

Marketing information products with blogs

There's more to blogs than egos, rants, and opinions. Blogs are ideal marketing tools for authors, publishers, and conference or teleseminar producers who value ease, speed, and low cost

By Roger C. Parker

Web logs, or blogs, seem to be everywhere in the news, so much so, that many who might profit greatly from them are staying away because of their "trendy" nature.

This "media overkill" is unfortunate, because blogs represent a *genuine communications breakthrough*. Blogs are startlingly inexpensive, easy to use, and they get the word out *fast!*

What is a blog?

A blog is an online content management system that permits users to add, remove, and

update information without knowing anything about web programming or HTML.

Blogs are easy to update because content is entered into online forms that are automatically formatted as they are uploaded to the Internet. You can easily update a blog in minutes from home, a Starbucks, or an airport waiting room.

Key blog characteristics

Blogs share several key characteristics:

- **Length and frequency.** Blogs consist of a series of frequent, short communications. Topics can be as short as one or two sentences.
- **Links.** Most posts contain links to one, or more, other online resources. This permits

Parts of a blog

- 1 Banner with blog title and explanatory subtitle
- 2 Title and content of individual post
- 3 Date, comments, and typeback links
- 4 Author profile, photograph, and e-mail link
- 5 Categories of posts, or posts arranged by month
- 6 Recent posts, latest listed first

The screenshot shows a blog post with a green header. The main content area is white with a green sidebar on the right. The post title is 'Web Content and Design Tips' with a subtitle 'Simple and effective resources, tips, and techniques, for improving website profitability'. The main text discusses 'Assessments build newsletter sign-ups' and includes a photo of a man in a green 'COACH' sweatshirt. The sidebar contains sections for 'ABOUT', 'CATEGORIES', and 'RECENT POSTS'. The post is dated March 04, 2005, and has 0 comments.

The screenshot shows a form for composing a new blog post. It has fields for 'Title' (filled with 'Assesments build newsletter si') and 'Category' (filled with 'Traffic building'). Below these is a 'Post Body' area with a rich text editor containing the same text as the published post. There are buttons for 'Compose Post' and 'Edit HTML'.

The above form was used to create the published blog posting, (left), found at www.rcpwebblog.info.

Special Report

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The Newsletter on Newsletters

*Blogs permit
you to
immediately
post new
information
at no cost*

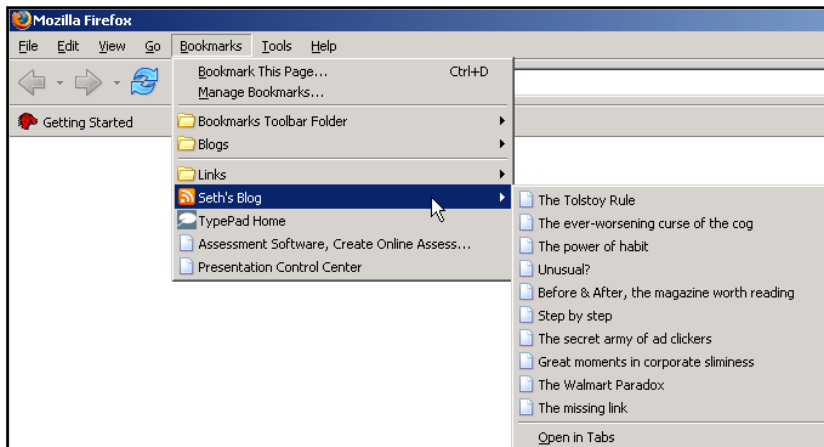
those who are interested in a topic to learn more as they desire, or learn what other readers have to say.

- *Immediacy.* Blogs eliminate the need to wait until your next e-mail or newsletter to update information.
- *Archived.* You can archive posts by month or by category.
- *Collaborative.* Blogs can be written by one person or a team.

original post with its number. With a single click, readers can access every blog post that references your original post.

RSS, Rich Site Summary—or, colloquially, Real Simple Syndication—invites readers to subscribe to your blog, so they’ll know when you add a new post or readers comment. At a glance, readers can quickly preview the titles and content of your latest posts.

Readers can subscribe to RSS feeds using a *news aggregator*, or *newsreader*, such as [News-Gator](#) or [NewzCrawler](#). Another option is to download the new, free, Mozilla [Firefox](#) web browser, (shown at left).



How to profit from a blog

Blogs permit you to communicate with your market without the costs and delays involved in sending mail or updating websites.

Promoting expertise by example

Simply create *believable connections* between current events, your expertise, and the products and services you sell. This permits you to “sell” from an editorial, or story, point of view.

Drive web site traffic

Blog posts can point to updated web content. When you add new website content, announce it in your blog. Otherwise, only new visitors attracted by search engine optimization or advertising might see your new content.

Frequent, non-intrusive, updates

Blogs avoid many of the problems associated with e-mail, such as filled e-mail in-boxes and

With the new Mozilla Firefox browser, readers can scan the titles of your recent blog posts.

Key terms

The most important terms include:

Posts are the building blocks of blogs. Posts are “mini-articles” added at different times. *Posting* is the act of adding new posts.

Comments permit readers to agree, disagree, or amplify each post. Authors can also update their posts with comments added at a later date.

