

B2B Communication 2.0

Introduction

This white paper sets out to scratch the surface of the impact of Web 2.0 on business to business communications. While the world is twittering away, how will marketing communications and media relations (as we know it) change?

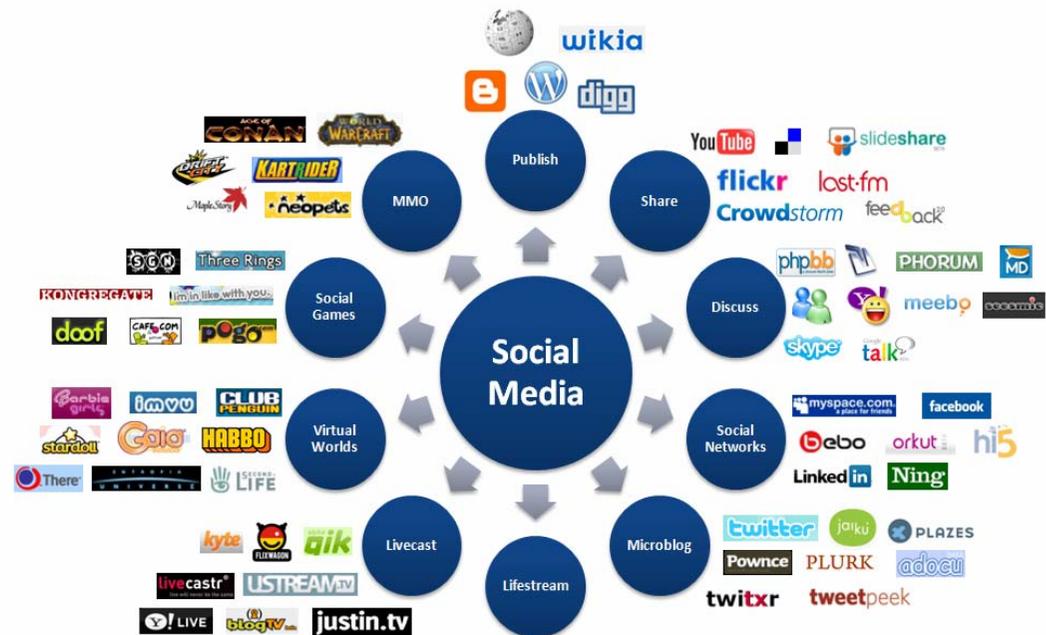
Those not familiar with some of the terminology may benefit from the background information section at the end of the document, before continuing. For more information about EMG, visit www.emg.nl.

Why it's hot

Some interesting data:

- 73% of active online users have read a blog¹
- 45% of them have started their own blog
- 39% subscribed to an RSS feed
- 57% have joined a social network
- 55% have uploaded Photos
- 83% have watched video clips
- every minute 10 hours if video is added on YouTube²
- 2.3 million people follow Barack Obama on Twitter (3.4 are following Britney Spears)³

It's not a craze, it's a fundamental shift in the way we communicate.



Source: FredCavazza.net

With a growing number of active Internet users utilizing social networking sites every day, social media sites are your greatest strategic asset to share knowledge with people in the industry, position the company as an expert in selected

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markets, attract new customers and build brand awareness. It could potentially create more effectiveness in your communication efforts and help grow your business.

Blogging B2B

Industrial companies are looking at the popular brands in the consumer sectors to see how “word of blog” marketing can be added to the B2B marketing mix. Either actively, by creating a company or product blog, or by paying closer attention to the blogging community.

However, the B2B world is still struggling with basic blogging, let alone creating something that spreads like a virus on social media websites. As an illustration, in July 2009 only 77 (15%) of the Fortune 500 firms have active public blogs (written by company employees about the company and/or its products)⁴ and most are IT related or consumer focused corporations.

Nevertheless, when done right, blogging can give B2B thought leaders great visibility. That, together with their general reputations, often gets thought leaders considered by potential purchasers very early in the purchase process⁵.

But before starting a blog, you will need to answer some basic questions:

- What are the objectives?
- Who will be responsible (communications/product/sales manager)?
- Who is going to write it (and approve it)?
- Do we have enough content to support it?
- Will we still have enough content after a couple of months?
- How do we control messaging in that environment?
- Do we allow blog comments and who will monitor?
- Will we publish negative blog comments?

Blogging can build both corporate and personal credibility. The personal aspect is important, since visitors will want to know who the author is and how to contact him/her (directly).



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Monitoring Blogs

Whether you decide to create your own company blog or not, it is important to monitor what your competitors, customers, end-users and other stake holder are doing online and possibly whether they write about your company and product.

