

## WHY BLOGS MATTER

The number of blogs has exploded in recent years: in June 2008, over 112.8 million blogs existed worldwide and about 175,000 were created daily.<sup>1</sup> Anyone with an internet connection can now produce, design and distribute ideas, commentary and/or news to a potentially wide audience. Some of these bloggers break stories, shine the spotlight on politics and other issues, and have increasing influence on the news cycle.

For example, blogger Joshua Micah Marshall's coverage of the 2006 firing of U.S. attorneys by the Bush administration is credited with sparking traditional media coverage and leading to the subsequent resignation of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, bloggers collaborated with mainstream media to update and add depth to breaking news such as the 2007 Southern California wildfires, Minneapolis bridge collapse, and Virginia Tech shootings. When the website of San Diego's public television station KPBS went down during the Southern California fires, their reporters provided updates on the social networking and microblogging website Twitter.<sup>3</sup>

Here are some tips on how to find, pitch and track blogs.

### KNOWING THE NUMBERS

Blogs are a regular source of information for many reporters.

- According to a recent survey, nearly 70% of journalists check blogs on a regular basis.<sup>4</sup>
- The majority of journalists read blogs to understand the context of a story, a new story angle or a story idea, but not to identify sources.<sup>5, 6</sup>



- Fifty-seven million adults in the United States (or 39 percent of internet users) reported ever reading a blog in 2006.<sup>7</sup>
- Although there are millions of blogs, only a few garner most of the readership. The Huffington Post, for example, one of the most well known political blogs, has more than 7 million monthly visitors in the United States alone.<sup>8</sup> Readers of political blogs are more likely to be college-educated men with a higher income than the general public and a median age of 49, which is older than the typical internet user. This audience also tends to lean liberal.<sup>9</sup>

## FINDING BLOGS

Free search engines such as Technorati and Blogpulse can help you identify which blogs to target for your campaign.

Here are some tools to identify and rank blogs.

- Technorati, Nielsen's BlogPulse, Google Blog Search and Bitacoras (for websites in Spanish) allow users to search particular blog websites, content and news.
- BlogPulse and Technorati rank blogs by looking at how often a website is cited or linked-to by other blogs (aka authority). A blog's authority usually points to its popularity.
- Technorati's [Popular Blogs](#) are measured by unique links in the last six months, while BlogPulse's [Top Blogs](#) are the most-linked-to today. TruthLaidBear is another popular blog index.

## PITCHING TO BLOGGERS

"Approaching a blogger is like contacting a friend of a friend out of the blue."<sup>10</sup>

Bloggers who write about current events or politics typically like controversy, including stories with a cover-up, mistake or wrongdoing. Bloggers who focus on a particular subject such as energy or toxics may only want information or tips on their area of expertise. Before you pitch a blogger, read their blog carefully so you can tailor your email to their interests. Note that blogs are increasingly connected to other types of media, so if you are not ready for information to become news at the time of your pitch, don't contact them.

Things to keep in mind:

- Reach out to bloggers ahead of a pitch, when possible. A quick introductory email establishing your credibility and your potential as a resource is a good first step.
- Avoid press releases - an informal email with a story idea is best.<sup>11</sup>
- State clearly why the topic is of interest or newsworthy and how the story is relevant to their readers.



- Keep your pitch short and sweet. Staying under three paragraphs will increase the chances that your email will be read.
- Address the blogger by name. It is not recommended to say “dear sir/madam” or “dear editor.”
- Use links instead of attachments. If you do have a press release, consider including it as a link so the blogger can use it as a reference. You can also include links to published articles or items that provide additional information.
- Make sure you have accurate sources - inaccuracies can discredit your campaign and ruin your relationship with bloggers (and journalists).

## TRACKING BLOGS Use a combination of search engines to monitor coverage.

- To track what bloggers are saying you should use a combination of key word searches in Blogpulse, Technorati or Google Blog Search. Technorati (Advance Search) and BlogPulse (Trend Search) can also graph the frequency of any topic in blogs for up to six months. BlogPulse goes further by allowing users to track the “conversation” of blogs (Conversation Tracker) by date.
- Custom RSS feeds to a news aggregator service such as Bloglines can update your search results automatically. You can also set up a Google Alert for key words (specify blogs as the type of media to monitor). In addition, companies such as Buzzlogic monitor and track blogs.
- Analytics: You can measure your website’s traffic with tools such as Google Analytics by tracking page views, visitors, repeat visitors and referrals from search engines and other websites (such as blogs).<sup>12</sup> A glossary of terms follows:
  - *Hit*: Hits are not a good way to measure website traffic because each individual file that comprises a webpage (i.e. photograph, text box or graph) is considered a hit. A webpage can contain hundreds of hits, and when a visitor looks at that webpage, multiple hits are generated.
  - *Page view*: Each time a visitor views a webpage is a page view, irrespective of how many hits are generated.
  - *Unique Visitor*: Each person (strictly speaking, each browser) who visits a website is a unique visitor. A first-time visitor to a website is given a unique “cookie” (a sort of ID number). That way, the website can differentiate visitors.
  - *Returning Visitor*: Visitor who returns to a particular website within a 24 hour period.

