

The SECRET POWER of BLOGGING

By Bruce C. Brown

Author of How to Use the Internet to Advertise, Promote and Market Your Business or Web Site — With Little or No Money



with foreword by Karen Jackie,
Principal and Chief Architect of Ideas and Execution
ContentRobot, LLC

**How to Promote and Market
Your Business, Organization,
or Cause with Free Blogs**

Foreword

ContentRobot



David Sifry, founder and CEO of Technorati (the recognized authority on what's happening on the World Wide Web), has been tracking the state of the blogosphere since October 2004. In his April 2007 report, he said that there are about 70 million blogs, which translates into about 120,000 new blogs each day or 1.4 new blogs every second. It took approximately 320 days to grow from 35 to 70 million blogs.

What does this mean? The blog is officially past its "proof of concept" stage and has gone beyond the realm of teenage diarists and armchair political pundits. Today, businesses of all sizes have caught on, and more and more include blogging in their marketing plans.

Launching a blog is pretty easy. There are few barriers, minimal starting costs, and lots of resources to help you get started. The benefits are many, as they provide an inexpensive way to get indexed highly in major search engines, be seen as an expert in your field, and allow visitors to spend time with your brand and learn more about you (and not a faceless company). It is also a great way to develop an online community while you get involved in valuable two-way communication with your customers and clients alike.

By blogging with customers and potential clients, small businesses can share best practices, test new products and ideas, offer superior customer services, and effectively communicate with anyone interested their offerings.

It is not too late for your small business blog to stand out among the competition, and this book offers you a detailed roadmap to get started.

Author Bruce C. Brown explains hosted blog packages, blogging platforms, writing posts, promoting your blog, and making money with your blog. Rounding out the extensive research is interviews with several professional bloggers and expert opinions to help you learn from those who have been in the trenches from the beginning.

The book, which is well-written and meticulous, is a very handy tool for those who are just thinking about developing (and maintaining) an effective blog for their business. Even if you have a limited budget and limited staff, you will love *The Secret Power of Blogging*.

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About ContentRobot

ContentRobot is a technology company committed to developing effectively designed and well-written business blogs and blog-powered Web sites. It enhances company Internet presences to build stronger brands, nurture client relationships, and enhance profitability.

The ContentRobot team is comprised of passionate technologists, designers, writers, and communicators who want to help you take your blogs to the next level.

About Karen

Karen has more than 17 years of successful writing experience and 10 years of Web expertise. She was manager and chief architect of Timex Corporation's first e-commerce web site (timex.com, launched in 1997) and an award-winning project director and account manager for two Connecticut-based Web companies.

For both corporations and small businesses alike, Karen has successfully developed a variety of brands, using both online and offline campaigns, with effective strategic planning,

information architecture, copywriting, Web site production, and marketing talents.

Karen holds a master's degree in business (with a technology focus) from Rensselaer at Hartford and has earned a BA in English from the University of Connecticut.

Blogging Profile, Case Studies, & Outsourcing

In this chapter, I bring you one of the most respected designers of blog or blog-powered Web sites, highlight their services and achievements through case studies, and provide insight into outsourcing your blog as an alternative to in-house blogging and blog development. I have chosen ContentRobot for their outstanding professional service and superior reputation.

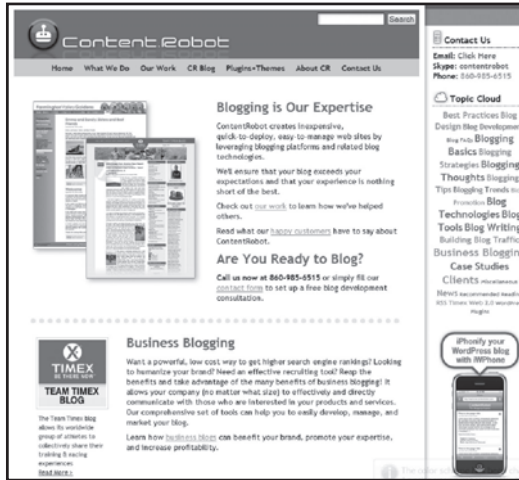
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ContentRobot provides all the services businesses need to develop an effective Internet presence. They specialize in business blogs

(this can mean any blog that focuses on a hobby to a full-blown corporate site or anything in between) or a blog-powered Web site. They use their vast award-winning experience to deliver results.



