

ROLE OF CORPORATE BLOGS IN BRANDING- A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Corporate blogging is a new form of online communication that is being used by companies as a PR tool. Today customers are moving away from the traditional media and so the need to be visible in the consumer's eye, new media is essential. In India corporate blogging is a relatively new phenomenon although it began way back in 2007. The study attempts to explore how corporate blogging is a new communication tool for companies. It tries to determine recent trends in corporate blogging especially in India and to find out what is the future of corporate blogging. The researcher has used the case study method. The study will be significant in presenting the Indian perspective towards corporate blogging.

KEYWORDS: Online Communication, Traditional Media, Corporate Blogging

INTRODUCTION

“The term blog originated from the blend of the term “web log”. Nowadays blogs compete with mainstream media in delivering news and information. Important events, war coverage and celebrity deaths are often reported quicker and more accurately on blogs and Twitter than traditional news service. Why? Because any one can easily set up their own blog and share their thoughts (known as their voice) online. Blogs are written on just about any subject and for a wide range of purposes, including personal, business, and work and sharing news stories.”(edublogs.org). Blogs can be of many types. They can be categorised by the type of content, who writes them and how they are delivered. Following are some of the most popular types and categories of blogs:

“Genre Blogs – Many blogs focus on a specific subject .Some of the most popular types of genre blogs are as follows:

- Music blogs
- Fashion blogs
- Celebrity blogs
- Travel blogs
- Art blogs

Other types of genre blogs include home and family blogs. Political blogs also remain a popular genre and are known to increase the popularity of a political candidate.

Blog Media – Blogs can be grouped by the primary type of media presented on the blog. For instance, a blog that is primarily composed of videos is often referred to as a vlog. A blog that links to other websites is sometimes called a linklog. A photoblog is a blog of photographic images, while a blog of sketches is a sketchblog. Blogs composed of short

text updates or posts is known as either a microblog or tumblelog.

Blog Devices – Many types of blogs are named for the devices used to create the blog or the devices used to access the blog. Blogs created for use on mobile devices or created by mobile devices is a moblog. Other types of blogs are created by using webcam video. These types of blogs are often personal video diaries.

Personal Blogs – Personal blogs are one of the two main types of blogs categorized by who is writing or updating them. A personal blog is a public diary or journal created by an individual as a chronicle of his or her life and opinions.

Organizational Blogs – The second type of blog categorized by who is producing the blog is an organizational blog. Organizational blogs are the voice of more than a single individual. They are the voice of a company, brand, corporation or political party. These types of blogs are most often used for marketing or public relations purposes. However, they can also be used for clubs or non-profit groups to bring information about events and activities to members.”(onlineblog.com)

Organizational blogs are also called corporate blogs. A corporate blog is a blog that is published and used by an organization, corporation, etc. to reach its organizational goals. Corporate blogs are utilized to promote products, services or expertise in an area that the company specializes. A corporate blog can also be used to drive public relations, and communicate effectively with employees or shareholders.

BRANDING

Corporate blogs can be used for branding of an organization or its products. Here it is important to define what is a brand? A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. A brand thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical (Aaker, 1991). Brands provide the basis upon which consumers can identify and bond with a product or service or a group of products or services (Weilbacher, 1995). From the customer’s point of view, a brand can be defined as the total accumulation of all his/her experiences, and is built at all points of contact with the customer (Kapferer, 2004). A successful brand is an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values which match their needs most closely (Chernatony and McDonald, 1998). A brand is made of certain brand elements like a brand name, which is a word or words used to identify a company, product, service, or concept. A logo is a visual trademark that identifies the brand. A tagline, a graphic and even sound, scent and taste can be termed as a brand element.

CORPORATE BLOGGING & BRANDING

Corporate blogging is a new form of online communication that is being used by companies as a PR tool. Today customers are moving away from the traditional media and so the need to be visible in the consumer’s eye, new media is essential. Kamla Bhatt in her article “A Different Blogosphere in India”, for the Financial Express says that there is an increasing realisation that corporate blogging can help bridge the gap between companies and their stakeholders like their employees, customers or investors. She quotes Rajesh Lalwani of Blog works who points out, “Corporate blogging allows a faceless entity to become real and allows companies to build trust through transparent conversations.” Talking about the corporate blogging scene in India she says that Indian companies have barely scratched the surface and discovered the

value created through corporate blogs. "It is early days yet and the large corporate are yet to adopt them in a big way, but it has been adopted by entrepreneurs on the other hand," says Lalwani. She also quotes Kiruba Shankar, who helps clients with their blogging needs. He says, "Corporate blogging is still in its infancy in India. Whenever I speak with heads of corporations, they say that blogging is important but very few actually turn those words to action."

