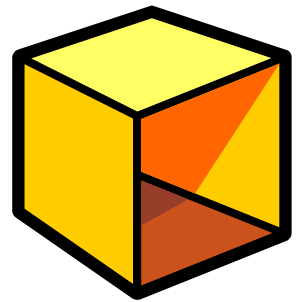


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**Shadowbox
Studios**
Price, Quality, Speed



Corporate Blogging 101:

Step-by-step Instruction for Successful Corporate Blogging

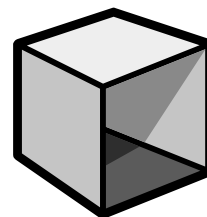
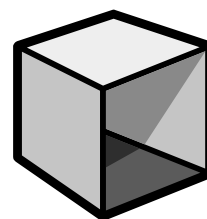


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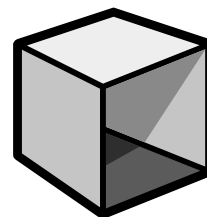
Introduction

Back in the early days of the World Wide Web (circa 1995), I had a personal website that I used as an online diary. At the time, I had no idea that keeping an online diary (blog) would be the next BIG thing in ten years. To be honest, my online diary didn't last very long. It wasn't that I didn't have anything interesting to say - it's just that it was such a pain to keep the site updated. Every update required me to take the content of the journal post that I had written in Word and wrap it with html, the language used to create websites, so that it had the same look and feel as the rest of the website. Once I had the html in place, I then had to upload it to its proper folder on the server via file transfer protocol. After the novelty wore off, I realized that I just wasn't dedicated enough to keeping an online journal.

Well, here we are roughly ten years later and the developments in web technology are such that it is now extremely easy to keep an online journal. This ease of use has made it wildly popular. According to [Technorati](#), a popular blog search engine, the blogosphere is doubling in size every 5 and a half months - it is now over 60 times bigger than it was 3 years ago. Moreover, on average, a new weblog is created every second of every day and 13.7 million bloggers are still posting 3 months after their blogs are created. That's a ton of blogging activity.

Unfortunately, this type of activity creates and fuels the kind of hype that we saw during the internet bubble of the late 90's that brought with it a complete loss of business perspective and loads of questionable information spewed out by internet charlatans looking for a quick buck. It is because of all of this hype that I thought it was necessary to develop a white paper that does three simple things:

- define blogging
- address its importance as a business activity
- provide step by step instructions on how to set up a corporate blog



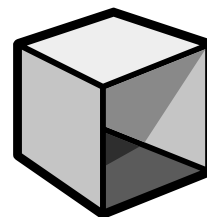
If you have any questions or comments you can always reach me via email – pat@shadowbox.com or through my blog – <http://corpblog.shadowbox.com>

Enjoy,



Patrick Dodd
Partner Shadowbox Studios

Email: pat@shadowbox.com
Corporate blog: <http://corpblog.shadowbox.com/>
Phone: 602/692.9789
AIM: Doddster98



Definition – What is a Blog?

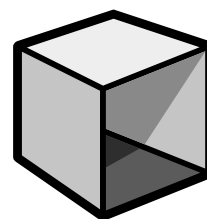
According to [Wikipedia](#), a **blog** is a [website](#) in which journal entries are posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order. The term blog is a shortened form of **weblog** or **web log**. Authoring a blog, maintaining a blog or adding an article to an existing blog is called “blogging”. Individual articles on a blog are called “blog posts,” “posts” or “entries”. A person who posts these entries is called a “blogger”. A blog comprises [hypertext](#), [images](#), and links (to other web pages and to [video](#), [audio](#) and other files). Blogs use a [conversational](#) style of [documentation](#). Often blogs focus on a particular “area of interest”, such as [Washington, D.C.’s](#) political goings-on. Some blogs discuss personal experiences.

What is a business blog?

Over the past year blogs have evolved from simple online journals to an effective medium for augmenting your corporate communications. Personal blogging has led to popular “media” blogs that are produced by journalists, experts, columnists and pundits. These are often referred to as “professional” blogs. In the last few years, blogging has caught on as a communication vehicle within the corporate business world. A couple of years ago [Jon Udell](#) offered this definition (since removed from his blog) for both Professional and Corporate blogs:

- 1.To promote yourself, your company, or (typically) both at the same time.
- 2.To influence the thinking of people inside and outside your organization.
- 3.To communicate directly with customers.
- 4.To advertise aspects of your internal process that are not proprietary, and that can benefit from the collaborative energy that a blog can attract.

Three years later this is still an accurate definition of a Corporate Blog.



