

Adapting Blog Technologies To Corporate e-Newsletters

Every January, trade publications put out a list of predictions for the coming year. They discuss products, services and trends that they think will change the way business is done, labeling these “disruptive technologies.”

The idea of disruptive technologies comes from Clayton Christensen's 1997 book, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*. A disruptive technology is a method, procedure, skill, device, or material that redefines the competitive standards. Note that the technology doesn't have to be a physical item and that it often forces us to re-examine the way we work.

InfoWorld's list of disruptive technologies for 2003 included open source, self-service CRM, digital identity, and my personal favorite, Weblogs. How can a simple, Web-based journal be disruptive?

For starters, it's worth describing what a Weblog is. Basically, a Weblog or “blog” is a personally created, online, time-stamped web page that includes the thoughts, ideas, and comments of the “blogger.” The musings are usually brief, but they are published frequently and consistently. People can subscribe to receive the blog updates via e-mail. Often, the blogger is an expert on the subject he/she is discussing.

At first glance, it doesn't appear that blogs would be at all disruptive. So why all the hype? If we look closely at the structure and intent of blogs as a communications tool, we can see some powerful ideas at work.

Blogs are a direct, one-to-many vehicle for communicating ideas. They expand an individual's ability to communicate. They are fresh and timely. The blogger, in order to maintain interest, must communicate often. Blogs enable a single person to share ideas, insights, and useful knowledge with an audience. Thanks to the Web, the audience can be a global one.

Whenever a new tool or process—such as e-mail— expands communications, the effects are far-reaching and dramatic. Even though blogs have been around for 3-4 years, they could be the next big thing.

Blogs Are The “Real Voice”

Two important characteristics of blogs are that they are written by a person who is knowledgeable and passionate about the topic, and that they are written in a “real voice.” This is a cosmic shift from the marketing and public relations materials that are the staple of business communications.

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Often, when information goes through a formal marketing or PR process, the end result is an attractive, expensive, stale, diluted document written in corporate speak. This result is generally due to the processes that evolved to accommodate the costs and standards of print technology, rather than to the incompetence or malevolence of corporate communicators. The edge, the authenticity, and the voice of the professional speaking to his fellow professionals is lost.

Blogs offer the human voice that can be loud, controversial, and even wacky. But the realness of the blog inspires trust and piques people's curiosity. A blog can create a community and a dynamic discussion.

If you are a product manager working in the chemical products industry, chances are that you would rather hear about the real experiences of other product managers in your industry than read a glossy marketing piece put out by the marcom department. Blogs fit this communications requirement perfectly.

Blogs Are Simple

Weblogs are easy for people to publish, read and respond to. They can foster a community of like-minded individuals and be the catalyst for spirited discussions. Blogs are an inherently proactive form of communications. Weblog participants can subscribe to receive scheduled postings to the blog. Weblogs are inexpensive to produce and they can include a variety of multimedia content (audio, video, files, etc.) and hypertext links that add value to the discussion.

Blogs Empower The Individual

There are a host of tools on the Internet that make blogging a snap! Blogs empower a single person to capitalize on the reach and ubiquity of the Web. And they don't require the investment or recurring costs of print technologies.

Blogs Empower The Enterprise

Blogs empower the knowledgeable people within a company to share their insights, know-how, and expertise. The value to a corporation is that this knowledge can be organized, distributed, and leveraged to increase the value of different product and service offerings to the customer.

If a corporation is going to use a blog, however, it should understand that controlling the content of the discussion is difficult. If you want an authentic exchange, you have to be willing to accept the stone-throwing and critical comments that often occur in a blog. This requires extending trust and giving up some of the control a company would normally have when it publishes a press release or hosts its own online forum, for example. The upside is that people will listen to a real voice.

Adapting Blog Concepts To Your Newsletters

You can adapt blog technologies to your corporate electronic newsletters by taking advantage of the underlying concepts. You can, for example:

- Publish a small amount of well-organized information frequently and
- Regularly Include content from individuals who are knowledgeable and passionate about their work
- Make it easy for your employees to communicate directly in their own, human voice
- Respect the reader by making sure your e-newsletter provides value and that he/she wants to receive it.

E-newsletters geared towards educating a marketplace, rather than those focused on advertising or marketing, turn out to be particularly effective. E-newsletters offer an affordable, direct way for the experts in a company to communicate with an audience. This means that a product manager or an engineer can enhance the flow of information and make it more accessible to those who want it.

Think of your channel and the information needs of your partners. Your company has a wealth of information that would help them sell your products more effectively. There is much insight within your partner community that could be leveraged throughout the channel. And your technical experts and engineers have critical knowledge and understanding that everyone could utilize.

What's often missing is an easy way for the "know-how" keepers to capture their knowledge, organize it, and deliver it. The best e-newsletters are written in a real voice, not in corporate speak.

Two years ago, the book *The Cluetrain Manifesto* shook up the business community (see <http://www.cluetrain.com/book.html>). The revelation? That business is about humans. As *Wall Street Journal* columnist Thomas Petzinger Jr. writes in the foreword: "I was dumbstruck. There in a few pages, I read a startlingly concise summary of everything I'd seen in twenty-one years as a reporter, editor, bureau chief and columnist for my newspaper. The idea that business, at bottom, is fundamentally human. That engineering remains second-rate without aesthetics. That natural, human conversation is the true language of commerce. That corporations work best when the people on the inside have the fullest contact possible with people on the outside."

It turns out that the human "voice" is an underserved or ignored need. In a world of 6+ billion inhabitants, the individual craves to speak and to be heard.

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About Maarga

Maarga Systems, Inc. is a software company based in Iselin, New Jersey. Maarga offers comprehensive IT solutions to small and medium businesses with its strong product and services portfolio. Maarga acquired the kNEWS suite of products from Gallatin Technologies, Inc in 2007. Maarga Systems, Inc is a wholly owned subsidiary of Maarga Systems Private Limited, a leading offshore outsourcing firm, based in Chennai, India offering high quality custom application development, application maintenance and system administration services around the Lotus Notes, Domino platform. Maarga is an **IBM Business partner**.

Maarga's **kNEWS Service** is a pay-as-you-go, turnkey electronic newsletter service that enables businesses to communicate more effectively with channel partners. More information is available by calling (732) 917-4204 or by visiting <http://www.maargasystems.com/products/knews/kNEWSService.shtml>

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