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Blogger Outreach

Blogger Outreach: From Research to Results



Marketing's new holy grail, blogs, represent an affordable—yet oh so valuable—opportunity to promote your business. Get a positive product mention on a well-read blog, and you've successfully set off the viral buzz that is word-of-mouth marketing.

Targeted to a particular niche audience, blogs offer priceless exposure to the people most likely interested in your product. With link-building benefits for search engine optimization as a nice side benefit, it's no surprise that blogger outreach is top-of-mind with modern marketers.

Truthfully, blogging has entered the US mainstream. According to a study by Synovate/MarketingDaily, nearly four out of 10 Americans have visited a blog, and eight of 10 now know what a blog is; moreover, as many as eight percent of Americans had their own blog last year. ¹

Blogs are even influencing mainstream media, with more than 75% of reporters seeing blogs as helpful in giving them story ideas, story angles and insight into the tone of an issue. ²

Today, marketers are targeting bloggers much in the same way PR folks target journalists—with pitches. Just like journalists, bloggers need content to fill their blogs. Savvy marketers are stepping up to help meet that need, and reaping the benefit.

Researching Blogs

In an ideal world, you'd already be visiting five to 10 blogs in your industry on a regular basis. You'd be familiar with your favorite writers—their likes and their weaknesses—and you may even have posted a comment or two of your own.

If so, congratulations, you can skip this section. Just as a relationship with your local journalist can payoff in increased coverage, so too with bloggers.

But if you aren't already a blog aficionado—or you represent too many diverse

¹ *Four in 10 Americans Read Blogs.* Sept. 5, 2007. www.marketingcharts.com

² *Blogs Influence Journalists.* Jan. 9, 2008. www.marketingcharts.com

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product lines to cover them all—you'll need to spend some time identifying your ideal targets.

Let us repeat one stat: eight percent of Americans have their own blogs.³ That's a lot of blogs to consider, and determining which ones are worth your while is quite a project.

Recognize that while a mention from an A-list blogger is certainly a coup, your time may be better spent reaching out to smaller blogs. Smaller blogs can be easier to break into, as their writers get fewer solicitations.

The research step is critical. Bloggers deal with much the same problem as traditional journalists—companies send out hundreds of press releases and mass pitch letters in the hopes that a few of them will stick. Frankly, that's irritating—to journalists and bloggers alike. Spend some time and target 10 really well researched blogs.

The fewer blogs you target, the more personalized your outreach can be. Your chance of a positive mention will increase, and you'll avoid appearing on anyone's "Worst Pitch" list.

To conduct your research, start by locating blogs in your topic area. Once you have a sufficient list to consider, evaluate which ones receive the most traffic and which are most likely to welcome your pitch.

Finding Blogs

Google, of course, is a great way to locate blogs. Just be sure to insert "blog" after your search term (e.g. gardening blogs, camping blogs, RVing blogs) to avoid other non-blog results. Here are four more ways to find blogs in your category:

- Send a message to your own network of colleagues. Ask which industry blogs they like and read most frequently.
- Post a similar request for favorite industry blogs on LinkedIn or Yahoo! Answers.
- Search [Technorati](#) and [Blogged](#), search engines dedicated exclusively to blogs. Use their blog directories or search functions to find topic-specific blogs.



³ *Ibid.*

- Search traditional media for mentions of top blogs. Real Simple, for example, ran a [best blog feature](#) in March 2008, highlighting favorites in several home and cultural categories. Access media databases at your local library, or login to databases like ProQuest and EbscoHost remotely.

Determining Popularity

If a blog has been featured in the mainstream media, you can already count on its popularity. Otherwise, determining which ones get the best readership can be a bit tricky. Here are a few tips:

1. Look for regular posts and multiple replies. You want sites that are maintained and have an active audience base. That said, not all blogs allow comments, so you may need other indicators.
2. Visit [Alexa](#) to view the blog's traffic ratings. If the blog registers on their Traffic History Graph, consider that a positive.

[GardeningRant](#), for example, is one of the top read gardening blogs around and has been mentioned in several press pieces. Yet, it has a daily reach of far less than 0.002%. Don't misread that. Even top read, A-list blogs, like [Seth Godin's marketing blog](#), will only reach between 0.002-0.005% of Internet users.



Alexa will provide other noteworthy information such as page views per user and international popularity.

3. Look at the number of RSS subscribers, if available. What you're looking for are small counters or widgets on the blog page indicating the number of email and feed readers. Similarly, some blogs use tools like SiteMeter that provide additional user data.



4. Look at the Technorati authority number; the higher the better. This number indicates the number of sites linking to that blog in the last six months. [icanhascheezburger.com](#), a blog for the cat lover, has long been a top Technorati ranker, seeing more than 10,000 links to it from other blogs.