Types of Corporate Blogs

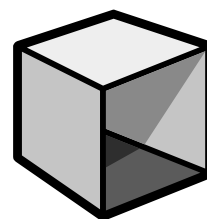
There are basically two types of corporate blogs – internal and external – depending on the intended audience. External blogs are targeted at people outside the organization are most commonly used to facilitate communication with clients, customers and/or partners of the business. External blogs usually fall into three broad categories – sales, customer relationship management (CRM) and branding. Internal blogs, on the other hand, are used to improve internal communications by delivering timely information, facilitating employee collaboration and enabling knowledge transfer.

Why is blogging important to my business?

Whether you know it or not, your customers, partners, competitors, and employees are already having online conversations. They're talking about the latest news/developments in your industry. They're talking about the new product release just announced by one of your competitors and if they haven't mentioned it already they will definitely be talking about that customer service screw up you thought you could sweep under the rug. Markets on the internet *are* conversations, and blogging gets you noticed and referenced in your industry's conversation.

In addition to helping you create new business relationships and nurture long time partnerships, effective blogging can also give you better exposure on the internet by improving your search engine ranking.

Keep in mind that blogging is not a miracle cure. That is to say that blogging in and of itself will not marginally benefit your business. However, when blogging is incorporated into your overall marketing and communications plan you will see an increase in visitors to your website as well as an increase in real conversations you have with potential customers.



But isn't this just a fad?

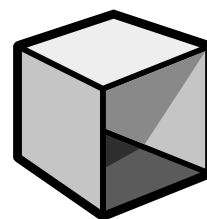
I often hear business people question whether or not "blogging" is something that is going to last. Certainly there is a great deal of hype surrounding the growth and potential benefits of the technology that blogging represents. If you remove the spectacular growth and the technology and look at the core activity of blogging, it becomes apparent that this isn't really a fad at all. It's just a new way of talking about an activity every business already engages in when communicating with the market. That activity is, talking to your market about what your business is up to right now.

Is it too late for me to start blogging?

Many technologies only offer early adopters the advantage in the market. As the technology becomes more mainstream the benefit of the technology diminishes drastically or disappears. Since business blogging is really a communications activity the more business that are engaged in it the more valuable it becomes for everyone. The only downside of being "late to the party" for your business is that some other business may have already carved out a prominent voice in your industry's conversation. But like real conversations, corporate blogging conversations are about ideas the industry is concerned with today. A credible and thoughtful new comer can have a great deal of influence on any conversation if their ideas are interesting enough.

Starting your blog

When I started blogging I just jumped in with both feet. It was great fun but I do have a few scars from mistakes I could have avoided. So before you start shooting from the hip like I did, I'd like to offer the following step-by-step approach to ensure that you get started off on the right foot.



Step 1 - Establish guidelines for your corporate blog

You might be thinking that since you going to be the only one authorized to post on the corporate blog that you needn't have a formal company policy for blogging. This is a huge mistake in my opinion. I say this because it is more likely than not that some of your employees already have their own blogs and will, if they haven't already, make posts about their work. Trust me, it is much better to take a proactive approach rather than waiting to see if a potential conflict arises.

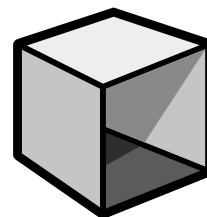
[Hill and Knowlton](#), a PR/Advertising company, has some of the best [guidelines](#) that I have come across. Here is a sample of their guidelines:

In connection with any blogging, please be mindful of the following:

- *Most weblogs publish RSS feeds that others can subscribe to, so remember that others, including your colleagues, may be actively reading what you write.*
- *Think of what you say in your weblog in the same way as statements you might make to the media, or emails you might send to people you don't know. If you wouldn't include it in those, don't post it on your weblog.*
- *Never disclose any information – including textual or visual material – that is confidential or proprietary to Hill & Knowlton, or any third party that has disclosed information to us (e.g. clients, journalists, suppliers, etc.). Your existing contract in any case prohibits this.*
- *There are many things that we cannot mention as a publicly-owned company. Talking about our revenue, future plans, or the WPP share price will get you and Hill & Knowlton in legal trouble, even if it is just your own personal view, and whether or not you directly identify yourself as an employee of Hill & Knowlton.*
- *You should make it clear that the views you express are yours alone. You may want to use the following form of words on your weblog, weblog posting, or website: The views expressed on this [blog; website] are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer*

Step 2 - Read, read and read some more before you write your first blog

Reading what other corporate bloggers are writing can provide you with basic corporate blogging guidelines and spur ideas for future blogging topics. You can find potentially interesting corporate blogs by going to blog specific search engines such as [Google Blog Search](#) and [Technorati](#). When you do find an interesting blog take a look



through the sites it has listed in its blogroll. More likely than not, an interesting site has interesting sites in its blogroll.

