



Best Practices for Marketing to Women in the Blogosphere

Edition 1

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"BlogHer's Mission is to create opportunities for women who blog to pursue education, exposure, community and economic empowerment."

-Elisa Camahort Page, Jory Des Jardins and Lisa Stone, BlogHer Co-Founders

Defining the Women's Blogging Community

According to the [2009 Women and Social Media Study](#) by BlogHer, iVillage and Compass Partners, there are 42 million women (53 percent of online women) actively participating in the social media space today, connecting and sharing with other women in niche communities and large networks. Of these women, 55 percent specifically read, write and post comments to blogs each week. Women are looking to raise their voices and express themselves, and they're also interested in discussing issues, seeking advice and engaging intensely and interactively with a supportive network of others doing the same. Originally a preferred communications tool for technophiles, then political wonks, blogging has moved from a bleeding edge activity for the early adopter, to a preferred channel of mainstream communication for anyone with a little bit of tech savvy.

Blogging has become so affordable and accessible that it has broken socio-economic boundaries. With a population that's more diverse than the general internet population, according to a [2006 Pew Internet & American Life survey](#), blogging has become a way for women to build effective personal and professional networks, to participate, with other women, in an interactive, authentic news medium, and to get and give help when making decisions big and small about their everyday lives.

Social media continues to be a growing phenomenon, and bloggers, in particular, represent a highly engaged and influential segment of social media users for brand marketers looking to connect to consumers online. Bloggers have a broad reach in the social media population and the survey demonstrates that women who blog are the most actively engaged social media participants -- constantly seeking out new ideas and ways to share their opinions about those ideas. Blogs are a go-to resource for those who want to gather information, share ideas and get reliable advice. At a time when the economy is top of mind for more than 70 percent of these active social media participants, women who blog are turning to online resources, including blogs, to help them make their day to day purchasing decisions.

Why Do Women Blog?

According to the [2009 Women and Social Media Study](#), the top four reasons women blog are clear: Women blog to have fun (68%), to seek information advice and recommendations (64%), to express themselves (55%) and to form community with others with similar interests (51%). While many women who blog still reach only an intimate circle of friends and families, many are using blogs as a way to gain wider

exposure for their ideas and work, gather information, advice and recommendations from a more diverse population, and achieve economic empowerment via new methods previously unavailable to them. These interests, combined with the significant number of women who rely on blogs for fun and entertainment, help explain the marked shift away from traditional print and television. The [2009 Women and Social Media Study](#) indicates that women are spending less time reading newspapers (39% report spending less time) and reading magazines (36%) and watching television (30%), specifically to make time for their activities in the blogosphere.

For a significant number of women, blogs have become the preferred mechanism for group wisdom-transfer, professional networking and socialization, and using modern technology and tools enable our circles to be unbound by common physical limitations. Blogging is our digital back fence, kitchen table, golf course and watercooler all rolled into one.

What Do Women Blog About?

Women who blog are becoming voices of authority on the subjects they blog about...covering every topic under the sun. Often serving as resources for broadcast and print media, they are the next generation of commentators, taste-makers and influencers. Whether discussing parenting, politics, or pop culture, women are leading the discussion online through the prism of their own lives. The resulting conversations ring with an authenticity and immediacy that has made blogging the most addictive, consuming and surprisingly productive form of media and entertainment that women have ever had access too, online or off. There is a fundamental difference between the way women are turning to blogs vs. social networks (e.g. Facebook and MySpace) and status updating (e.g. Twitter). The [2009 Women and Social Media Study](#) confirms that social networks and status updating are excellent sources for making ongoing, quick connections with family, friends and colleagues, but blogs remains the go-to resource when women want to get or share information about a range of topics. These include technology and gadgets (61%), politics and news (60%), Green and Eco-consciousness (57%), Pregnancy and Baby (55%), Business, Career and Personal Finance (53%), Parenting (49%), Health and Wellness (46%), Food, Cooking and Recipes (44%) and Cars (41%).

