

Blog Tour

by Steve O'Keefe

On Friday morning, October 10, 2003, I pulled down a voicemail from a longtime client. She wanted to know whether or not I offered "blog tours." By Tuesday, I had another phone inquiry plus an e-mail query asking the same thing. Something was up.

Heath Blog

Until that day, I had successfully avoided dealing with blogs. Like many people, I made a couple attempts to visit blogs, trying to figure out the appeal and whether it will last. Blogs hit my radar screen when Heath Row wrote a nice review of this newsletter in his blog, "Media Diet," in May of 2003. I spent a couple hours cruising Heath's blog and several blogs he links to. To be honest, I haven't been back to Heath's site since.

If there were ever a blog I would follow, it would be Heath's. I've known Heath for maybe 20 years. A journalist for *Fast Company*, he was editor of *Karma Lapel*, a zine review similar to the greatly missed *Factsheet Five*. Heath's tastes and mine are aligned: we're both deeply into technology, writing, publishing, and the media. We're both suckers for independents: publishers, zines, music, business. His writing tone and style are even similar to mine. His blog is attractive, well-maintained, and comes highly recommended. Considering that I'm online about 10 hours a day, the fact that I haven't paid more than one visit to Heath's blog in over a year says something about blogging—or about me.

There are several other blogs I like. Many of the folks behind *Boing Boing* are old pals from the days of *Mondo 2000* and *The WELL*. I know Jim Romenesko, who runs the *Media News* blog for *Poynter.org*, from his days running the printed zine, *Obscure Publications*. I like what these people write about and I'm online all the time, but I never visit their sites more than once a year. Just as failing to read books by

authors you admire makes you feel poorly about yourself, I am embarrassed that I don't follow these blogs.

Blogs Suck

Time, mostly. Blogs suck time. If I visit a blog and it pulls me in, I'll be there for at least a half hour. If I take links to other blogs or resources, my journey might last two hours. Blogs are compelling. It's easy to get sucked in. So I avoid them religiously, otherwise I'd never get any work done. You could easily spend five hours a week following one good blog. Follow three robust blogs, add a couple good e-zines, and kiss your working day goodbye.

I don't use a computer at home; I spend too much time on one at work. So I don't follow blogs (or e-zines, for that matter). I love print. I will read almost any zine that comes in the mail. When I read print, I'm relaxed. When I'm on the computer, I'm working, trying to accomplish results. So while I like what I see on some blogs, I'll never follow them unless I have to for work. When clients started calling about blog promotion for books, blogs became work. Now I have to follow them.

Blog Tours

I traced those three inquiries about "blog tours" to an article at *Wired News* (which is now a blog). Leander Kahney wrote about a blog tour for Dennis Hensley's book, *Screening Party*. The tour was organized by Kevin Smolker, inventor (as far as I can tell) of the blog tour for authors. Here's how it works:

Smolker contacts the owners of blogs related to the topic of the book being promoted. He asks them if they will feature the author on a specified date. Put four or five of these appearances together and you have a blog tour. On the appointed day, the author visits the blog and posts a message or entertains questions.

In May, Smolker organized a tour for my long-distance mentor, Seth Godin, author of over 60 books, in-

cluding the bestsellers *Permission Marketing* and *Unleashing the Idea Virus*. Godin was promoting his new release, *Free Prize Inside*. Between May 3 and May 14, Godin visited 11 blogs, most of them focused on branding issues. He gushed about the impact of his tour at the Book Expo in Chicago a month later. Naturally, Godin has his own blog now. I love Seth Godin's writing. I've never visited his blog.

A blog tour is a slightly lamer version of my Chat Tour or Online Seminar campaigns. Most blog tours will have negligible impact on sales or even on exposure. But the author will be able to say, "I'm doing a blog tour," and that alone may be worth the price of admission. Everyone loves to say the word "blog." The media are particularly fond of it: it's new, it's hot, it's sexy—what is it? The nebulous nature of blogs contributes to their aura of hipness. Is it a web site or a diary or a community or a zine? Can't say for sure—you just have to experience *blogness*.