Evaluating your Options

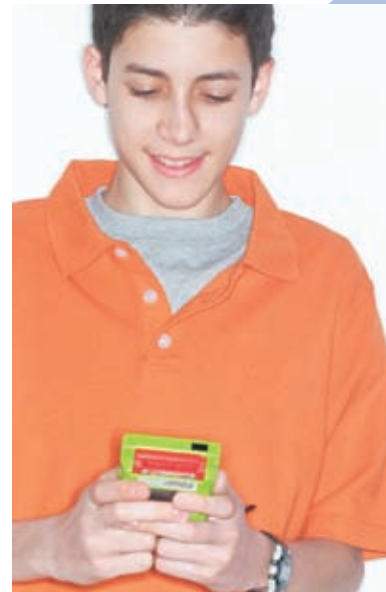
Determining popularity should give you a shortlist of blogs to target. Next, spend some time getting to know these blogs.

1. When available, read the About Me and Advertising pages first. Many bloggers spell out their advertising and pitch preferences directly.
2. Think about your ideal target audience as you read the blog. Is the blogger a good fit with your customer base? What can you tell about its readers from their comments?

For example, when the makers of büjji, a poison ivy wash and block, wanted to reach out to gardening bloggers, they wanted to target people in more rural settings with large, expansive yards. Although popular, several city garden blogs and vegetable blogs were eliminated from consideration because they were not the best fit for the product.

3. Read and think some more. Does your product have real value to the readers? Don't be so fast to answer that last one. Consider: Will mentioning your product help the blogger grow his or her audience?
4. Search for mentions of your brand and industry. If the blogger doesn't offer a search field on his/her site, you can still search within the site using either Google's or Technorati's Advanced Search tools.

Even the big dogs can blow this one. MC Milker is a mom, marketing consultant and blogger at [TheNotQuiteCrunchyParent](#). Last year Milker received a pitch from Hasbro and was sent some handheld video games to review, even though she regularly rails against them on her blog. (Although Milker had mentioned Hasbro favorably on occasion, this mistake could have been avoided had they searched her blog for 'video games' before pitching. ⁴)



To keep track of your blog research, start a spreadsheet. List blogs down the left-hand side and other relevant criteria across the top. Consider the following: Location, Posting Frequency, Comment Frequency, Technorati Authority, Alexa Ranking, RSS Subscribers, About, and Notes.

5 Ways to Pique a Bloggers Interest

1. Send free samples
2. Offer a product giveaway. (Garden Rant recently gave away five Troy-Bilt garden carts in a [special reader promotion](#))

⁴ Ogilvy PR Blog. Reader comments. Sept. 6, 2007. <http://blog.ogilvypr.com/?p=238>

3. Offer a special discount code designed for their readers only
4. Send real news. (Survey and research results are popular)
5. Offer a creative image to accompany #1-#4. (Send a small pic via email or offer a download at your site)

Time to Say 'Hey'

Okay, we don't want to scare you, but this is the part you can really mess up. Bloggers can be [vicious](#) to marketers who are ignorant, [lazy](#), or pushy.



That said remember your manners: Be polite and be honest. Follow simple rules of courtesy, and you'll be fine.

Tell the truth. First of all, don't pretend to read their blog, if you don't. Starting off with a lie gets any potential relationship off on the wrong foot.

Be upfront. Okay, this is pretty much the same as 'tell the truth' but we wanted to spell it out. Acknowledge that you are in the midst of a promotional campaign and that you want to connect with bloggers.

Provide value. Look beyond your needs as a marketer and consider the blogger's needs. Provide some 'quick tips' and a graphic (sized for the web, please!). If you can, offer a giveaway promotion or send a discount code for the blogger's readers.

Don't be a pest. Reach out to a blogger no more than twice. When bloggers don't respond it means they're not interested (or maybe you did something to tick them off). Move on.

Open a conversation. Let bloggers know you're open to feedback or interviews. In essence, offer to work with them in whatever way would provide most value to readers. Be sure to follow up promptly on requests for more information.

Join the conversation. This is a best practice along the lines of keeping with blogs long before you ever need to pitch them. That said, we recognize that forging blogger relationships isn't feasible on a mass scale (many bloggers recognize this too). Contribute to the conversation if you can. Become a part of the blogger's community. Just don't be self-serving and make the mistake of posting comments that are simply ads or trackbacks to your own site.

More good sense. Plenty of other bloggers have offered tips on how to pitch. For expert advice straight from the blogger's mouth see the [Diva Marketing Blog](#) and [CK's Blog](#), just to name a few.

