

The Beautiful Plan

~ Publishing Strategies from Patron Saint Productions ~

Issue #10 ~ Fall 2004

BEA2004: of Blogs & Dogs

by Steve O'Keefe

Book Expo America was a real treat this year. Held in the heart of the heartland (Chicago), the Expo took on a practical, business-like tone, without the hijinks and hype of Los Angeles or the cynicism of New York. Most publishers were upbeat about sales, having trimmed their staffs and inventories in recent years, thus preparing themselves for profits.

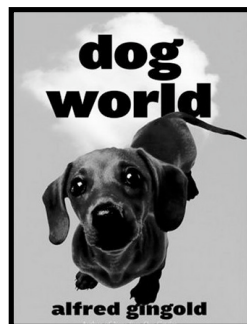
The Expo was more compact in Chicago; I could walk the breadth of the main floor in 10 minutes. The floor was less crowded than usual, with fewer attendees and a couple empty booths where one could sort catalogs. The weather was beautiful and showcased Chicago nicely, making up for the Baghdadish wasteland between downtown and the convention center.

Even the parties seemed more subdued, infused with the strains of South-side blues. If I were choosing a distributor based on the fetes they hosted, I would have to go with Independent Publishers Group (IPG). Their tasteful courtyard soiree at the Chicago Museum of Art was simply elegant, from the orchid sprays gracing every table to the jazz quartet swinging soulful tunes into the darkening dusk.

Publishing Has Gone to the Dogs

The biggest trend I noticed this year is that it seems like every publisher has a dog book on the fall list. Grace Associates showed me *Dog Book*, by Emily Weinstein. Avalon Travel Publishing offered new installments in *The Dog*

Lover's Companion series. If you're in travel publishing, and you don't have at least one book on sojourning with animal companions, you have missed the boom. Wiley has a half-dozen new dog books through its Howell Book House imprint.



pile carpeting. I ran into a corgi, a collie, and a chihuahua, this last at the Gibbs Smith booth promoting, I believe, a cookbook! This all culminated in a canine carnival at the BowTie Press booth to help launch the new Pampered Pooch series, starting with *Dog Parties*.

The book publishing industry is almost completely driven by baby boomers right now—they are at the perfect age for buying lots of books. Dogs are the new children. Trust me, I know whereof I speak. My only daughter got married in May, with a standard bouquet even though my wife says that dachshunds are now the hot fashion accessory for brides. Like many one- and two-child couples, we finished child rearing too early. How can we fulfill our genetic imperative to parent? With Peanut, of course—our new passenger compartment compatible companion.

The number of dogs in attendance at the Expo also seemed to be on the rise.

People aren't the only creatures who appreciate those vendors who pay for plush

Boomers aren't just breeding dog book sales. Real estate books are almost as good an investment as real estate itself. This trend isn't simply the result of the dot com meltdown and stock market volatility. A few years ago, Congress virtually eliminated the capital gains tax on the sale of houses occupied by owners for two consecutive years. This provides an incredible tax-free road to riches which I have yet to see a book about: *serial homesteading*. Young, childless couples (or older empty-nesters) buy a house, fix it up, then sell it two years later. Look for more books dealing with investment properties, landlording, vacation properties, and buying property in foreign countries (part of a growing global perspective that is opening the door for all kinds of new titles).

In cookbooks and health & fitness titles, if it isn't low-carb, it's not getting shelf space. Who knows how long this trend will last? At least until people tire of the privations of Atkins and put those pounds back on.

In Internet books, there are two new areas where readers are hungry for good information: adword marketing and blogs. McGraw-Hill has a real winner with Andrew Goodman's *Winning Results with Google AdWords*. Due in September, it's the only book on the subject in Amazon's database. With Google's successful IPO, expect to see as many Google books in the coming years as there are eBay books today.

Publishers were proud that, for the first time since Watergate, *books* were

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leading the political discussion in the USA. Proving the point was an appearance by Bill Clinton promoting *My Life*, which brought cash registers to life for booksellers. Michael Moore briefly shifted the focus back to broadcast media. And then there are the blogs—again, that word—trying to make sure that this is the last year that any media as slow as book publishing has an impact on political discourse.

