/.

And I’ve created a “Growth Guy” Squidoo lens for growth firms with links to help you with your people, strategy, execution, and cash decisions. Here’s the link which will give you a feel for the technology plus provide you with what I hope are some highly useful links to help your business – www.squidoo.com/business_growth.

I would also encourage you to look through Squidoo to find experts on blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, and on Squidoo itself. The key is to put yourself out there as an expert in your industry and use a “pull” strategy instead of a “push” strategy to market your business and yourself.