ContentRobot Case Studies

Bazaarvoice: Business Blog Design Complements Corporate Web Site

Purpose: Bazaarblog is the company blog for Bazaarvoice. This Austin, Texas, company develops outsourced technology, services, analytics, and expertise to encourage and harness word of mouth marketing and bring it closer to a company's brand and customer experience.

The blog allows Bazaarvoice to share ideas and thoughts with prospects, clients, partners, analysts, press, and marketers interested in improving online experience, conversion, and word of mouth. While Bazaarvoice had an initial blog presence, they sought ContentRobot to convert the blog from TypePad to WordPress with a new design and poise it for further growth.

Features: The WordPress platform offers Bazaarvoice a way to easily author the blog and manage comments to keep the conversation going. The new blog design stands alone, but is readily aligned with the Bazaarvoice brand.

The Bazaarblog readers can keep up with Bazaarvoice information, view Bazaarvoice's favorite Web sites and books, search for content, comment on the posts, sign-up for a newsletter, contact them with a handy form, and subscribe to the feed. On the back-end, Bazaarvoice tracks it all with Feedburner statistics and Performancing blog metrics.

Why It's Successful: This conversion of the site from TypePad to WordPress was a success. ContentRobot was able to take a basic blog, convert the existing content into the new format, and add a myriad of features so that Bazaarvoice can author and manage its new blog.

Beneath the Cover / Push the Key: Content + Technology

Purpose: Michael Drew sought ContentRobot to create the Push the Key blog and soon after asked us to help him develop its complementary blog-powered Web site, Beneath the Cover. These sites discuss the ins and outs of the publishing industry. Publishers, editors, designers, authors, and literary agents alike can find an abundance of articles that will help them do their jobs.

Go to BTC to read what its expert contributors have to say and go to PTK to see the response to those opinions. These sites will continue to evolve as each offers custom newsletters and RSS feed options, designed to allow readers to target the content they wish to receive on a regular basis.

Features: A key goal of both projects was to make it easy to find and read posts in a variety of ways. ContentRobot then integrated and (heavily) customized two WordPress themes so that several contributors, 75 categories, and hundreds of articles were displayed both logically and enticingly.

Visitors can navigate the sites via the dropdown menus, which show various topics at a glance. Readers can interact by adding comments and rating stories by simply clicking on “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” buttons and can read recommended blog posts from other Internet resources that round out the vast content.

The Push the Key blog features post titles that act as a great separator between stories and can be tailored to the content. The handy topic cloud shows off the depth of the content PTK offers.

Beneath the Cover is much less bloggy as it highlights its contributors and their expertise. Due to its sheer amount of content, BTC provides featured posts and customized category pages to help visitors navigate the site.

Why It’s Successful: These sites are building an impressive following with comments and interaction steadily on the increase. This initial success has attracted more contributors to write content for BTC, which makes these sites definitive resources for all things publishing.

Bite of the Best: Blog-Powered Web Site

Purpose: Bite of the Best is a tasty new blog-powered Web site that offers commentary about the “best” products you can find in your grocery stores. A true family affair, Bonnie Tandy Leblang, a nationally recognized food writer —along with her sons — write the content, while the Tandy sisters created the design.

ContentRobot implemented their vision using the WordPress blog platform and related technologies.

Features: Each week, visitors can read a “featured bite” and registered users can get involved in the site by adding their two cents (via comments) and rating products they’ve tried. Especially fun is that these users can enter a variety of contests to win free products, which include food products and kitchen gadgets. Fans can follow the blog along in an RSS reader or a newsletter, which is delivered to their inboxes each Wednesday.

BOTB readers are treated to lively and entertaining writing. However, behind the scenes, ContentRobot customized many WordPress elements to make the site function. Among the enhancements were optimizing the taxonomy so that the Tandys can easily categorize and showcase “bites” and marketplace items. Also, to keep the post’s design consistent, WordPress’s custom fields properly display the “factoids” or details of each product.