Start by visiting a search engine like www.technorati.com or www.trendpedia.com, which deal exclusively with blog posts. This might reveal some interesting blogs that you should subscribe to.

Blogs can also help you to signal industry trends and issues. Bloggers are often quite knowledgeable about the topics they write on and can substantially influence how a particular issue might evolve.

After analyzing the gathered information, you may decide to:

- Participate on those blogs by adding comment or posting new articles
- Write about the subject on your company blog (with links to relevant blog postings)
- Use other communication channels if and when required (news releases, newsletters)

(Other) Social Media

Once you have decided what to do with company and social blogs, it is time to look at other online communities. Apart from the slightly different formats, the decision whether to participate or monitor these social media networks and media sharing sites should be based on similar grounds as with blogs. The sites mentioned below are meant as illustrations. Other examples are Facebook, MySpace, Plaxo, QAlias, SlideShare and many many more. However it is important to understand that not all of these are suitable for B2B applications, do not have the right geographical reach or volume.

LinkedIn

One of the social media networks that has developed into a business platform is LinkedIn. It is about finding (ex and current) colleagues, business contacts and friends. It offers the possibility to start interest groups which has created focused blogs that also function as an advertising platform. With 47 million members (September 2009), over 370,000 groups within the LinkedIn social network it provides an opportunity to reach out to target audiences.



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Twitter

Micro blogging, with Twitter as the current market leader, is extremely popular and although the posts are text only and short, the amount of content generated on a daily if not hourly basis, is enormous. Company tweets are a phenomena that is not only restricted to companies targeting consumers anymore.



Media sharing

Web sites – such as YouTube, and Flickr are exchange platforms to share photos and videos that you have created were originally intended for personal use. However, business usage is developing as an online photo and video management and sharing application. For Flickr groups can be set-up around a common interest as well; these can either be public, public (invite only), or completely private.



Trade Media and Social Media

From the 1990s, trade media publishers have tried to keep up with the internet revolution by creating online versions of their magazines, launching portal sites and sending digital newsletters. Since Web 2.0 technologies enable everyone to cheaply create their own free media channel, publishers are having difficulties charging for the online content they publish.

However, while the business model for trade media is definitely changing, decision makers in the industry still seek an authoritative, unbiased source of information. They do not have the resources to research the vast amount of free online content and will probably continue to require the judgement and filtering function of journalists, editors and bloggers.

Professional blogs should therefore be considered as a trade media outlet and the blogger(s) contributing to them as editors. Though the material sent to them may need to be tailored. Make sure the (background) material you refer to is available online, but, more importantly, make sure it is relevant:

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I do not recall any releases that I have referenced in this blog - and I get 10 a day. I delete the emails and if I have second, I click the opt-out at the bottom of the email so that I am not bothered again. When there's no way to opt-out of the continued emails, following press releases just remind me to dislike the sender.

Bloggers are looking for something to link to, ie, news or info that's on another blog. Bloggers usually only 'report' on things they see or get from others they know through blogging (party looking to make news is blogging) or through other social media. If you send press releases to bloggers you do not know and who do not you, you risk alienating the blogger.

Kevin O'Keefe⁶

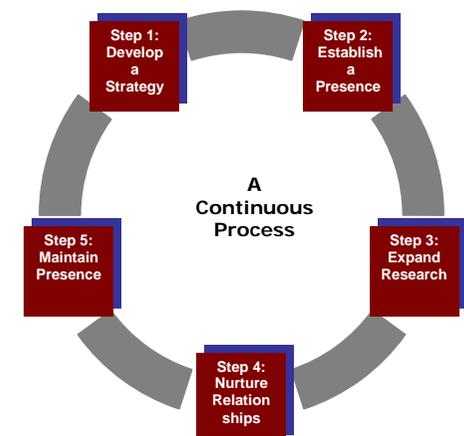
Online Advertising

Increasing percentages of online advertising budgets are spent on search engines: both directly, by paying Google for the clicks on ads, and indirectly, by paying search engine optimisation and positioning companies to influence the ranking. All three are quite time consuming. Maintaining an ad and the related keywords on Google in B2B niche markets can easily cost more than the actual costs of these clicks, but it can drive targeted visitors to your (optimized) website.

But do not forget the traditional publisher and their online media. Sponsoring an important website can help claim (thought) leadership in a certain industry or topic, though probably needs active involvement on that site as well. Better invest time in participating online than spend money on Flash animations.

A structured approach

To make your Web 2.0 and Social Media communications successful requires a structured approach. You need to research to identify influencers, monitor what they are saying, respond and/or contribute to inform those influencers and a build relationships.