Motivation Types

Though each blogger is a unique individual, the BlogHer |Compass Partners Study revealed several common motivations for blogging that often drive how bloggers interact, identify, and encourage others with similar interests. Understanding these motivations will help marketers connect authentically and with impact.

The Activist

Includes bloggers surveyed who want to “educate” (37%) and/or “persuade/advocate” (22%), writing about such topics as Politics (23%), Social Activism (19%) and Green issues (12%).

The Activist fights for a cause and encourages others to do the same. The Activist is a tireless advocate for causes near and dear to her heart. She writes to share her beliefs with others, to raise awareness, especially about issues she feels aren't properly addressed by the mainstream media, and she welcomes others to help spread the word, often providing tools and tips for other wannabe activists. Corporate social responsibility isn't a buzz term to The Activist. She will check into an organization's practices before deciding whether or not to engage with, much less write about them.

“I see jewelry's future as a way to make a difference in developing nations. All profits from ads on this site will be donated to philanthropic causes benefiting communities in Africa and South America.”

[-Diedre from Sparkle Smart](#)

The Thought Leader

Includes bloggers surveyed who want to “promote my skills or business” (22%) and/or “reach a large audience” (25%), writing about a range of topics, but particularly Business, Career & Personal Finance (20%).

Forget traditional measures of an industry leader. Living up to the democratic promise of the web, Thought Leaders don't necessarily rise to the top because of their college degrees, job positions or old boy's network. The Thought Leader builds credibility blogging about a subject of interest and tapping into online networks of others doing the same. On the strength of her ideas and how she contributes them to the wider conversation, the Thought Leader is frequently asked to comment in news stories, review products and services, and generate buzz for new ideas and insights before they hit mainstream. The Thought Leader may indeed be working **with** an organization she believes in, but probably not **for**. Like with The Activist, marketers must be prepared to equip Thought Leaders with all information—not just typical press release material—in order to fully leverage her influence with her audience. Also consider that the Thought Leader is interested in building her platform; working with her by driving traffic to or showcasing her work is a good way to partner.

“I love to write and talk tax. I present on tax topics around the country - last July, I was in San Francisco at [BlogHer](#) to discuss tax for freelancers and bloggers. I was also interviewed last summer for a movie, *An Inconvenient Tax*, focusing on tax reform. I write a monthly tax column for *The Legal Intelligencer*, the oldest law journal in the US. I'm also working on a book about the history of tax.”

[-TaxGirl](#)

The Storyteller

Includes bloggers surveyed who want to “express myself (73%), “keep a personal record” (54%). “connect with others like me” (59%), and/or to get “positive reactions and feedback from my audience” (33%), writing primarily about “My life, family and friends” (83%).

The Storyteller may have begun blogging as a form of self-expression, finding a place where she could paint pictures with words and hope to tell her stories to others. Along the way, The Storyteller has discovered a talent and passion she may not have known she had. Visions of novels, anthologies and freelance writing gigs may float in The Storyteller’s head. Storytellers can generate very large audiences and are not always willing to alter their proven writing repertoire for brands, though she is open to other forms of advocacy, such as display advertising or advisory work. Often, storytellers refer to brands in the context of their stories, not typically in any formal review or analytical piece. Marketers that will allow Storytellers to showcase their work and creatively integrating brands will do well with this group.

“...at my core, I’m a writer. And even before that, I’m a mom. I don’t have a whole lot of time to spend on the Internet and I want to spend the time I do have writing, and making what I’ve already written better.”
-[Lindsay Ferrier from Suburban Turmoil](#)

The Fan

Includes bloggers surveyed who want to “educate” (37%), “establish a community” (29%), “connect with others like me” (59%) and simply “for fun” (76%), distributed across every topic under the sun.