Publishing Has Gone to the Blogs

One of my highlights at the BEA was getting to spend the best part of a day with a personal hero, marketing guru John Kremer. After an intense Wednesday teaching two classes at PMA's Publishers University, I spent Thursday with Kremer escalating and de-escalating through BEA's educational tracks.

The program was better this year, with fewer marketing pitches masquerading as education. I joined Kremer at the end of Seth Godin's session with Jay "Guerilla" Levinson. Godin was promoting his new book, *Free Prize Inside*, and praising his recently-completed blog tour. Godin's keen instinct is frustrating at times: he always gets there first, before the field is crowded, and the rest of us have to fight for space in channels he opened.

Godin wrote *E-Mail Addresses of the Rich and Famous* in 1994. By 1995, the rich and famous figured out how to keep their e-mail addresses private. He wrote *Permission Marketing* in 1999, ushering-in the era of opting-in, a strategy which is now all but used up. In 2000, he brought forth *Unleashing the Idea Virus*, and showed publishers that you could sell more bound books by giving away the e-book. Now you can't give 'em away. An early adopter of blog tours, Godin has probably gotten as much out of them as anyone ever will. Even in an age of instant publishing, you need to be inside Godin's bald head, because the opportunities he writes about dry up almost as fast as the ink that carries them.

After lunch, Kremer and I attended—what else—a panel on blogging, moderated by none other than Seth

Godin's former boss, Michael Cader, the chef behind Publishers Lunch. The discussion itself contained all the elements that makes it hard to like blogs: smug, self-congratulatory, snide, all with no visible revenue streams. Blog-masters spend inordinate amounts of time grooming these interactive diaries for little or no pay.

Both John and I wanted to know whether blogs would replace the dysfunctional technology of electronic newsletters, which have been crippled by spam filters (e-zines were probably one of Seth Godin's got-there-first ideas). Neither of us can see how blogs can avoid the same fate, and nothing we heard convinced us otherwise.

For what it's worth, here's my take on blogs. They are part of a shift to a more opinionated media resulting from Internet technology, reflected in the appetite for Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Why buy a whole newspaper when 75 percent of it is stuff you're not interested in—especially if you can get your favorite columnists for free online?

For the most part, people do not want "unbiased" media coverage; they want media that shares their personal bias. And the more outrageously expressed that opinion is, the more traffic the blog gets, the more attention the columnist gets, and that's what they're working for—since they aren't working for money (unless, of course, they can leverage their reputations into merchantable products and services).

Blogging will not go away anytime soon, though most blogs have already died, their carcasses gumming up the web worse than the dead sites left in the wake of the dot com debacle. Only those bloggers like Jim Romanesko and Heath Row, who were born for this, will survive and prosper. And the outlets that do survive will indeed be very important buzz factories for books.

Polluting the Amazon

Speaking of vitriolic hyperbole, Dennis Johnson on the BEA's blogging panel representing the Moby Lives site, had nothing but unkind words for Amazon.com. Possibly the most reasonable member of the panel, he turned bull terrier when discussing Amazon's strong-arm tactics to force publishers

into 60 percent discounts or the Marketplace program.

Publishers Weekly also took a gratuitous swipe at Amazon with a front-page article in the *Show Daily* chastising Earth's Biggest Bookstore for its heavy-handed tactics negotiating with publishers. The piece, which contained little that could be considered news, focused on Amazon's efforts to get the largest discount possible from publishers as well as a piece of publishers' co-op advertising budgets. The article even upstaged reporting on former president Bill Clinton's speech. Of course, Clinton's remarks ran too long to make the *Daily's* deadline.

Let me play devil's advocate, then, and present a blog-worthy contrarian opinion about Amazon. Last year at the BEA, several mid-size publishers confided that Amazon had risen to their third-largest account, presumably behind Ingram and Barnes & Noble. Publishers on average were slow to grant Amazon the discounts it deserved based on volume—the same discounts they offered to other giant retailers buying on the same terms. Granted, Amazon was slow to tell publishers exactly how big it had grown; orders in the company's formative years were largely hidden in the Ingram buy.

This year, some of those same publishers told me that Amazon.com is now their biggest account, easily passing Ingram and B&N. Now Amazon wants co-op money. It deserves it. More to the point, publishers' budgets for online marketing have not kept pace with their results in that arena. I can't fault publishers, because it's hard to adjust so quickly to the sea change in our business wrought by the Internet.