Aparna Ramalingam in her article "Blogging Hits Corporate World," says that marketers are looking at blogs as a powerful social media tool. Corporate blogging activity is either internal (where they are used as a collaborative tool among employees to share inputs) or external (as a medium of interaction with customers). Most importantly, communication with stakeholders is direct and two-way. For example; HLL's Sun Silk Gang of Girls is a community-driven portal whose blogging feature is a hit with users. Infosys also has a corporate blog. Contributors include Infosys board members, unit heads and executives. A company spokesperson says, "In this forum, we share our perspectives with our clients and other business professionals. The blog enables us to have a dialogue, instead of simply publishing our perspectives to clients." She quotes Rajesh Lalwani, founder, Blog works, "Increasingly, corporations too are keeping track of blogs as they want to know what is being said about their company online." That's because online search and word of mouth (for product reviews) is becoming the norm every day. "Users wanting to know more about a company need not rely on the company website alone. There are other online sources as well," explains Lalwani.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out how corporate blogging is a new communication tool for companies.
- To determine recent trends in corporate blogging especially in India
- To find out what is the future perspective of corporate blogging in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blogs evolved in the late 90s. The purpose of these blogs was to streamline internal communication practices and to facilitate incremental collaborative intelligence within the company. Ever since then, blogs have continued to evolve and have gained considerable popularity by the public, particularly as a result of growing internet use, the emerging Web 2.0 and the simple user interface that blogs offer (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Huang et al., 2011). Nowadays the blogging phenomenon has reached a critical mass. The blogosphere surpasses 100 million blogs with an estimated 80,000 blogs created every day (Weil, 2010). Corporate blogging can be defined as "the use of blogs to further accomplish company goals" (Weil, 2010). Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that blogs are written in an informal and conversational style that tells an authentic story, and that traditional marketing practices are considered inappropriate in the blogosphere. Blogs might have some similarities with conventional websites, but differ in the certain attributes (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). In the study, "A True Potential of Corporate Blogging", by R.TH.J. Teelen, we find certain characteristics of blogs. A blog:

- is an interactive, two-way communication medium;
- is written in an authentic and transparent voice;
- refers and links to each other;
- invites comments;
- is mostly created on instant publishing software, with no IT expertise required;

- provides an efficient tool to alert interested readers when a new article is published, without using traditional methods such as email;
- is a very effective tool to get higher in search rankings, if frequently updated;
- is a type of viral marketing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Case study method was followed to conduct the study. As a part of the case study, the blogs of Infosys and HCL Technologies were perused.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The first objective is to find out how corporate blogging is a new communication tool for the companies. There have been a number of studies that have found that corporate blogging could be beneficial to the company and will remain a prominent competence for companies in the future. They provide a unique opportunity for companies to discuss topics in-depth and to establish an online content hub, for which blogs are considered to be the base of a company's Social Media strategy. This provides an ideal communication platform for knowledge-intensive companies to discuss their expertise and gather thought leadership, while bypassing the traditional media.

The second research question was to identify recent trends in corporate blogging in India. The researcher perused through the corporate blogs of Infosys which had experts discussing the key drivers of business transformation and accelerating innovation. It had a variety of articles on digital marketing, digital consumer, customer relationship management, outsourcing, supply chain management etc. The blog of HCL Technologies had a number of categories like idea blogs, engineering and R&D services, telecom, media, publishing and entertainment, travel, hospitality etc. It featured blogs from its CEO and Global Head, Talent Acquisition.

The final objective was to identify the future of corporate blogging. Again numerous studies have pointed towards the fact that the new media is here to stay. Corporate blogging is expected to remain an important Social Media tool, or even grow in popularity over the years. It has been identified to be the essential backbone of every company's Social Media strategy, as it allows companies to establish a content hub where complex topics can be discussed in-depth, without any interference of the traditional media. Companies connect with the customers through blogs. In the study "Blogging: Bubble or Big Deal? When and How Businesses should Use Blogs" by Charlene Li, the researcher found out that, Jonathan Schwartz, president of Sun Microsystems, maintains a blog where he shares his thoughts about the business with more than 100,000 visitors each month. The thought of having a public company blog instil fear in traditional command-and-control corporate cultures. But giving customers a view of the inner workings of a company has its tangible rewards. Consider the Microsoft Developer Network's Channel 9 blog, which shows video clips of Microsoft engineers talking about their current projects and invites developers to add their comments. Microsoft had always considered itself to be open to developers but wasn't perceived as such because access was so limited.

Channel 9 not only gives Microsoft a way to be more responsive, but it has also helped revamp the corporate image. Companies feel that they can connect with the customers through blogs because:

- Most companies believe that they need to “message to” their customers — as opposed to having a conversation with them. Blogs can be a natural, easy extension of a company-customer relationship.
- They have something important and unique to share which can be easily done through blogs.
- Companies are willing to listen to what their customers have to say.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study analysed only two corporate blogs so findings of the analysis need not hold good for all companies per se.
- The study has only explored the branding angle of corporate blogging.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has found out that corporate blogging as a trend has to still develop in India. There are only a handful of Indian companies that have proper blogs. The companies need to realize that blogs are not mere sender oriented platforms. They can be interactive too. There has to be more awareness about the real value of corporate blogging in India.

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