BY GRAHAM JONES

Internet Author and Speaker

Blogging and Personal Branding

Blogs are essential for your personal brand

Weblogs or 'blogs' allow you to share your views, ideas and thoughts with the rest of the world. They provide a powerful device to enable you to create and enhance the brand 'you'.

The first known 'blog' appeared on the web in December 1997. A year later, at the end of 1998, there were only 23 web sites that were of the same kind – constantly updated snippets of information written by one person. It was not until the middle of 1999 that software services were provided to enable non-technical people to write their own web logs (blogs). Since that time, the phenomenon of blogging has risen exponentially. Nowadays, around 400 blogs are added to the World Wide Web every minute.

Blogs are web pages that can be updated quickly and easily by anyone. You don't need special skills, nor do you need any special software programs. If you can type, you can blog.

Typically, a blog consists of several entries, called 'posts'. Each post can be anything from a few words, to several thousand words. The posts can be about things you have seen, ideas you have had, places you have visited – anything really. Some people use blogs to record a daily journal of their life. Others use them to promote their business. Some people use blogs to exchange ideas or to get people interested in a particular topic. There are blogs on hobbies, sports, management, families, technology – you name it, there will probably be a blog about it.

Blogs are here to stay

Blogging is not some 'flash in the pan', here today, gone tomorrow idea. It is permanent; true the technology may change, but the concept of blogging is likely to endure. That's because it provides an online alternative to the diary, the notebook or the filing cabinet full of clippings and notes. Blogs can bring all of those things easily into one central location for you.

Indeed, the business world is taking to blogging in huge numbers. Some businesses believe that blogging is now an essential tool in their marketing and image. And don't just take my word for it.

Business Week magazine recently ran a cover story on blogging and said that blogging was a 'prerequisite' for business.

Business Week magazine from May 2005

Many large international businesses are turning their attention to 'blogs'. McDonalds, for instance uses blogs within its advertising campaigns; Disney uses blogging for its Intranet.

However, blogging has a 'bad name'. That's because there are many dreadful blogs. Many people just type in their daily routines; who wants to read that they've just let the cat out? Or, who wants to read some rant from a weirdo? Well, you can if you want.

Blogging can be positive

Blogging can have positive aspects. For instance, look at http://www.elliotjones.co.uk. Elliot is my son; he was born on 24th November 1999 and has been blogging since before he could read and write! OK, he's had some help from me. Each month, Elliot's blog gets around 800 visitors. Not that many, but most of them are 'regulars'; nice that they care. But the real reason for the blog is that it helps us keep in touch with family and friends spread throughout the world. For instance, Elliot has aunties and uncles in the USA and in Canada, as well as friends in New Zealand and Australia. They all take a regular peek at the blog so they can keep up to date with what's going on; it's so much

easier than letters and cheaper than phone calls. But there's another reason for running this site as a blog – it's easy. If suddenly we decide to add some text, we can do it in a few minutes. However, if it were a traditional web site it would take ages to set up a new page. With blogging, the whole process is automated. Plus, it doesn't cost any money. With traditional web publishing, you may need to get a web designer to change the pages for you – and that would cost and take time.

Blogs show the world who you are

If you look at a blog, you get an instant idea of the person behind the page. You can peek into their personality, from the very words they write. You get an idea about their preferences thanks to the items they choose to write about. In short, a blog allows you to understand the writer and form a relationship with them, if you become a regular reader.

For people who simply write a blog for entertainment or for personal reasons this may not be a problem. But for the rest of us, the fact that other people can view our blogs and find out more about us could be a problem. What if a potential employer checked out your blog as part of a job application? What if a customer of your business looked at your blog and disliked you? What if a colleague found it difficult to work with you after reading your blog? As you can see, a blog reveals more about you than you might want.

Conversely, a blog can have other effects. Potential employers may look at your blog and discover you are just the person for the job. Customers may find out about the real you and be more willing to do business with you. And your work colleagues may discover that you could be more of a friend than they thought.

A blog allows you to show the world who you are.

Blogs are part of your brand

Clearly, showing the world who you are can have positive impacts on your business and career. But having a blog means that you have an additional piece of ammunition in letting people who matter know more about you. For instance, you may wear particular colours, have a specific hairstyle and use particular accessories to help identify you. The mobile phone you choose, whether or not you use taxis or a bus are all part of the individual you reveal to the outside world. Everything you do helps establish your identity.

Having a blog is part of that identity formation, so you need to ensure your blog is consistent with your brand. This means your blog needs to be written 'from the heart'. Use your emotions, your instincts and the real you to drive what you write in your blog. Trying to be clever or business-like will mean your blog will be too removed from your own identity and so it will not help support your brand.

Take a look at http://www.tompeters.com. Tom Peters is the world's leading guru on management. You'll see that his entire web site is a blog. His brand as a management guru is well established; he has been at the peak of his profession for decades. Yet nowadays, he is using his blog as a central component in his brand management. Clearly if one of the world's leading management thinkers is so keen on blogging, it must be important.

But because blogs are an essential component of your personal brand it means you should avoid using all the 'default' values and designs provided by the blogging services. Otherwise, your blog will look just like another blog and it will not reflect your individualism. For this reason, you should at least adapt the templates provided by the blogging services, or design your own pages or buy in a bespoke layout and style to match your brand. The Tom Peters web site does not look like a typical blog, but it is a blog nevertheless.

How to get a blog

By far the easiest way to get yourself going with a blog is to go to http://www.blogger.com. Just sign up for a new account, which is free, and then you can start your blog in a few simple steps. If you wish to learn the details of using Blogger, you can get a guide I have written, called *Quick and Easy Blogging* from http://www.blogskills.co.uk/quick.htm. Indeed, it is perfectly possible to get your blog up and running within an hour.

There are alternative systems to blogging, such as TypePad, WordPress and others. However, Blogger is by far the simplest and is extremely flexible. It is owned by Google and so comes with the backing of a solid, international business that knows a thing or two about the Internet.

Whatever you do, though, you need to get blogging fast. Businesses, employers and colleagues are increasingly reading blogs to find out more about the real person. If you don't have a blog, you could lose out to those people who do, because your brand is not complete without a blog.