What I can fault all sides of this debate for—Amazon, publishers, and bloggers—is the replacement of intelligent, cooperative dialogue with edicts, threats, vitriol, and cheap shots. Can't we all just get along? Amazon is an important partner, helping readers find and buy books. Good manners and good business suggest that we find ways to make this mutually-beneficial relationship work better.

Put that in your blog and serve it.



Blogging into Book Markets

by Richard Hoy

At a conference in New York City in June, 2003—the first formal conference ever on the subject of blogging—panelists at a roundtable discussion were asked the inevitable question: “What is a blog?” A huge argument ensued because no one could agree on a single definition.

While even the experts can’t agree on what a blog is, everyone agrees that blogs are fueling something significant. I mean, geez, even ex-presidential candidates have blogs (*HowardDean.com*).

So what is a blog? For purposes of this article, I’m defining a blog as a running commentary on a subject, presented in “diary” format, made possible through special software that makes publishing the commentary on the Internet easy and quick.

The fastest way to get your brain around the definition above is by seeing some examples:

- Instapundit (*instapundit.com*)
- Boing Boing Blog (*boingboing.net*)
- Slashdot (*slashdot.org*)

These three blogs each probably have more readers than a mid-sized city’s daily newspaper. In fact, Slashdot has so many readers that it can cause the “Slashdot Effect.” That’s when so many Slashdot readers are trying to access a Web site mentioned in the publication at the same time that it causes the site to crash.

These three blogs, and others like them, built major readerships with just some clever prose and a little technology—really something anyone, say maybe even an author, can do.

Blogging Services & Software

There are lots of blogging services as well as software packages. For example, Salon has a popular service (*salon.com/blogs*) as does BlogSpot, now owned by Google, (*blogger.com/blogspot-admin/*) and also Radio Userland (*http://radio.userland.com/*). My personal favorite is MovableType (*movabletype.org*), a software package that

now also comes as a service called TypePad (*typepad.com*).

My company, Booklocker.com, is a self-publishing services company. We offer independent authors a cost-effective way to get their books into the marketplace. I installed MovableType on our server and offered blogs to some of the authors using our service. We chose MovableType because it’s very easy for our authors to enter the commentary they want to publish without having to see the ugly technical back-end that makes it work.

Real Simple Syndication (RSS)

Another important dimension to blogs is Real Simple Syndication (RSS). RSS is a way to format information so it can be easily shared between Web sites. Essentially, RSS is a special file that contains summaries of the most recent updates on a Web site. Having these summaries out there in a universal format (specifically, a format called XML) means that if a piece of software looks at your RSS file, it receives a list of summaries and links to the most recent content changes on your Web site.

Since RSS data is in a standard format, sharing that data with other Web sites is a simple exercise. For example, using RSS I can take the last three entries from one of our author’s blogs and automatically put them on the book’s sales page—creating cross-promotion between blog and book.

A more dramatic example of the power of RSS is Feedster (*feedster.com*). It’s a search engine driven entirely by RSS feeds. Feedster basically monitors all the RSS feeds submitted to it, looking for changes. When Feedster detects a change, it sucks down the content associated with the change into its database. People can then use Feedster to search for new content on specified sites.

RSS was available way before blogs. But it wasn’t until blogs came along that RSS took off. Most blog software and services automatically create an RSS feed, hence the link between the success of blogs and RSS.

Practical Applications for Authors and Publishers

So let’s put it all together and see what blogs and RSS mean for authors and publishers. An obvious application for authors and publishers is to create their own content using blog technology. I can tell you from tests here at Booklocker.com that blogs do sell books. But the trick is that the content has to be well-written and published frequently. There is nothing worse than a stale blog. And it often takes at least a few months before one can build a readership. Some of the more successful blogs we have at Booklocker.com are:

- Emergency Divorce Handbook For Women (*angelahoy.com/book*)
- Tim Leffel’s Cheapest Destinations (*http://blogs.booklocker.com/travel*)
- Kim Davis’ Daily Dance on the Edge of Normal (*http://blogs.booklocker.com/KPDavis*)

Another application that isn’t so obvious is using RSS to monitor content on other blogs for opportunities to plug a book. If you go to Feedster and plug in some search terms, you’ll get back all the blog posts that reference those terms, including the date and time they were first published. Monitoring on a daily basis helps you find opportunities to inject your own commentary (many blogs allow readers to post comments on a topic).

