

Do You Blog?

Maximize your Web presence by showcasing your expertise.

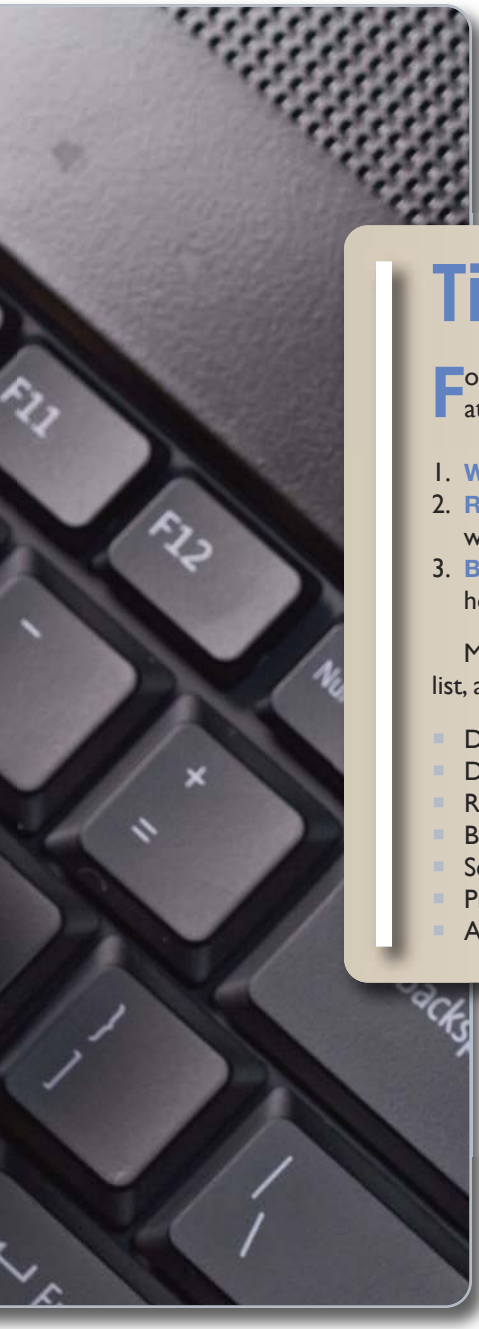
By Lin Grensing-Pophal

In 2004 Ted Demopoulos, a consultant, speaker and author of Blogging for Business, started a blog, he says, as "an experiment." He'd been reading blogs for a few years – since about 2000 – and was very familiar with them. So he put one posting "out there," as a "kind of joke" just to see what would happen.

"I didn't expect anything to happen very quickly," he recalls. "But literally overnight my search engine results were greatly enhanced. I was shocked. Within the first month the traffic to my Web site doubled."

Demopoulos has been a consultant since 1990, and says his blog "has helped my consulting business extensively." Blogging, says Demopoulos, has "helped me sell keynote speeches, consulting and training and has absolutely gotten me new clients." In addition, he says, "It has enlarged my footprint with existing clients by showcasing my range of expertise."

You've probably heard about blogging and have a general idea that it involves some sort of Internet-based



Tips for Bloggers

For Toastmasters who are considering their own blogs, Katherine Smith, who runs a blog at **www.katherine-smith.com**, offers three pieces of advice:

1. **Write regularly.** "I haven't kept up with it the way I should," she admits.
2. **Remember that anyone can read it.** "Don't disclose anything in your blog that you wouldn't disclose to a room full of strangers."
3. **Be specific.** "If your blog is about team-building, don't suddenly write about wage and hour laws."

Margaret Graziano, founder and CEO of KeenHire, an HR consulting practice, adds to this list, and advises the following:

- Do not use your blog as a self-promotional or advertising tool.
- Do not link to gossipers and stay away from complainers.
- Remember that "like attracts like" – be where the positive energy is flowing.
- Be conscientious about spelling and grammar – your credibility is at stake.
- Seek out and link to powerful people.
- Practice good etiquette – be gracious and practice reciprocity.
- Acknowledge people for their input, advice, introductions and referrals.

communication. Or perhaps you've already discovered some of the benefits of blogging and are using these benefits to your advantage – either as a visitor or as the author of your own blog.

But if you want to broaden your understanding of the phenomenon of "blogging," here are the basics:

What Is Blogging?