Law Blogs

In the year since the shot fired by *Wired News*, I've asked several experts to help me understand blogging. When e-zine guru Richard Hoy told me he thought blogs would replace e-zines, I asked him to write an article for this newsletter (see page 3). My friend Kevin O'Keefe (no relation) started the new year with a new business creating blogs for law firms. Here are some excerpts from our correspondence:

"Blogs may be dominated by teenage diaries but there was a lot of trash published on 'home pages' when the web came out in the mid '90s. The value is in becoming a leading authority for the public, the media, colleagues, and clients.

"Blogs are incredible for lawyers in that lawyers have traditionally marketed themselves via publishing, education of others and interaction. Blogs do it all with having the added power of RSS & email syndication. They also take lawyers to top of search engines overnight. In talking with lawyers, I have not had one say they would not pay to have me set up a blog.

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“For example, I am representing the nation’s leading lawyer on serious injuries and deaths caused by food-borne illnesses. We are setting up four blogs on different bacteria and viruses. We will report all news, outbreaks, and lawsuits on the subject plus offer insight & commentary.”

When a story breaks, the media turn to the web first to gather information, and blogs can rise to the top of search engines because of the traffic they get and because RSS distributes links to blogs, and those inbound links dramatically improve search engine rank. For experts in narrow niches—gurus, pundits, authorities, teachers, journalists—blogs make sense. When the media needs experts, they will increasingly find them on blogs that document every scrap of information on a given subject, often while taking strong personal stands on controversial issues. These are the two hallmarks of successful blogs: expertise and strong opinion.

The Problems With Blogs

Blogs suck time—for readers, but especially for writers. Maintaining a top-tier blog is easily a full-time job. Bloggers are expected to 1) Post something new every day, 2) Monitor and document news with links to other sites/blogs, and 3) Police and respond to reader comments. Some blogs generate hundreds of reader comments each day. Who has time to read all that? And if you don’t enforce content standards, feedback sections quickly fill with commercial messages (blog spam).

Blogs don’t pay. At the educational session on blogging at the BEA, the common lament was there’s no money in blogging. It’s almost impossible to get people to pay to access blogs, and advertising revenue is incidental for even top-tier blogs. So far, the biggest pay day has resulted from bloggers getting book publishing contracts. And why not? The blogmaster is usually an expert in his or her subject area and has an established readership to jumpstart book sales. Most blogs survive because they help attract clients or generate sales of merchandise; subscription and ad revenue is unlikely to ever make a sig-

BLOGS CITED

Heath Row's Media Diet
cardhouse.com/heath

Boing Boing
boingboing.net

Jim Romenesko's MediaNews
poynter.org/column.asp?id=45

Wired News
wired.com/news

Kevin Smolker
Business Blog Book Tour
apennyfor.com

Seth Godin's Blog
sethgodin.typepad.com

PublishersMarketplace
publishersmarketplace.com

John Kremer
Book Marketing Tip of the Week
bookmarket.com/tips.html

nificant contribution to the coffers of bloggers.

Most blogs won’t survive. Like web sites in the mid-1990s, blogs are launched with much fanfare and the best of intentions, and sink when the blogmaster tires of devoting 16 hours a day to something that doesn’t pay. This explains, in part, why many of the highest-traffic blogs are porn sites. Porn is the one reliable money-maker online. You won’t hear too much about porn blogs because of the conspiracy of silence to exclude porn from search results. However, if you take an honest tour of the highest-traffic blogs, you are going to see a lot of stuff that shouldn’t appear on a workplace computer.