If you want to get official, the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) has developed "[10 Principles for Ethical Contact By Marketers](#)" and the folks over at Ogilvy have developed [something similar](#). Here are the WOMMA guidelines⁵:

1. I will always be truthful and will never knowingly relay false information.
2. I will never ask someone else to deceive bloggers for me. I will fully disclose who I am and who I work for (my identity and affiliations) from the very first encounter when communicating with bloggers or commenting on blogs.
3. I will never take action contrary to the boundaries set by bloggers. I will respect all community guidelines regarding posting messages and comments.
4. I will never ask bloggers to lie for me.
5. I will use extreme care when communicating with minors or blogs intended to be read by minors.
6. I will not manipulate advertising or affiliate programs to impact blogger income.
7. I will not use automated systems for posting comments or distributing information.
8. I understand that compensating bloggers may give the appearance of a conflict of interest, and I will therefore fully disclose any and all compensation or incentives.
9. I understand that if I send bloggers products for review, they are not obligated to comment on them. Bloggers can return products at their own discretion.
10. If bloggers write about products I send them, I will proactively ask them to disclose the products' source.



Again, use good sense. Be thorough in your research and thoughtful in your pitches. And in the words of the [Diva](#), follow what your Mama taught you. Send a thank you when your product is mentioned.

⁵ Reproduced with permission from WOMMA.

On Negative Posts

Recognize that if you've asked a blogger to review your product, you've opened yourself up to negative reviews. Even if you sent free product. Even if you bought an ad (more on that below). Just like in the traditional press, if they don't like your product they have every right to say so.

Similarly, realize that the mere act of sending a pitch opens you up to criticism. Bad pitches can happen to anyone now and then. It's how you respond that sets you apart.

Take this for example: Blogger Scott Monty got a great pitch that blew up at the end when the PR rep mistakenly addressed him as "David." Whoops. Monty blogged about the mistake, [criticizing the error](#). Kristen, the offending PR rep, was monitoring mentions of her company's name. When she saw the criticism, she stepped up and posted an apologetic comment. She wrote:



"I confess, it was me. I made the mistake with your name. I'm okay with admitting it. The best part, I have learned from this, and Scott, I appreciate you even mentioning Flektor at all. That means a lot to me."

You know what that did? It earned Kristen and Flektor some positive PR. Monty wrote a [follow-up post](#) complimenting her good graces. They touched base via phone (gasp!), and both came away more enlightened.

Now, if the blogger just flat out doesn't like your product, you have some options. You can let it go. If the blogger spewed bitter criticism and general hatred, just walk away.

On the other hand, if the review was more measured in tone, you can respond with similar class. Perhaps something gracious, like this: "Thank you for reviewing our product. I'm sorry it didn't appeal to you. I've shared your comments with our product development folks, so hopefully we can offer something that meets your needs in the future."

However, if he/she finds your product lacking in some way that's rectifiable, go ahead and respond in the comments. Thank the blogger for his/her review. If the instructions were unclear or the product was faulty, talk about how you plan to fix it.

Never, never ever, be rude. Wait 24-hours and calm down before sending a response if you have to. Rude posts just feed the conversation and breed more ill will. And remember, Google never forgets. A nasty post can live on and on in infamy.

On Blog Advertising

Many bloggers will accept advertising on their site.

Recognize that buying a blog ad does not guarantee you a good review. Bloggers receive little to no compensation for their work, so some are quite happy to write a positive review—as a thank you of sorts—for buying an ad placement. Others, however, would be mighty offended by the notion.

This is just one way the line between journalist and blogger gets blurry. Major news publications keep an impenetrable wall between advertising and editorial. In doing so, they establish a level of credibility that indicates their opinions cannot be bought and sold.

Bloggers will play by different rules. Some (especially the smaller and less experienced) will embrace the notion of pay-for-placement. But even a not-so-savvy media consumer will understand that when an advertisement on a blog sits adjacent to exultations and praise, some financial influence may be at play.

Buying blog advertising alone (i.e. skip the pitch) can be an effective advertising strategy, as you still get exposure to a niche, targeted audience. What's more, it may be more cost-efficient to buy an advertisement instead of doing outreach work in the mere hope of getting a review—not to mention a positive one.



A 2007 study conducted by Synovate/MarketingDaily, found that 43% of blog readers noticed ads on the blogs and nearly one third of them have clicked on a blog ad. Looking at the age 25 to 34 group alone, a sizable 43.6% reported clicking on blog advertisements.⁶ Those statistics make a compelling case for blog ads in conjunction with, or as an alternative to, blogger outreach.

All in all, the best blogger outreach efforts will occur when the marketer is also a long-time reader and active community participant. Bloggers will tell you they're grateful people, and one good turn deserves another.

If you can, start planning your blogger outreach now, for a launch next year. If economy demands more immediate returns, hunker down for some solid research and creative thought. When you're ready, make the pitch. With some solid content or a valuable offer, you just might hit a home run.

⁶ *Four in 10 Americans Read Blogs.* Sept. 5, 2007. www.marketingcharts.com.