

# How do blogs



Forget reach and frequency. Success in today's marketplace is measured not by how broad your reach is but by how deep your network is

by Katie Delahaye Paine

Just mention the word *blog* and watch the fear that spreads across many people's faces. But relax—this article isn't about blogs; it's about social media. There— isn't that better?

Of course, social media includes blogs, but it also includes social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, Flickr and YouTube.

To understand how to measure social media, you first must understand that all the rules of communication have changed. In the old days, he or she who screamed loudest won. Communication was all about reaching as many eyeballs or ears as possible for the least amount of money. Hence the emphasis on metrics such as ad value equivalency, which purported to

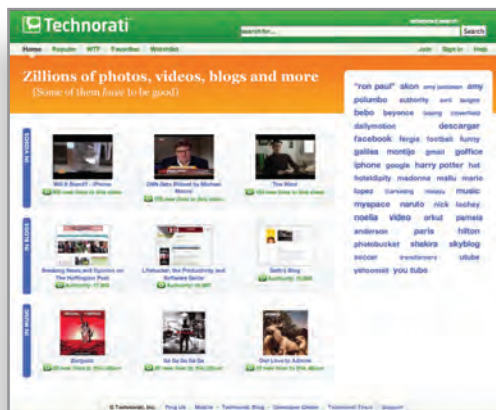
prove how cost-effective PR is compared with advertising. It also led to communication overload, with the average American seeing some 3,600 messages per day.

Then along came blogs and Google, and the tectonic plates shifted. To quote David Weinberger, co-author of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, there is no longer a market for your message. The vast majority of eyeballs and ears really don't care what you're trying to say. They are going online and searching for what interests them, forming networks with people of similar interests, and ignoring the mass communications that corporations throw at them.

Forget reach and frequency. Success in today's marketplace is measured not by how broad your reach is but by how deep your network is. Measuring relationships is more important than ever before, and measuring return on investment may actually be easier—if you have good web analytics.

The standard maxim in the communication world is, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." The problem is not so much how to measure blogs, but rather that managing them is impossible: You simply can't "manage" what 10 million independent-minded, opinionated people are saying. And woe to those who try, since

# measure up?



the blogosphere resembles nothing more than a cornered porcupine that will automatically begin to throw darts the moment it sees someone trying to control it.

The first thing to remember is that in addition to being irrelevant, “reach” in the blogosphere is essentially not possible. There are currently no equivalents for blogs to metrics such as audited circulation figures. The Interactive Advertising Bureau recently challenged the two leading measurement giants, Nielsen and comScore, to come up with an accurate system, but the best guess is that they are at least six months away from coming up with something that everyone agrees on.

It’s also important that everyone is on the same page as far as *what* to measure. Should we measure the value of a corporate or internal blog, or the impact of blogs on reputation or sales, or perhaps something else?

## Measuring your own blog

Say that you are a blogger (or are running a corporate blog) and want to calculate your ROI for that blog. You could calculate the value the same way you would for a house—by looking at the comparable value of what other blogs have sold for. There’s a nifty little applet at [www.business-opportunities.biz/projects](http://www.business-opportunities.biz/projects)

/how-much-is-your-blog-worth that will determine the absolute value of your blog based on your traffic, your links and what other blogs have sold for recently.

Alternatively, you could calculate the ROI by looking at the conversations taking place on your blog. To quantify this, you need to look at the number of links, comments and trackbacks. Go to Technorati.com and type in the name of your blog, and you’ll see how many links there are to it.

## How will blogs affect your organizational goals?

Do customer complaints on blogs pose a threat to your reputation? Your sales? Is one of your goals to get a particular point of view or positioning across? Do you need to influence a particular analyst?

If there is definitely no clear tie between your organization’s goals and the blogosphere, then stop reading this immediately and go learn about measuring more relevant media. (As in any communication activity, if it doesn’t support a specific corporate goal, why are you doing it?)

On the other hand, if developing a network of influencers around your product, your idea or your service is important, then a blog will be a very useful tool.