Additional Resources

- Blogging: Genius Strategies for Instant Web Content, by Biz Stone (Pearson, 2002, ISBN: 0735712999)
- Lockergnome’s RSS Resource *http://rss.lockergnome.com/*



Richard Hoy and his wife, author Angela Adair-Hoy, are the proprietors of Booklocker.com, Inc.—a company that provides a low-cost, turn-key publishing and sales environment for independent authors—and Writers Weekly.com, an email newsletter and web site that reaches more than 40,000 writers each month.

AuthorViews: Two-Minute Videos for the Web

On September 1, Patron Saint Productions announced a new service for book publishers: **AuthorViews** digital videos (*authorviews.com*). AuthorViews are two-minute author presentations designed for two major uses: media pitching and sales collateral. You can view a promotional video about the service and five sample AuthorViews at the web site.

AuthorViews for The Media

Most television talkshow producers ask to see video before they commit to booking an author. However, most authors don't have a quality video, and many publishers don't have the equipment, facilities, staff, or budget needed to make one.

AuthorViews help fill the gap by providing a professional yet affordable video production service. When publishers pay to create a video, they get more control over the content. Instead of offering a talkshow host a poor-quality home video or a clip from a TV appearance for a previous book, publishers can provide a broadcast-quality presentation on the author's forthcoming book.

The AuthorViews cut used for pitching the media can run anywhere from two to five minutes. It fits on a standard CD in ultra-high-resolution format. The CDs can be duplicated in-house or purchased in bulk from Patron Saint Productions and put into press kits that are mailed to talkshow hosts.

Publishers also receive a streaming version of the press kit cut for use in online news rooms. The streaming version is optimized for a broadband Internet connection and plays on most platforms: PCs, Mac, Unix, etc.

AuthorViews as Sales Collateral

The shorter, web version of the AuthorViews video is designed to be viewed at sites that already contain ample information about the book. Instead of answering questions such as, "What is your book about," authors are asked, "What does this book mean to you, personally?" The goal is to establish a brief

emotional bond with viewers strong enough to push them over the threshold from browsers to buyers.

AuthorViews fit well on author sites, fan sites, special interest sites, and online bookstores. They work well on the publisher's catalog page for the book. AuthorViews are also well-suited to sales conferences, especially when sales reps use laptop computers to present new titles.



*Poppy Z. Brite talks about her new book, **Liquor (Crown)** in AuthorViews video.*

One More Tool in the Kit

Patron Saint Productions' Executive Director, Steve O'Keefe, says AuthorViews are really nothing new. "Online author videos have been around for several years. Bookstream has a product called Bookwrap which many publishers use. The web site bookpresenter.com also offers a multimedia product. The only thing different is our approach.

"I have been developing AuthorViews for almost three years. These videos were built using an intimate knowledge of how people behave online. Here are some things we do differently:

Two Minutes Maximum. People have been trained by television to expect a quality viewing experience that simply can't be duplicated online. We recognize that no matter how good the videos are, they're going to be viewed at 72 d.p.i., at roughly the dimensions of a business card, probably with inferior audio. Most people simply won't sit still for more than two minutes in the multi-tasking world of the Internet.

Emotion, not Explanation. With only 90 to 120 seconds to work with, what can an author say that connects with a viewer? In almost all cases, the AuthorViews video is on a web page that already contains basic information such as jacket copy, table of contents, sample chapter, critical reviews, and bibliographical information. We don't want the author to repeat what's already there. So we ask unusual questions designed to catch the author off guard, whether that means making them laugh or making them mad. We watch for their eyes light up. When they do, that's the cut we build the video around. When the author is emotional, the impact on viewers is immediate and can be profound, pushing them to tap the 'buy' button — which is right there on most web pages featuring books.

Physical Language. We always ask an author, "What does your book feel like?" The web is two-dimensional. A main impediment to sales is that you can't actually hold the book in your hands. So we ask authors to hold it for you, to comment on any production values that stand out: quality stock, sewn binding, deckled edges, interior color, oversized dimensions. This segment has been a huge hit in test markets, even for books that have routine production values. It makes people lust to own the book — to possess it and to touch it.