My First Blog Tour

A couple months ago, I was approached by a marketing consultant about doing an online campaign for a first novel. The author is known in tech circles, the web site for his book contains breathtaking nature photography, and the themes of the book are somewhat controversial. I recommended a blog tour. Why? Because there are almost no publicity vehicles for first fiction, the author has friends in the tech-savvy community of bloggers, and the

nature images and controversial themes should appeal to niche sites—which are converting into blogs faster than you can say, “Honey, get off the computer and introduce yourself to your children.”

At first, I sent my client off to Kevin Smolker’s site. Then I had second thoughts. Blogs are just another form of web site, another form of media. I need to start separating the best from the rest, find contact information for the bloggers, and publicize books to them and through them. So I offered to produce my first blog tour as an experiment, and the client said yes. Blogs are hot right now. Blogs are sexy. If nothing else, this author and publisher will be able to say “we’re doing a blog tour” in news releases, and that will generate more results than the tour itself, and make the author the center of attention at cocktail parties.

I’ll have more to say about blogs in an upcoming piece for Publishers Marketing Association Newsletter. For now, I think the best strategies for book publishers concerning blogs are:

- ◆ Send review copies of books out to bloggers.
- ◆ Buy ads on blogs that cover the subject of the book.
- ◆ Do a blog tour if you like, just don’t believe the hype.
- ◆ Encourage your authors to blog (their time, not yours).

And finally, be prepared for blogging to fade almost as quickly as it appeared. Ultimately, “blog” is just another word for web site. The concept will merge with the web like a gopher retreating into its hole. A blog tour is the same thing as a chat tour or an online seminar—and those are just new words for *talk show*. As far as blogs replacing e-zines, don’t hold your breath. RSS feeds are potentially subject to the same spam filter problems plaguing e-zine publishers.

If you’ve had experience promoting books through blogs, I’d love to hear about it—whether good or bad.



Google Top 10 for "blog"

1. Blogger (blogger.com)
2. BlogPhile (blogphiles.com)
3. Blog for America (blogforamerica.com)
4. Google Blog (google.com/googleblog/)
5. Boing Boing (boingboing.net)
6. Lawrence Lessig's Blog (lessig.org/blog/)
7. Where is Raed? (dear_raed.blogspot.com)
8. The dullest blog in the world (wibsite.com/wiblog/dull/)
9. Joho the Blog (hyperorg.com/blogger/)
10. Blogarama (blogarama.com)

Yahoo! Most Popular Weblogs

1. boing boing
2. Wil Wheaton.net
3. Kottke.org
4. Obscure Store and Reading Room
5. Doc Searls Weblog
6. evhead
7. Textism
8. Robot Wisdom Weblog
9. Megnut
10. Rebecca's Pocket

Blogarama 10 Most Popular Blogs

1. Hot Abercrombie Chick
2. 18+ Pornographic Log
3. Self Improvement Is Masturbation
4. BOOBblog
5. ::Just a Girl and Her Blog::
6. Sex Blogger
7. Big Tanned Boobs and Cold Beer
8. Owl's Diary - No More Secrets
9. TwiddlyBits' Sex Blog
10. Naked Loft Party

Technorati Top 10 Blogs

1. Slashdot
2. ScottWater
3. Davenetics* Pop + Media + Web
4. Boing Boing
5. Fotolog.net
6. Instapundit.com
7. fark
8. www.AndrewSullivan.com - Daily Dish
9. (In)formação e (In)utilidade
10. Penny - Arcade

Highest Traffic Blogs in Canada (from BlogsCanada)

1. ThisCanada.com
2. sweetness follows
3. voxpopgirl
4. The Whore's Boudoir
5. The Glob and Wail
6. love lounge
7. IMG SRC: geek-girl photography
8. TwiddlyBits' Sex Blog
9. Passion-Photo
10. Our Bedroom - tales from paradise

Number of Weblogs listed at Open Directory (dmoz.org)

1. Personal (3,526)
2. Library and Information Science (484)
3. Technology (253)
4. News (144)
5. Arts and Entertainment (96)
6. Science and Culture (58)
7. Regional (37)
8. Sports (15)
9. Religion (14)



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