Once you’ve answered these questions, you can move on to deciding how and what you want to measure.

—K.D.P.

## Think you ought to start a blog?

Developing a corporate blog seems to be all the rage these days, and for some companies, such as General Motors and Sun Microsystems, it makes perfect sense. GM and Sun want to get closer to their customers, so their CEOs started blogging as a way to encourage a conversation with their customers. If you're in the business of getting information out to the world, you want to tell the world the new stuff you've learned and encourage a dialogue to see what the world is thinking.

Starting a dialogue is the common theme here. A blog is not just a corporate web site in a different dress. It is not just a marketing tool. It is a way to establish social networks that may—or may not—help sell products. But direct selling is not the point.

To be an effective blogger, you have to have something to say. There's a lot of debate about whether hiring a blogger to ghostwrite your CEO's blog is ethical. I'm not sure it's unethical; it's just not very effective. Blogs become popular because they reflect the real personalities and values of the people writing them. No one reads a blog to get more corporate-speak. They read blogs to get the information *behind* the corporate-speak.

So, to paraphrase my mother's favorite expression, if you don't have anything interesting to blog, don't blog it. If you do have something interesting to say, inexpensive places to start blogs are [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com), [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and [www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com).

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Another metric is the Conversation Index, which refers to the ratio between the number of posts the author creates and the number of comments and trackbacks. The theory is that the degree to which you are generating conversation is an indicator of your blog's value. So, if in any given month you add 50 posts to your blog and you get 100 comments on those 50 posts, your Conversation Index is 2:1. The downside is that there's no way to calculate similar ratios for your competition, so there's no way to benchmark your results.

For some organizations, measurement is as simple as adding a unique URL to a blog posting and tracking the number of sales or leads it generates. Elisa Camahort of BlogHer fame starts blogs for her clients in the theater business, getting actors to post their thoughts about the show and the town. By tracking click-throughs from the blog to the ticket sales site, she has been able to measure thousands of dollars in ticket revenue originating from the blog.

### Measuring the impact of other people's blogs on your business

As noted earlier, managing the voices of 10 million people is impossible. But there are several ways to assess the impact of the blogs in which you are mentioned. One is to look at the blog rank—the rank determined by Technorati that

looks at the number of links and trackbacks and calculates your “authority measure.” Market Sentinel has developed a system to measure blog authority based on the number of times a particular blog shows up in a discussion of your specific brand. Its methodology is explained in the white paper “Measuring the Influence of Bloggers on Corporate Reputation,” which is available at [www.marketsentinel.com](http://www.marketsentinel.com).

The most common form of blog measurement involves gaining a better understanding of the impact of blogs on reputation. Using technology such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) and heuristics, you can scan large volumes of postings to determine the content, tonality and sentiment of your coverage. People are concerned that a potential PR disaster can erupt and spook customers and/or Wall Street, so they make sure that every mention of their brand is tracked and that any hint of a problem is reported. They also use this kind of measurement to listen to customers and find out what is on their minds.

Do you have to slog through a thousand postings a month? Not necessarily. What you measure and how you measure it depend on several factors. First of all, how frequently does your brand (or the competition) appear, and how important to your audience are the blogs in which it appears? You only want to read postings from the sites that really matter to your target audiences.

One way of deciding which blogs are important is to consider web rank—the rank of the site in numerical order of all Internet sites worldwide, based on a sample of millions of web users who have voluntarily installed a special measurement toolbar in their Internet Explorer browser. The toolbar aggregates data on sites visited while users browse the Web. Web rank takes into account both the number of site visitors and the average number of page views by each visitor. Rankings are based on three months of aggregated traffic data and are updated monthly. The measurement system includes web-based forums, message boards and discussion groups, but does not measure clips from Usenet newsgroups.