A *typeback* is a unique number associated with each posting. Readers can comment on your posting in their own blog, referencing your

spam filters. RSS permits you to keep in touch without wearing out your welcome.

Recycle and sell existing content

Blogs make it easy to archive previous issues of your newsletter or website content by topic, breathing new life into them by linking them to current topics. You can also link blog posts to your shopping cart.

Test new ideas and future products

Because blogs invite reader comment, you can “test-drive” new product ideas and see what kind of reaction they provoke without the formality of surveys.

Promote upcoming events

Blogs make it possible for those without HTML training, to easily add and delete upcoming event calendars. Blogs can also create a story out of an upcoming event by providing a “behind the scenes” preview of your next book or event.

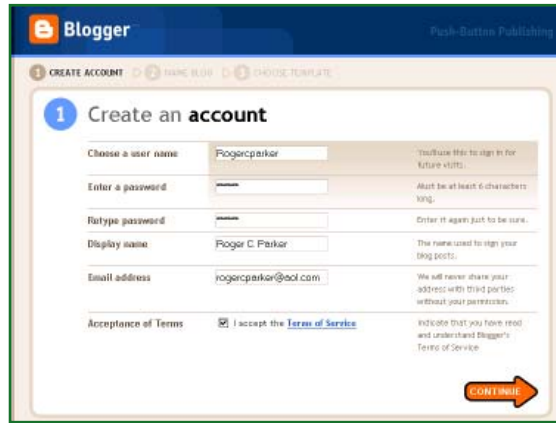
Create a loyal, participatory community

Comments and typeback links make it easy for you and your market to ask questions, comment, and constantly learn from each other.

3 steps to a published blog

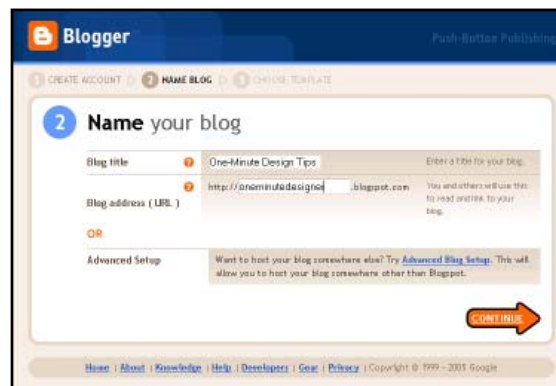
Blogs are easy to set up. Both www.blogger.com, owned by Google, and www.typepad.com offer a “3 steps to success” solution that gets you published in less than 10 minutes.

Both offer free test drives. Blogger, owned by Google, is free. After a 30-day test, Typepad begins charging \$14.99 a month for multiple blogs. (See sites for details.)



Step 1

Set up an account by entering your name, e-mail address, and a password.



Step 2

Choose a title for your blog. This will be automatically registered as its URL.



Step 3

Select a design from the many available; all can be customized later.

At this point, you're ready to publish your first post, using a form like the one shown on page 1.

How to promote your blog

1. *Syndicate your blog using RSS, and encourage clients and prospects to subscribe*

The best blogs contain short, frequent posts

2. Use your business cards, e-mail signature, and website banners to invite clients and prospects to *bookmark your blog* in their web browser.
3. Submit your blog to *directories* which will promote them to readers interested in blogs.
4. Send postcards, or occasional e-mail reminders, whenever you post important new content.
5. Promote your blog with keywords and Search Engine Optimization submissions and pay-per-click search engine advertising.
6. *Exchange links* with other blogs, expanding opportunities for both of you.
7. Provide *web links* to your blog; view your blog as an extension of your web site.



If you have access to HTML design skills, you can create your own custom layout, like Debbie Weil's (above) at www.debbieweil.com.

Customizing your design

After choosing a basic layout, refine your choice, changing the background, banner, and text colors, plus adding or removing content categories.

For example, you can add or delete sidebar information like your biography, links to your website, a list of previous posts, access to previous posts, a calendar, or promotional offerings.

Writing tips

- *Concise and focused.* The best blogs contain numerous, short posts, each often just two or three sentences. Blogs with several short posts look better than ones with a single, long post.
- *Link often.* Use links to provide details, examples, supporting evidence, and contrarian points of view.
- *Style.* Let your personality emerge. More so than e-books, newsletters, or special reports, there's an "entertainment" element to blogs. Your readers will enjoy your honest approach.
- *Multiple blogs.* Since blogs are easy to create and update, and inexpensive, consider multiple blogs for different market niches or purposes.

Customize your blog's URL

Sites like www.blogger.com or www.typepad.com create awkwardly long URLs. (My first was http://rogerparker.typepad.com/marketing_resources/.) *That's not a URL to mention during a radio interview!*

Instead, register a shorter, more memorable, URL as an *alias*. An alias transparently redirects visitors to the original URL. (In my case, I chose www.rcpmarketing.info.)

Conclusion

View blogs as tools that complement, rather than replace, e-mail and your existing website.

Roger C. Parker's blogs: www.rcpmarketing.info, www weblog.info, www.rcpevents.info, and www.rcpdesign.info. Roger's e-mail: rcpcom@aol.com.