Step 3 – Write with passion and sincerity

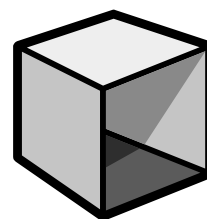
The quickest way to kill a blog is to use it as another way to distribute company press releases and white papers. It is appropriate to refer to whitepapers and press releases, but these posts are the exception and not the rule. The purpose of your blog is to engage your markets in conversation and the best way to start a conversation is to be sincere and honest in your blog while writing about things that are important to you and to your business. You want to be interesting and approachable and talking about your interests helps do that. Corporate speak wont get you far in the Blogosphere.

Step 4 – Be specific (focus on a niche)

Personal blogs are really all over the map when it comes to the topics that individuals talk about. That's just their nature. Corporate blogs, however, should stick to a handful of categories or topics. This is not to say that you shouldn't be personal in your blog posts because you should, but the people you are trying to reach don't want to read through your blog if it is interspersed with personal ramblings about your daughter's day care problems.

Publishing your Blog

Now that you know how to get started on the writing, let's talk about how to setup your blog online, To start blogging, you need to have access to [blogging software](#) - specialized software that runs on a web server (not on your local computer). You have three options - the hosted service, the self-hosted packages and the Shadowbox Studios Solution.

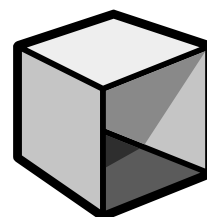


Service Type	Time to get started	Technical know how required	Brand Integrity Maintained	Maximum functionality	Cost
Hosted Services	5 minutes	No	No	No	Mostly Free
Self-Hosted	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Shadowbox Solution	As little as 1 week	No	Yes	Yes	\$14.95/month

Hosted Services

Hosted services are great for people that don't have a dedicated [web hosting](#) solution and want to get started blogging quickly. Some of the hosted services available include [WordPress](#), [Blogger](#), [LiveJournal](#), [TypePad](#) and [Xanga](#). The main advantages for going with hosted services are 1) you never have to worry about technical maintenance of your blog, 2) you can get up and running within minutes of signing up for an account and 3) most of these services are free. Although all of this sounds well and good, there are some disadvantages to using hosted services.

The major disadvantage in using a hosted service is that you give up some brand autonomy and lose control over what you can do with your blog in terms of the root functionality of the software. By giving up brand autonomy I mean not being able to accurately match the look and feel of your corporate website and having your blog URL look something like http://your_blog_name.blogspot.com/ rather than http://your_blog_name.yourdomain.com/, which is akin to having the following corporate URL - <http://superhosting.com/~yourcompanyname/>. If you saw the value in having your own domain name for your corporate website, then you should see the value of extending your online brand to encompass your blog. After all, your corporate blog is (or should be) just an extension of your corporate website.



Self-Hosted

This solution is for those that have Web hosting available (or are willing to purchase hosting) and feel that the benefits of having your corporate blog under your brand umbrella outweigh the drawbacks of maintaining your own blog installation. Self-hosted blog software packages include [Movable Type](#), [WordPress](#), and [Textpattern](#).

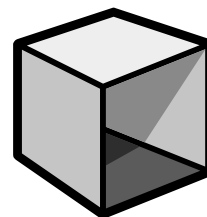
Please keep in mind that the self-hosted packages will require you to perform installation and maintenance tasks. Some web hosting companies have made the installation process a little easier, allowing one-click installation from a browser-based control panel. Check with your hosting company to see if this functionality is available to you. Like hosted services, these packages may be offered free of charge, or for a fee, depending on the package you select and its intended use.

Shadowbox Solution

This solution combines the ease of use and worry free maintenance found in the “hosted service” solution with the autonomy and brand integrity of a self-hosted solution. We accomplish this by hosting your blog on our servers using WordPress as the software that powers your blog. Shadowbox Studios can even help you customize the look and feel of your blog to match that of your website and ensure that your blog and website are seamlessly integrated.

We choose to use WordPress because it is one of the most mature, powerful and versatile blog software packages on the market. Shadowbox has been using WordPress to power our corporate blog for the past eighteen months and have been thoroughly impressed, which is why we use it exclusively for our hosted solution.

If you are interested in learning more about the Shadowbox Hosted solution and whether it matches your blogging objectives, please feel free to [contact us](#) directly.



Getting noticed

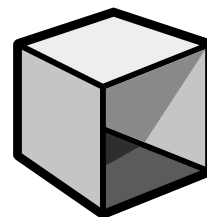
You've done your homework and you are writing some great content. The problem is that no one knows you exist. Blogs are about creating conversation and if no one visits your blog then there isn't likely much conversation going on. Here are a few tips that will help you start generating traffic to your blog.