Blogs – more appropriately and formally called "Web logs" – are ongoing, informal communications about topics of interest. One estimate claims more than 10 *million* blogs in the United States alone. Why the proliferation? Because they are easy and inexpensive to create. Vlogging – a relatively new term – has cropped up to refer to video blogs, a concept popularized by sites like YouTube.

Bill Ives is the co-author, along with Amanda Watlington, of *Business Blogs: A Practical Guide*. While researching the book, Ives interviewed 70 successful bloggers. Blogs, says Ives, offer a number of benefits. They:

- Create a searchable archive of content where every entry has a unique URL, which makes it easier to find through Google or other search engines.
- Promote ongoing, dynamic communication.
- Promote transparency – they can be open to the entire world, or they can be password-protected to allow access to only a specific audience.
- "Level the playing field" in terms of marketing communication. There are a number of cases, says Ives, where "individual consultants or small businesses were able to gain tremendous traction and visibility in the Internet through their blogs."
- Are very inexpensive to create – even free. Costs range from hosted blogs that cost nothing to blogs that are more expensive and offer a variety of features. In any case, says Ives, a blog is less expensive than a traditional Web site.

Getting Started

When considering whether a blog would make sense for you, it really comes down to two very simple – yet critical – questions:

1. Do you have something to say?
2. Does anyone care?

Blogs on Public Speaking

There are plenty of blogs about public speaking, says Jorge Olson, Toastmaster, entrepreneur and consultant. To find and keep up to date on them, he suggests that Toastmasters go to "Google alerts" and ask to be notified on "public speaking." Then, he says: "Every time someone – anyone in the world – adds something to their blogs about public speaking you will get an e-mail with the link."

"One site I encourage everyone to visit is Garr Reynolds' Presentation Zen blog," says Laurent Duperval, president of Duperval Consulting in Montreal and a Toastmaster – **http://presentationzen.blogs.com**.

This blog is required reading for anyone who uses PowerPoint, he says. "His views on presentation and design have revolutionized the way I think of a PowerPoint slide," says Duperval. "I used to suffer from 'bulletitis,' because I was too lazy and ignorant to do anything better," he says. "Today my slides no longer contain bullets and they have become very visual – I no longer use PowerPoint as a crutch, but, instead, to enhance the emotional content of my message."

Meredith O'Connor, marketing/communications director for Bates Communications, Inc., in Wellesley, Massachusetts, recommends **www.thepowerspeakerblog.com**, from Suzanne Bates, author of *Speak Like a CEO: Secrets For Commanding Attention and Getting Results*. "Suzanne writes her blog about communications and speaking skills, examples of great speakers and leadership," says O'Connor.

Anyone interested in conducting more effective meetings and presentations should frequent the blog: **www.openingkeynote.com**, says Jeff Davidson, of Breathing Space Institute, in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Jorge Olson includes a directory of the best public-speaker blogs on his Web site: **http://jorgeolson.com/public-speaking-and-blogs**.

If you answered "yes" to both of those questions, here's how you can get started:

Get to Know What Blogs Are All About

Spend some time reading blogs, suggests Demopoulos. The content of those blogs could be virtually anything, but he advises, "Spend some time concentrating on your industry and your area of expertise."

How to find blogs? Here are two helpful search engines: (see sidebar) **www.technorati.com** and **www.blogdigger.com**.

Find Your "Voice"

"You want to have a consistent topic that's directly aligned to your business strategy and what you want to be known for," says Ives. Focus is key. "You should have a title that's reflective of what you're trying to do and a very brief purpose statement that says 'here's the purpose of this blog,' so people can see that quite readily."

And, he adds, "You want to post fairly frequently. It doesn't have to be every day, but several times a week or at least on some consistent basis so people can anticipate. The more frequently you can do it, the more likely you are to attract a loyal following."

Make It Easy to Find You

"One error I see people make a lot is that they start a blog and no one can find it," says Demopoulos. "I strongly recommend that people have a link to their blog from their Web site. It sounds obvious, but it's amazing how many people don't do this."

Demopoulos also recommends including your blog in your e-mail signature. His, for instance, reads:

> Ted Demopoulos, Consultant and Professional Speaker
> Demopoulos Associates
> **www.demop.com**
> Visit The Ted Rap Blog at **www.demop.com/thetedrap/**

Avoid Hype

While there are certainly bloggers whose objective is to generate business, that is not always – nor should it be – the main objective. In fact, says Margaret Graziano, founder and CEO of KeenHire, a human resources consulting practice, "If you use it as a forum for self-promotion or advertising, you've missed the boat and will alienate people." Graziano is a prolific blogger herself and says her blog is invaluable in her business, but she cautions that having a blog is not about "just doing it" – it is about *doing it right*.

