



To Blog or Not to Blog

Blogs and e-Newsletters are very popular, but can they increase sales or improve your corporate image?

Have you added online marketing to your Marketing Mix? Should you? I recently discussed this with an architect client who was considering starting up a blog. There are many aspects to online marketing, including blogs, e-Newsletters and social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Although some feel more like fads than marketing tools, each serves a purpose and, when used effectively, will not only boost your online presence and add value to your corporate image, but may even help to increase sales.

Blogs and e-Newsletters are good marketing tools when used effectively. To help differentiate them, look at e-Newsletters as a traditional publication, only without the printing and mailing. Published regularly, it should have a main story, one or two shorter articles and some lighter material, perhaps tips or relevant links.

A blog on the other hand is more casual, more like a "brain dump". Have something to share? This is the place to voice your opinion, show your lighter side, even invite others to join in. Unlike an e-Newsletter, a blog can be updated hourly, daily, weekly, monthly... the timing is much less important.

For various reasons, the aforementioned architect is generating lots of attention in the press, producing articles and signing on new clients. All the things a growing business should be doing. We suggested he create both an e-Newsletter and a blog. Here's why:

e-Newsletters, sometimes called e-zines, can be powerful communication tools. They provide an opportunity to reach out to your customers and prospects on a regular basis in more detail than, say, an e-blast. For the architect, we suggested he provide quarterly summaries of his projects, news releases and articles. Since much of the content would be created anyway, the e-Newsletter would provide him a convenient vehicle for assembling and distributing the content, while driving traffic to his Web site for additional details.

The important thing to remember is that once you start the process of an e-Newsletter, you will need to continue it, otherwise the effort will be wasted. We recommend at least every other month. Four to six weeks between issues is ideal. More frequently should be reserved for news-oriented companies or organizations with lots of information to update.

To produce an effective publication, there are three main items to consider before moving forward:

- 1. Content.** This is the big one. Who's going to provide your articles and graphics? This is important, because like any good publication, the content is what creates interest and will make or break the success of your e-Newsletter. Don't underestimate the effort it takes. Choosing topics, researching, writing and editing... it takes time and commitment so plan ahead. We suggest setting a schedule for the entire year so you'll have an idea of what to expect.
- 2. Distribution.** This is relatively easy. There are several options for third party services that can manage your database, provide templates and support. Most of them are available at modest rates.
- 3. Design.** So now you have content to share, a Web site worth visiting and you've signed on with a delivery source. Now what? Often overlooked, design is frequently stated as a primary reason for lack of interest in newsletters. It's easy to over – or under design it. Too much eye candy and readers won't know where to look and leave frustrated. Not enough and they'll be bored and move on.

Like most of us, you probably receive several of these a week, so keep those in mind when producing your own. How many do you read? What piques your interest to open those? How many do you delete? Why? These are things to keep in mind when designing your own. They should be interesting and timely, with an emphasis on driving traffic to your Web site. Short articles with links to your site, company updates, even useful tips and relevant suggestions to help round out the content.

Blogs have been around in one form or another since the Internet was invented. Today, everyone seems to have one and they look much cooler than the scrolling lines of text from the original formats. Why are they so popular? People like to communicate. We seem to have a lot to say, and blogs are rela-



tively easy to get going, even if you add photos and links. Do others really care what we each have to say? Apparently, since there are over 150 million in existence today.

So, how does a blog help, say our architect's marketing efforts? Unlike the e-Newsletter, a blog can be updated much more frequently. This makes it the ideal vehicle for sharing your thoughts, or providing up-to-the-minute updates on projects. For example, perhaps he comes from a client meeting where incorporating a new eco-friendly technology into the project's design was discussed and sharing that information could spark additional green conversations. Then, on the way back to his office, he had a brilliant idea for reducing global warming by using a different material for rooftops. Why wait until the next newsletter? A few minutes of writing a new post, and presto! Instant communication with his database. These topics are interesting to his clients and prospects and demonstrate his thought leadership. He can then elaborate in longer articles, which not only will get posted to his Web site, but yes, you guessed it, added to his next e-Newsletter as well.

So which is best for you? Maybe both. Maybe neither. It depends on your industry, your intent, the content you want to share and the amount of resources you can commit to the process. To be clear, don't expect either an e-Newsletter or a blog to increase your sales dramatically. But when used effectively, they can be powerful additions to your Market Mix. Together, they can help you stay top-of-mind with clients and prospects, help drive traffic to your Web site and highlight your experience and leadership position in your industry. And that often translates to new sales. All that without adding expensive costs such as printing or mailing, making it not only cost-effective, but environmentally friendly too.

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