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Background information

Web 2.0

The term Web 2.0 was coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999⁷: 'The Web we know now, which loads into a browser window in essentially static screenfuls, is only an embryo of the Web to come...'. Although the term suggests a new version, it does not refer to an update to any technical specifications, but rather to cumulative changes in the ways developers and end-users use the Web.

In 2004, the term began its rise in popularity. At the first Web 2.0 conference John Batelle and Tim O'Reilly outlined their definition of the "Web as Platform," where software applications are built upon the Web as opposed to upon the desktop.

In simple terms: Web 1.0 is looking up information on a website, while with Web 2.0 a growing portion of daily life has moved online:

- send/receive e-mail, appointments and contacts on your phone
- manage your contacts/network with LinkedIn and Plaxo
- stay in touch with the news and with friends on Facebook and Twitter
- buy/listen to music and share/watch video on your iPhone and YouTube

Social Media

Social Media are not a result of Web 2.0 technology, but its popularity has definitely been influenced by the rise of Web 2.0 services such as personal blogs, Facebook, Twitter etc. : *Social media supports the human need for social interaction with technology, transforming broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many)*⁸. From the late 70s digital Bulletin Board could be accessed via dial-in modems, but these were mainly used by hobbyists. Nowadays, anyone can participate.

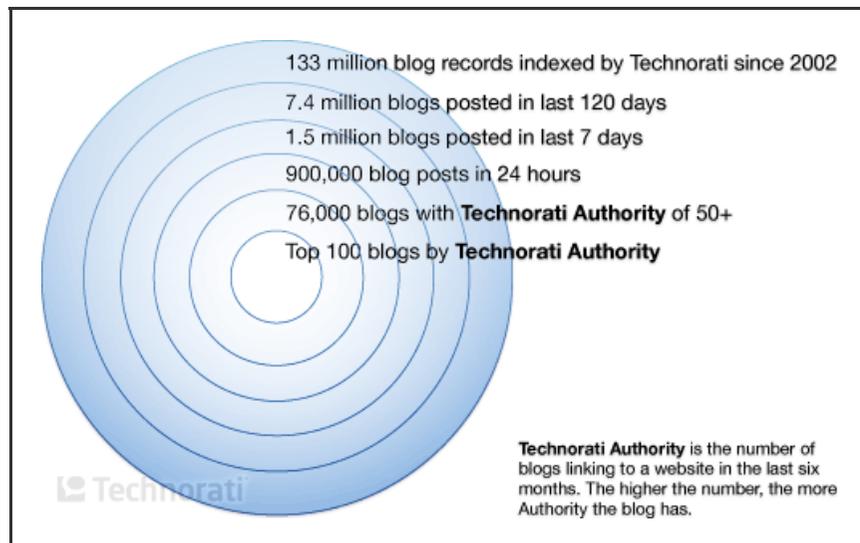
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Blogs

A blog (a contraction of the term "weblog") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order.⁹

In the late 90s there were just a handful of sites we would now call a blog. Weblogs could only be created by people who already knew how to make a website, but that soon changed. Cameron Barrett¹⁰ started a list of such websites and soon it became difficult to read every weblog every day, or even to keep track of all the new ones that were appearing¹¹.

In 2005 The Blog Herald reported that the number of blogs exceeds 50 million worldwide¹², but the numbers are often disputed or at least interpreted differently. Technorati publishes an annual State of the Blogosphere¹³ quoting many different numbers (see chart). The key conclusion is that not all blogs are actively maintained.



Source Technorati State of the Blogosphere 2008

Instead of visiting many different blogs and read the latest contributions, you can subscribe to its RSS Feed. A Feed Reader, or News Reader, can track any changes on the subscribed URLs and will display a list to the user who may then decide to

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visit that site. RSS is commonly translated as 'Really Simple Syndication' which underlines how easy it is to publish information to a large audience. Note that RSS Feeds are not limited to blogs only, but are also available on news and other websites.

¹ Universal McCann Comparative Study on Social Media Trends April 2008

² <http://www.emw.net.au/blog/marketing/social-media/interesting-youtube-usage-facts/>

³ <http://twitterholic.com/>

⁴ <http://www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/>

⁵ <http://searchengineland.com/b2b-blogging-using-thought-leadership-to-drive-positioning-sales-13363>

⁶ <http://kevin.lexblog.com/2008/10/articles/public-relations/press-releases-and-bloggers-theres-an-art-to-sending/>

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>

¹⁰ **Cameron Barrett** started www.camworld.com which is no longer maintained but can still be accessed – first entry is dated June 11, 1997

¹¹ http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html

¹² <http://www.blogherald.com/2005/04/14/number-of-blogs-now-exceeds-50-million-worldwide/>

¹³ <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogsphere/>