Blog Appropriately

Like any form of public communication, blogs can create problems. "If you start saying bad things about people, they can react and you can get into wars," warns Ives. "Certainly you don't want to do anything that's

libelous or slanderous." And you don't want to infringe on someone else's copyright by posting information that you haven't created with appropriate permission and credit.

Because of the power of blogs and how quickly information is disseminated, says Ives, some people have gotten into trouble. "They're not always aware of the transparency and exposure. Your words can be all over the world very quickly."

How To Do It Right

Chakisse Newton is a speaker, consultant and executive speech coach. She's been a Toastmaster since 2003 and, in 2005, was a finalist in the Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking. As a speech coach and a marketing consultant who helps companies develop and communicate their key messages through blogs and other marketing channels, Newton says she has observed several key areas where speakers misuse their blogs. The top three, she says, are:

- **They forget that speaking is a "contact sport."** While writing and contributing to blogs can be useful, she says, ultimately true improvement comes only from time spent on the platform practicing what you've learned. "Too many speakers become so cerebral about techniques for audience involvement and the like that they abandon the one sure-fire way to become a better speaker: stage time."
- **They don't know that successful blogging is about more than writing; it's about creating a forum for dialogue and a sense of community.** "The best blogs are those that provide valuable information and also ask readers to comment and provide their insights," says

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Newton. So many competing resources provide a one-way channel of information that any blog or resource that fosters community will stand out from the rest, she says. This can be accomplished through forums, comments or just soliciting general feedback. Newton notes that, recently, a Toastmaster from Dubai successfully used the Toastmasters network on LinkedIn to request feedback on a blog.

- **They start blogs without doing their homework.** "Despite all the hype around Web 2.0, not everyone needs a blog," she says. For those who do have value to add, Newton suggests asking the following questions before moving forward:

  - Who is the target audience for my blog?
  - What unique voice or point of view do I have to offer?
  - How will I build my following so people actually find the value that I provide?

Katherine Smith is an independent consultant who runs a blog at **www.katherine-smith.com**. Smith had been reading blogs for a few years and says she was "bored by a lot of the content – it wasn't tactical enough for me." So she decided to start her own blog and timed it along with her venture into consulting.

Starting a blog is not hard to do. Smith bought a domain name through her Internet provider and took advantage of a hosted service – **Wordpress.com** – rather than hosting her own blog. "The truth is, unless you're drawing significant amounts of Web traffic, you probably don't need to host your own blog," she says. Another hosted service she recommends as a good starting place is **blogger.com**.

Of course, it depends on your objectives. Jorge Olson is an entrepreneur, consultant, keynote speaker and author of *The Unselfish Guide to Self Promotion*. Olson is also a Toastmaster and believes that public speaking is one of the most effective tools for business, family and life. While Olson also recommends WordPress – which is free – he prefers to host his blog himself, noting that this will generate more traffic and better Google rankings.

"Do you have something to say? Does anyone care?"

Penny Sansevieri, author of *Red Hot Internet Publicity* (Sourcebooks, 2009) and CEO of Author Marketing Experts, Inc., specializes in Internet publicity and recommends that Toastmasters interested in establishing a blog use the following ideas to help build credibility:

- Become a filter – the go-to person for your area of expertise. People love filters and when you're a filter, you're considered an expert, Sansevieri says.
- Use your blog to review books or products in your industry.
- Interview other professionals and turn your blog into a resource.
- Blog on current trends. Keeping your finger on the pulse of what's going on will show that you are in touch with your market.

Blog frequently – a minimum of twice a week. That way you keep your blog current and people will continue to read it, becoming more engaged in your message, says Sansevieri.

If You Build It… They Do Not Necessarily Come

Of course, as with Web sites, just having a blog is not enough. Awareness needs to be created to generate visitors. That can be done in a number of simple ways:

- Include your blog address on your letterhead and other business communication materials.
- Add information about your blog to your e-mail signature.
- Include a prominent link to your blog on your Web site.
- *Talk* about your blog at networking events, professional meetings, etc.

Above all, keep it fresh and meaningful. Bloggers who rise to the top of the list in the blogosphere are those who consistently deliver meaningful and valuable content to a specific target audience that finds the information so compelling, they keep coming back for more.

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