This site takes advantage of many external tools, such as:

- **Amazon:** Allows readers to easily purchase products at Amazon with BOTB’s affiliation
- **Feedblitz:** Readers can subscribe to a heavily customized, blog-driven newsletter, which is sent every Wednesday
- **Feedburner:** Provides feed tools and subscriber tracking
- **Google Analytics:** Site tracking tools and analysis
- **WordPress Plugins:** A variety of SEO tools and other updates were installed

- **Wufoo:** Allows BOTB to effortlessly create online forms and allows readers to enter contests

Why It's Successful: Bite of the Best is able to easily publish interesting content for its readers and provide a great place for food manufacturers to promote their products. The number of subscribers continues to rise on this new blog-powered Web site. Building on its success, BOTB will be offering even more for its readers, including recipes.

GrokDotCom: Newsletter to Blog Conversion

Purpose: GrokDotCom, published by the Conversion Rate Specialists, Future Now, is an award-winning newsletter that contains plain spoken and refreshingly irreverent content that helps their clients develop and maintain Web sites that persuade their visitors to act.

Future Now wanted to convert its existing newsletter, which resided on a proprietary software, and Movable type blog onto the more flexible WordPress blog platform. Now GrokDotCom features articles and posts written by Future Now authors, along with an extensive “blended” RSS feed of industry news.

Readers can learn more about online conversion rates, accountable multi-channel marketing, and Web analytics by reading the blog, subscribing to it via RSS, or receiving daily, weekly, or monthly newsletter content into their e-mail inboxes.

Features: ContentRobot customized the two-column WordPress theme to display the latest articles, blog posts, announcements, and events on the home page. At a glance, visitors can click to the “Persuasion Architect” posts and check out the GrokDotCom calendar. Readers can dig deeper to the posts and interact with

the Future Now experts by adding their own comments and insights.

Behind the scenes, much attention was paid to search engine optimization to get the best search engine placement for the sheer volume of content that this blog steadily publishes. ContentRobot installed and configured Tag Warrior, SEO Title Tag, and Google Sitemaps, among others.

ContentRobot also customized three newsletter templates for those readers who prefer to get the Grok content in their e-mail boxes. Each aggregates different content feeds for different timeframes (daily, weekly, and monthly).

Why It's Successful: ContentRobot was able to bring together several sources of content and pour them into a single content management system. The resulting converted site is easy to use and the content is accessible in many ways. GrokDotCom appreciates the simplicity of adding, categorizing, and tagging content in their WordPress-driven site. Sending out the newsletters, which was a time consuming and manual process, has now been mercifully automated – saving time and money to get word out to the masses.

New School Selling: Blog-Powered Web Site and Newsletter

Purpose: New School Selling sought a new Web site because it was moving away from its “Sales Warrior” model toward a new branding effort, along with recently expanded products and services. To build a cost-effective, feature-laden site, ContentRobot developed the NSS Web presence using blogging software as its platform – or created a blog-powered Web site.

By implementing WordPress and a variety of plug-ins, the

redesigned NSS Web site not only offers detailed information about their training courses and products, but it includes a blog and a newsletter – so that NSS’s readers can stay informed about New School Selling and its offerings.

Features: Visitors can learn New School Selling’s sales philosophy and why the old methods of selling either don’t work or are increasingly becoming less effective.

Readers can discover (and purchase) the variety of training that NSS offers, from in-house seminars to weekly telecourses. The event calendar allows readers to see at a glance where owner Steve Clark is teaching or when the telecourses are being held. Behind the scenes, maintaining the schedule is as easy as writing a post.

Subscribers can keep track of entire blogs via an RSS newsreader. Readers not familiar with RSS, or who prefer to receive information via e-mail, can get the latest posts in their inbox by signing up for the newsletter. Existing newsletter readers were simply converted to the new blog-driven newsletter technology without disruption of their subscription.

Why It’s Successful: The former flat, one-way Web site has been transformed into an interactive one, where visitors can learn about NSS and get more involved in the company. At a glance, the event calendar keeps readers up-to-date and aware of NSS happenings. The blog is where readers can get information about sales and the selling process and are encouraged to exchange ideas.