Don't forget about traditional marketing communications

If all you have in your marketing communications tool belt is your corporate blog, then the likelihood of realizing your objectives is going to be almost nil. While blogging can be an effective way to start conversations with people interested in what you have to sell, it is by no means to be viewed as a stand alone strategy. Your blog is most effective when it is integrated with your other online communications activities such as press releases, white papers and company website.

Comment and Trackback

There is more to blogging than simply cranking out blog posts. To really join the blogging community you need to post intelligent comments in other people's blogs and use the trackback functionality when you refer to a post someone else made in one of your blog posts. Remember, the goal of your blog is to engage your market in conversation. When you post a comment or use the trackback functionality you are throwing your two cents into the conversation. As a bonus, your URL will be listed in the comment and trackback section thus giving other people the opportunity to browse through your blog and improving your search engine rankings. Unfortunately, both comments and trackbacks have been used by spammers for nefarious purposes so it is important that your comments and trackbacks are genuine responses.



Be generous with your links

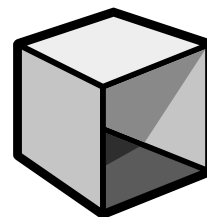
The use of hypertext links or “linking” is one of the primary reasons why blogging has become such a popular and effective online communications medium. Links are added to the text of blog posts to reference news items and other blogs or websites that are related to the topic being discussed. In my experience, the best blogs, more often than not, have numerous links in each post. In addition to using links within your posts, it is always helpful to provide links to your favorite blogs in a section called a blogroll. Once you get your blog going you can ask the sites on your blogroll to reciprocate. Keep in mind that reciprocal linking is one of the keys to improving your search engine ranking.

Submit your blog to appropriate blog and RSS directories

One of the best ways to get noticed is to make sure that your blog is registered with all of the popular blog and RSS directories. There are about 50 such relevant places. You can find a comprehensive list at <http://www.masternewmedia.org/rss/top55/>

Let the blog search engines know each time you publish

If you want to know what the blogosphere has to say on a particular topic, the best place to go is a blog specific search engine such as Technorati. One of the reasons that Technorati is so good at delivering the most up to date posts is that they have a system that allows blogs to “ping” or notify them whenever a new post has been made so that the search engine can send their robots to get more information about the post. Pinging such services gets you more visibility, which in turn should bring you more inbound links and traffic to your blog. Once you do the initial set up, the pings will be sent out automatically.



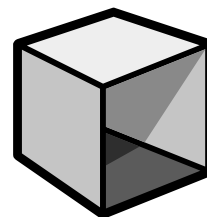
Publish and promote your RSS/Atom feed

Since most people are not familiar with RSS and Atom, I think its best to get this section started with a definition. According to [About.com](#), content syndication is a blanket term used to refer to accessing and publishing web content (text, images, etc.) in one or both of these formats: [RSS](#) and [Atom](#).

Web publishers (e.g., [bloggers](#)) can make their content available through syndication by using either RSS and/or Atom technology to produce what is known as 'feeds' ('blog feeds' or 'news feeds'). These feeds can either show headlines only, headlines and summary, or full content. Many [weblog systems/software](#) incorporate content syndication as one of their features.

Syndicated content on the web are usually indicated with text links or graphic buttons that show the words RSS, Atom, XML, Syndicate, and/or Subscribe. They may be found on weblogs, websites, news sites, and other types of online content providers. Readers and/or fellow web publishers can access the latest updates of particular sites with content syndication when they use [aggregators](#) and/or [feeds generators](#).

So why is RSS/Atom important to my corporate blog? The main reason that RSS is important to business blogs is that many tech savvy people don't "visit" their favorite blogs on a daily basis by actually going to the blog's web page. They use a program or a service to subscribe to their favorite blogs' (RSS) news feed and receive updated information. It is easier to forget about a blog and never return than it is to unsubscribe to an RSS feed. Most respectable blog software has built-in support for RSS publishing. If the blog software/service that you are using doesn't support RSS publishing, then its time to find software that does.



Shadowbox Studios Corporate Blog Services

So you have read through the Corporate Blogging White paper and, though it's got you pointed in the right direction, you would like a bit of help from blogging experts to ensure the launch of your corporate blog goes off without a hitch. Don't worry, you are not alone and Shadowbox Studios would love to lend a hand. Whether it's to help you define your corporate blog strategy, brand and host your blog or provide editing services, Shadowbox Studios has the technical and creative experts on hand to make sure your corporate blog meets your business objectives.