Net-Friendly. The most difficult facet of producing videos for the web is making them accessible to people no matter what computer platform they have or how fast their connection speed. Almost no one does a good job at this, but we do better than most. We render each video in RealMedia, Windows Media, QuickTime, MPEG-3 and MPEG-4. And we offer both high-resolution/broadband and low-resolution/dial-up for every video. In most cases, the viewer sees a link that says, "Click here for a two-minute author presentation," and the software determines which version of the video

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to launch based on the viewer's platform, software and connection speed. In other words, the mechanics are invisible—the viewer hits a button and the proper video begins to play. One problem with other author videos online is that they're available in only one or two formats. A lot of potential viewers are locked out by the technology. We work very hard to make these videos as close to universal as possible.

Syndication. All of our campaigns are based on moving content to the target audience—rather than pulling the audience to a site—and AuthorViews is no exception. We want these videos installed wherever people are interested in the author or the topic of the book. The videos are short, the file sizes are small, and we have the ability to serve them, we have eliminated many barriers to getting the clips installed on other people's sites. Plus, my staff is extremely good at finding sites where the target audience hangs and contact information for the people who control those sites. That's what we do, day in and day out, and have done for a decade now."

Tested and Refined

O'Keefe took his laptop and demo AuthorViews to the Book Expo America in Chicago and solicited feedback. "I made 30 appointments over two days to preview AuthorViews videos. I showed them to publicity people, marketing people, wholesalers, distributors, media contacts, booksellers, and authors. The response was discouraging, in a way.

"Publishers want the videos, alright—but they want them for pitching talkshow producers more than for the web. Most of them would not pay the asking price for a web video alone. But they will pay for a press kit version, and a smaller amount to have a web version produced and syndicated.

"To satisfy publishers, I must produce two cuts from the same video shoot: a longer press kit cut that hits the talking points for the book, and a shorter, more emotional cut for the web. We've re-worked our scripts to get both edits out of one shoot, and we've had to do additional work in rendering to get

an ultra-high-resolution version that fits on a CD for talk show producers."

Scheduling an Author Shoot

Patron Saint Productions is charging \$7500 for the complete AuthorViews package. However, the company is offering an introductory rate of \$4500 to tempt publishers into trying AuthorViews. "We need the practice," O'Keefe says, "and we're willing to give publishers a break for being early adopters."

AuthorViews will be traveling in the coming months to New York, Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. Authors touring through New Orleans can usually shoot their video with at Patron Saint Productions' studio with a minimum of advance notice. To schedule your AuthorViews shoot, or for more information, please contact Steve O'Keefe at Patron Saint Productions.



LAST CALL !

by Steve O'Keefe

Since 2001, I've been trying to bring publicists and authors to The Big Easy for intensive training in book publicity. Once again, I'm hosting a workshop on Thursday and Friday, October 28 and 29, with the lovely and talented Alice Acheson. Once again, I will have to cancel unless I get ten registrations by September 30. You have just a few days to call or e-mail if you're coming.

I'd like to do this seminar every year, and I'd like to do it without spamming people via e-mail to attend. I think I've got a terrific program with Alice Acheson, and the price is fair. So please, if you've been thinking of coming down, check out the info on my web site and call or e-mail today.

Thank you.



~ About ~

Patron Saint Productions

Patron Saint Productions is a publishing consultancy specializing in online marketing strategy, campaigns, and training. It was founded by Steve O'Keefe, a 20-year book publishing veteran who has launched online marketing campaigns for more than 1,000 books and dozens of publishers.

Web: <http://www.patronsaintpr.com>

E-mail: info@patronsaintpr.com

Phone: 504-586-9517

Online Marketing Campaigns

Patron Saint Productions provides the following services, all designed to light a fire under a book during the month of publication. Ask about discounts for series promotions.

New Book Launch

A comprehensive campaign including a media component (e-mail news releases), excerpt distribution, discussion group postings, and online bookstore displays. Price: \$3,500.

Chat Tour, Blog Tour, or Seminar

All the services of the New Book Launch Campaign, plus a week-long author chat tour, blog tour, or online seminar. Price: \$7,500.

Web Site Promotion

Includes directory registration, writing meta tags, linkage campaign, e-mail news releases, discussion group postings, and site-of-the-day submissions. Price \$3,500 + registration fees.

Ask About These Other Services

~ Author Videos ~
~ Employee Training ~
~ Online Marketing Plans ~

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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