Shop.org: Membership Blogging

Purpose: Shop.org is an association that is comprised of interactive

executives from more than 500 nationally recognized retail brands (both big and small). They participate to share information, lessons learned, new perspectives, insights, and intelligence about online and multichannel retailing.

To extend their diverse community online, Shop.org wanted to develop a blog where their members could write about their expertise and experiences to spur lively conversation (perhaps even a bit of a debate) to uncover best practices and solutions that work.

The blog focuses on topics such as affiliate programs, analytics, IT, marketing and consumer trends, e-commerce, search engine marketing, Web 2.0, and user-generated content. All Shop.org members are encouraged to write as many stories as they wish and to comment freely on others' posts.

Features: ContentRobot designed a clean and stylish two-column WordPress theme to compliment the Shop.org logo. They also incorporated the association's primary colors (red, grey, and white) and other visual cues from the main Web site for the overall look.

The Shop.org blog's motto is "By the Member, For the Member" and this is best illustrated by prominently listing its contributors in the right column. Authors have their own RSS feeds so members can subscribe to any contributor or get the entire blog's content RSS feed as well.

ContentRobot worked closely with the Shop.org team to create blogging guidelines and specific corporate policies that detailed who can post, how comments would be handled, and how members join the blog.

Why It's Successful: Since its launch, the Shop.org members have

been busy getting trained on how to blog effectively. No longer hindered by location and time, they expect greater content and discussion to be generated in 2007 and beyond.

Team Timex Blog: Athlete Blogging

Purpose: The Team Timex Blog was developed to provide a comprehensive forum for 45 blogging athletes.

Visitors can follow the athletes as they train and compete all over the world in triathlons and other events that feature biking, swimming, and running. The bloggers educate and entertain readers about life as a Timex athlete on their tours.

Features: Each Timex-sponsored athlete authors their own blog and has their own newsfeed. This way, blog subscribers can keep track of an entire blog or any one of their favorite athletes. Readers not familiar with RSS can sign up for a newsletter and get the latest posts in their inbox.

Visitors can learn all about diet and nutrition, family life, training regimens, and even injuries from the athlete's perspective. Readers can also easily see where they are racing with the calendar of events — and come back to see how the Timex racers performed with overall race results and personal race reports.

The blog uses the WordPress platform and has several supporting plugins to extend the functionality. Timex tracks it all with Feedburner and Performancing metrics.

Why It's Successful: With a minimum of training, several athletes are already publishing some great posts — even with great supporting imagery.

ContentRobot was able to work with Timex to develop a blog

that is appropriate for its communication style, in addition to determining the editorial/taxonomy considerations, configuring the software, and creating a branded design.

Outsourcing Versus In-House Blog Development

If you want to start a blog for your small business but you do not have the expertise, time, personnel, or other resources, you should consider outsourcing part or all of its development. The pros can help you brainstorm key strategies, provide the best-in-class solutions, and fill in the gaps for any technical, design, editorial, and marketing needs for both the short term and the long haul.

Your blog team, not unlike your Web team, needs to have these common skills to build a successful blog. Is your team missing any? If so, consider getting some outside help.

Design

First impressions count. People will form an opinion on your blog in 1/20 of a second. While you can use a default template or perhaps get one for free, realize that there are limitations. Whatever approach you follow, make sure your blog's design appropriately reflects your company, brand, and mission. To create a branded template, the key skills your team needs are:

- **Photoshop expertise:** Basic graphic design skills are paramount for image creation and photo editing
- **User Interface development:** Know how to create an overall effective blog design layout (where the navigation is most effective, where to place advertising, etc.)

- **Usability:** Creating a design that is inherently usable, not just cool
- **CSS:** Working with style sheets allows you to enhance your blog's look and feel (including colors, font, and table properties) and go beyond basic blogging templates

Technical

Do you manage your Web site? Do you know what FTP and MySQL are? While installing software could take five minutes, you may not have time to play resident geek to configure your blog the way you need it to work. Small businesses might not want to worry that their blog needs a database; they just want to know that they can easily post stories to their blogs. Here is what the tech team, at a minimum, should know how to do:

- **Server setup:** Knowledge of PHP, SQL, UNIX, Apache, and RSS
- **Blog setup:** Can install and configure blog software and related components (plugins, modules, and widgets)
- **Blog management:** Can administer backend functionality, such as user registration, handling comments, and RSS feeds
- **Advanced functionality:** Add and tweak blog functionality, including forums, contact forms, comments and trackbacks, newsletters, and e-commerce
- **PHP programming:** Often custom programming is required if you want to display content in a specific way other than reverse chronology

Marketing

If you build a blog, will they come? Not necessarily. Along with fantastic content, you have to know how to attract visitors (and build readership) with a variety of online and offline techniques so they keep coming back. From blog post techniques to search engine optimization and the best social networking/ Web 2.0 practices, the pros can position your blog appropriately. Your marketers will need to know:

- **Search engine optimization:** Add keywords, descriptions, and tags to your blog posts and pages
- **Search engine marketing:** Get your site listed in major search engines (Yahoo, Google) and blog directories (Technorati, Ice Rocket)
- **Blog advertising and affiliates:** Determine what programs are available (i.e., AdSense), know which ones make sense for your site, and how to effectively implement them
- **Online techniques:** Create press releases, blog commenting strategies, banner advertising campaigns, and more
- **Offline promotion methods:** Simple things like adding your blog address to your business card and your e-mail signature will help publicize your blog

The Benefits of Working with a Blog Development Company

Your blog developers can help you determine your short- and long-term goals and help you meet them. They can help you

strategize technical considerations (like hosting plans) to great blog design (2- or 3-column templates) to content development (topics and categories).

Content Approach

The easiest way to build success is to create lots of killer blog posts and have lots of great ideas in the wings. The hardest part is keeping it up and not getting discouraged with the inevitable writer's block. Your blog development company can help you establish topics and offer ideas for blog growth. A blog developer can help you brainstorm topics, create an editorial calendar, and assist with any imagery and HTML needs.

Cultivate Relationships

Do you know how to build relationships with key bloggers? Do you have a link strategy? Can you establish a comments policy that encourages visitor interaction? Get some help to seek out partnerships and evangelists — it is amazing how these connections can pay off in unexpected ways.

Intangible Skills

Your blog consultant will become your best ally in maintaining your blog. They can help by staying abreast of the latest blogging techniques and technologies to make sure your blog is up-to-date, provide technical support, and be your biggest cheerleader.

Finding a Reputable Blog Vendor

There are several ways you can find a reputable blog vendor. Similar to finding a dentist, try to:

Internet Search

Enter “blogging expert” or “blog-powered Web sites” in your favorite search engine.

Friends and Colleagues

Ask anyone in your personal and professional circles if anyone has experience working with blog developers. It is great to work with someone you already know.

Referrals

See some blogs you like? Contact the company and find out who did their blog. Happy clients are always willing to share their experiences with a certain vendor.

Then check out their Web site/blog to read more about them, check out some case studies, and contact them to talk more about your project. Your initial consultation should be at no cost. Remember, too, that some vendors may not be ready to provide prices on the phone or offer packages, due to the custom work they perform.



Blog is short for weblog. A weblog is a journal (or type of newsletter) that is updated often and intended for the general public. Blogs generally represent the personality of the author or the Web site. In July 2006 the Pew Internet & American Life Project estimated that the US "blog population has grown to about 12 million American adults", some 8% of US adult internet users. The number of US blog readers was estimated at 57 million adults (39% of the US online population).

If you have a product, service, brand or cause that you want to inexpensively market online to the world then you need to look into starting a blog. Blogs are ideal marketing vehicles. You can use them to share your expertise, grow market share, spread your message and establish yourself as an expert in your field, for virtually no cost. A blog helps your site to rank higher in the search engines. This is because Google and the other search engines use blogs because of their constantly updated content.

Tiny one person part time businesses use blogs as well as companies like Microsoft, Apple, Nike, General Motors, Amazon.com, Yahoo. Most Fortune 1000 firms are using responsible Blogs and Blog marketing as well as advertising on blogs for one simple reason, It works! And it generates profits immediately and consistently! In addition many blogs earn additional revenue by selling advertising space on their niche targeted blog.

In this new ground-breaking book you will learn how to create top-notch Blog marketing campaigns, how to build stronger customer relationships, generate new qualified leads and sales, learn insider secrets to build your readership list quickly.



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