Since a new blog is created every second of every day (according to Technorati), you need to carefully evaluate the claims of the various monitoring services. There are free services such as Technorati, Sphere and IceRocket that offer robust search engines that can call up all the blogs that mention your brand. Alternatively, there are paid services such as CyberAlert, CustomScoop, Moreover and e-Watch that

automatically deliver blog postings to your desktop. What you choose depends on the reach you desire. As of this writing, Technorati monitors 35.3 million blogs, Feedster monitors 80 million, and CyberAlert and CustomScoop claim 6 million-plus. Nielsen BuzzMetrics boasts coverage of more than 25 million blogs.

### Figuring out what it says

In the media and in most newsgroups, the vast majority of what is said about a particular organization is neutral. But the unfettered and unfiltered nature of the blogosphere brings more opinions—and frequently more negative opinions. Remember to step back as far as you can and remain objective. Think like your target audience. Just because someone leaked a piece of information or got a name wrong is no reason to respond or get involved in a discussion.

At KDPaine & Partners, we recommend tracking the following criteria:

- 1. Dominance/visibility:** How deeply does the posting discuss the brand? Is it just a passing mention, or does the blogger go into the subject in depth with numerous links?
- 2. Type of interaction:** What was the nature of the interaction? Was the posting designed to solve a problem, compare different brands or simply allow the author to rant?
- 3. Nature of discussion:** What was the nature of the discussion? Was it a true dialogue with an extensive exchange of ideas, or was it just bantering back and forth?
- 4. Sentiment:** What was the tone of the conversation? Did it portray your brand in a positive or negative light? If the tone of the posting leaves a reader less likely to do business with your company, it is negative. If the posting leaves a reader more likely to do business with you or recommends the brand, it is positive. If it essentially just discusses facts, it is neutral or balanced.
- 5. Messaging:** Did it contain one or more of your key messages?
- 6. Positioning:** Does it position your brand the way you'd like to be known or in some other, less desirable way?

### Do blogs really matter, and what do I really need to do about them?

The quick answer is yes. If you don't want to start a conversation with your marketplace or hear what your customers are saying about you, feel free to ignore social media altogether. You probably won't be in business for very much longer, but at least you won't have had to deal

with this whole new realm of communication.

However, you also should be aware that most journalists today rely on blogs for story ideas and to check facts, track down rumors and investigate scandals. So, if you care about what key journalists are reading about you, you should probably be monitoring social media.

If you are still up in the air about whether blogs are important for you, conduct a quick poll of your audience and find out just how influential the blogosphere is. There's a lot of generic research out there, but most organizations would be better off surveying their own customers to find out just how big an impact consumer-generated media and the blogosphere have. •

### about the author

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## Social media measurement tools

### Tools to measure social media content:

- KDPaine & Partners CGM Dashboard [www.cgmdashboard.com](http://www.cgmdashboard.com)
- Cymphony's Orchestra [www.cymfony.com/sol\\_orchestra.asp](http://www.cymfony.com/sol_orchestra.asp)
- Nielsen BuzzMetrics [www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com](http://www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com)
- Umbria [www.umbrialistens.com](http://www.umbrialistens.com)

### Tools to measure networks:

- BuzzLogic [www.buzzlogic.com](http://www.buzzlogic.com)
- InFlow [www.orgnet.com](http://www.orgnet.com)

### Tools to measure ROI:

- How Much Is Your Blog Worth? [www.business-opportunities.biz/projects/how-much-is-your-blog-worth](http://www.business-opportunities.biz/projects/how-much-is-your-blog-worth)
- WebTrends [www.webtrends.com](http://www.webtrends.com)
- WebSideStory [www.websidestory.com](http://www.websidestory.com)
- Clicktraks [www.clicktraks.com](http://www.clicktraks.com)

### Tools to measure influence:

- Technorati-powered tool to rate your blog's popularity by number of links [www.kineda.com/are-you-an-a-list-blogebrity](http://www.kineda.com/are-you-an-a-list-blogebrity)
- Online monitoring service provider Market Sentinel [www.marketsentinel.com](http://www.marketsentinel.com)

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