From bands to baseball, candidates to celebrities: The Fan is focused on all things related to a person, place or thing. Whether it’s short informational posts or long analytical columns, she’s enthusiastic on sharing everything about her passion with others. The Fan is always on the hunt for excellent content to share about her particular passion. Fans are fanatic about the most unexpected things...you may have a Fan for your brand already! Fans are ripe for review writing, and their readers often expect these bloggers to obtain samples or free trials in order to share their unbiased opinion about these products. Brands are often encouraged to send samples and queries, but not to compensate for endorsements, or expect positive endorsements for comped goods. Credible Fans always disclose when they’ve been given product by a source.

“We mock soaps out of love. And hate. But mostly love.”
-[Becca and Mallory from Serial Drama](#),

The Resource

Includes bloggers surveyed who want to “educate” (37%), “promote my skills or business” (22%), and/or “reach a large audience” (25%), Resources, too, can be distributed across every topic under the sun).

The Resource wants to be the go-to website around a particular subject or industry, and knows that in the blogosphere giving away traffic is sometimes the best way to get traffic. If you’re creating relevant information, the Resource will check it out. If you’ve got a new product or service, The Resource wants to try it...and share her opinion. Often, Resources are large traffic generators, pointing to areas of influence. While they may not be the final destination for mentions or reviews of your product, they can certainly bring traffic to these destinations. And if you tie your messaging into topics of interest for Resources, you may find steep traffic increases to media that you create around your brand.

“So I started this blog to connect with others, to offset the feeling of isolation with diabetes, and to sort out and share some of what I was learning. It’s my “gold mine of informational nuggets,” if you will...”
- Amy Tenderich from [Diabetes Mine](#)

What Do Women Bloggers Want?: Blogger Outreach Best Practices

Perhaps one of the most frequently asked questions by marketers is, “what do bloggers want?” That question is often accompanied by further questions such as: Can my organization effectively reach out to bloggers? Do bloggers like contests? Will bloggers try my product? The simple answer to all of these questions is “yes, but...”. Below we provide both the eight fundamental best practices every person reaching out into the blogosphere should follow, and then illustrate those best practices in action by providing real-world case studies of two major brands and their successful efforts in the blogosphere.

Eight Fundamental Best Practices

1. Listen before you speak
2. Ask before you tell
3. Personalize, don't generalize
4. Always be transparent about who you are and how you are related to the product or service being discussed.
5. Be open to feedback that doesn't exactly sound like your marketing copy, but don't feel like you have to take abuse
6. Set your own ethical policies and guidelines and be the ones to enforce them! Not only should you be transparent, but you should require similar disclosures from the bloggers with whom you work.
7. Create something that will engender **authentic** enthusiasm. Social media isn't magic; it still comes down to the product!
8. Find ways to let the blogger experience your brand - or even live - with your brand.

Best Practices in Action

Here are several examples of recent campaigns that provide key takeaways on best practices for marketing to bloggers.

Case Study #1: GM: Drive a car; change a mind

GM wanted to build positive association with its vehicles among women who blog. Rather than try to influence bloggers with written communication, the company offered to provide bloggers with real experiences with GM-branded vehicles. At the BlogHer '06 conference, GM invited attendees to take a test drive in any of a variety of their vehicles, requiring nothing of bloggers, just a driver's license. Bloggers who test-drove the vehicles tended to make their drives social activities and brought other bloggers with them. After returning from their test drive, most of the bloggers provided feedback on their experience and agreed to provide videotaped testimonials. GM secured their permission to post these testimonials on the brand's YouTube page. Approximately

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one-third of the event's 750 attendees had an experience as a driver or passenger in a GM vehicle; several dozen blogged positively about their experience and about the cars. GM has repeated their ride and drives at BlogHer conferences and at private events and has recorded dramatic increases in brand perception among women who test-drove vehicles. Polling after a blogger event featuring test drives of GM cars showed a 57 percent increase in the number of women who said they would now consider buying a GM car.