## TO GO Why bother?

Blogs can:

1. Create “buzz” and establish a story frame before an event or news cycle;
2. Expand coverage of an issue to a potentially global audience;
3. Reach or “narrowcast” to highly targeted audiences focused on one issue.
4. Continue coverage of an issue after newspapers have moved on, or encourage discussion of issues not covered by traditional media;
5. Combat negative news through alternative opinions; and
6. Communicate with your base.

## OTHER RESOURCES

A glossary of blog jargon:

- *Post*: Also called an entry, a post is created every time a blogger updates his/her blog.
- *Comment*: Blogs are frequently referred to as a platform for conversation, and readers respond to each post with comments. Comments are usually time-stamped and identified with the author’s name (or pseudonym).
- *Blogroll*: List of links to other blogs generally found on the sidebar of a blog’s webpage.
- *Traffic log*: Number of visitors to a particular website.
- *RSS feed*: RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. RSS is a web feed format used to publish frequently updated websites. Instead of checking each one manually, an RSS feed helps to view the summarized content of many websites in one single page in an automated manner.

Additional blog directories:

<http://wiki.cyberjournalist.net/jblogs-ongoing>

<http://truthlaidbear.com>

<http://www.townhall.com/youropinion/ManageBlogPosts.aspx>

<http://www.blogcatalog.com/directory>

<http://www.leftyblogs.com/>

<http://www.bloggernity.com/>



Prominent environmental news blogs include:

Treehugger, <http://www.treehugger.com/>  
 Worldchanging, <http://www.worldchanging.com/>  
 Gristmill, <http://gristmill.grist.org/>  
 Sustainablog, <http://sustainablog.org/>  
 Dateline Earth, <http://blog.seattlepi.nwsourc.com/environment/>  
 Triplepundit, <http://www.triplepundit.com/>  
 Plenty, <http://www.plentymag.com/features/>  
 Realclimate.org, <http://www.realclimate.org/>  
 The oil drum, <http://www.theoil drum.com/>  
 Deep Sea News, <http://scienceblogs.com/deepseanews/>

## ABOUT NCI

*Resource Media's New Communications Initiative (NCI) is a program designed to increase and expand the understanding and application of new communications trends and technologies. NCI provides research and resources to help you and others in our broad community stay ahead of the curve. Each edition of "The Feed" covers different aspects of today's changing communications and media landscape. For more information, to suggest potential topics for future editions of The Feed, or to subscribe, please contact Liza Pike at [Liza@resource-media.org](mailto:Liza@resource-media.org) or (415) 397-5000 x307.*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Technorati.com, [About Us](http://technorati.com/about/), <http://technorati.com/about/>

<sup>2</sup> Noam Cohen, International Herald Tribune, A Web-only news operation gets its due, February 24, 2008, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/02/24/business/blogger.php>

<sup>3</sup> Mark Glaser, [California Wildfire Coverage by Local Media, Blogs, Twitter, Maps and More](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2007/10/the_listcalifornia_wildfire_co_1.html), Media Shift, October 2007, [http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2007/10/the\\_listcalifornia\\_wildfire\\_co\\_1.html](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2007/10/the_listcalifornia_wildfire_co_1.html)

<sup>4</sup> Omnicom, Brodeur, New Media Journalist Survey Summary Results, Jan 4, 2008, <http://www.brodeur.com/pressreleases/Brodeur%20Blog%20survey.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cyberjournalist.net, [How Journalists Use Blogs](http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/002821.php), <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/002821.php>

<sup>7</sup> Pew Internet & American Life, [Internet Activities](http://www.pewinternet.org/trends/Internet_Activities_8.28.07.htm), [http://www.pewinternet.org/trends/Internet\\_Activities\\_8.28.07.htm](http://www.pewinternet.org/trends/Internet_Activities_8.28.07.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Source: [Quantcast.com](http://www.quantcast.com/huffingtonpost.com), <http://www.quantcast.com/huffingtonpost.com>

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Graf, The George Washington University Institute for Politics Democracy & the Internet, The Audience for Political Blogs: New Research on Blog Readership, October 2006

<sup>10</sup> Karen Showalter, Netcentric Campaigns, Harnessing the Power of the Interactive Web, 2007

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly Abbot, Imediacomm, [How to Measure Blog Influence](http://www.imediacomm.com/content/10812.asp), <http://www.imediacomm.com/content/10812.asp>