- Allow bloggers to have their own experience with your brand. Don't over-orchestrate what that experience will be.
- Never initiate a quid pro quo system; give bloggers opportunities, and trust that some will be inspired to write about your brand. Those that do are your best advocates.
- Establish reasonable metrics. Even if you can't trace a campaign back to live sales, there are ways to measure brand preference and awareness.
- Works best when the brand aims to help bloggers do what they want to do or something relevant to the blogger, rather than striving for a brand-centric experience.
- First aim should be to build relationships, not drive sales or achieve positive posts.
- Great example of Best Practices #1, 4, 5, 7 and 8 in action!

Case Study #2: Good Nites: Creating dialog and shared content around a sensitive topic

GoodNites® worked with BlogHer to start a conversation around the sensitive topic of bedwetting, one that's not openly shared by many parents given the associated angst, stigma and confusion. GoodNites® tapped the BlogHer Network as a means to reach and provide parents of bedwetting children with a safe, anonymous venue for getting and sharing information, and to discuss and share their experiences through a community of shared information and support. GoodNites® penetrated BlogHer's audience of influential, highly engaged bloggers, by developing a survey that was promoted across the BlogHer Network on banners that linked to the survey and discussion page. There were more than 133 complete surveys and 18 engaging stories shared and discussed.

- When targeting a community, be willing to allow anonymous interaction, and protect that anonymity. Protect the sanctity of that community by ensuring it is a moderated environment and that members can trust that their privacy is being respected.
- Establishing a community that can work in tandem with other online resources that meet business needs, like websites, is a smart way to connect with your customers, providing them with options to connect to your product resources, but not requiring it.
- Great example of Best Practices #1, 2, 5, and 8 in action!

Case Study #3: JC Penney: Living with the brand

JC Penney sent 12 bloggers shopping with \$500 gift cards to be used in the retailer's newly established Linden Street furniture department, to purchase new items to decorate their home. Each blogger that participated disclosed that she had been given the gift card by the brand through BlogHer and posted a video of the shopping spree on her blog that was cross-posted to a YouTube page created for the promotion. A co-branded widget drove consumers to the bloggers' reviews and to Special Offers, a popular area on BlogHer.com, to enter to win a shopping spree at JC Penney. Twelve bloggers posted reviews on their blogs and YouTube videos of their shopping experiences. Those videos generated 3,816 YouTube video views. The Special Offer Page also generated tremendous activity. A testament to the success of this sweepstake is the level of engagement with the JC Penney website. Entrants were required to visit the JC Penney website and pick an item they would buy and leave a comment about it on the site.

- Disclosure is key to protecting the bond of trust bloggers have with their readers.
- Select credible bloggers who will provide a balanced review, not a guaranteed endorsement.
- Context is critical: if sponsored content or product reviews are placed where readers perceive it to be editorial, then it may subject your brand to criticism and undue scrutiny. Insist that any content associated with your brand be labeled and showcased somewhere that is clearly demarcated.
- Your customers trust each other more than they trust you. Leverage that trust by enlisting them to talk about your product, and don't control the conversation.
- Great example of Best Practices #4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in action!

Although a lot of the blogger relations "Don'ts" are simply the reverse of all the Best Practices listed above, there are three we feel merit specific and special mention:

1. Don't encourage spam, and don't make people spam to have a chance to win anything. You risk your own reputation...and theirs. And they may never forgive you.
2. Don't attempt to control what the bloggers will say about you; rather provide them with the information and resources they would need to share your brand story.
3. Don't play it fast and loose with disclosure; insist that bloggers inform your readers of any compensation or product they might have received from you.

Looking Ahead

The blogosphere will continue to change as the new generation of women online push conversations and interaction to a new level. As more examples of such engagements occur, and lessons are learned, BlogHer is confident that the implementation of the best practices above will become second nature to those wanting more productive results from their social media initiatives. For brands entering this space, understanding the ethos of the larger blogging community, and the different motivations and drivers of the micro-communities within the space, provides the foundation for successful and high-impact campaigns. The blogosphere is where our customers are spending more and more time and represents a tremendous opportunity for innovation, interaction and, ultimately, commercial results.