

Using Blogs and Multimedia for Organizations

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Case Study: Real Life at Ball State University

Launched September 2005, the Real Life blog site is now visited by about one thousand visitors daily.

The Real Life blog site hosts twelve bloggers who are undergraduates in varied years and majors who post about college life and its ups and downs.

Unvarnished View: Keeping it Real

In order to have a blog, visitors consider the bloggers as authentic; BSU does not edit, spell check, or choose what the bloggers write about. Comments from visitors are sent to the blogger first before being posted online for all to see.

Bloggers have been the primary source of self-editing, and BSU officials have not had anything deleted that bloggers felt could be posted in the public domain.

What Does Web 2.0 Mean?

Since the term was coined and has become a “buzzword,” the meaning can vary from a function on a Web site, such as blogging, to a more complicated view on how the Web site is created and how it interacts with the World Wide Web. “Web 2.0, a phrase coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004, refers to a perceived second-generation of Web-based communities and hosted services — such as social networking sites, wikis and folksonomies — that facilitate collaboration and sharing between users.”¹ Organizations may now create, freely publish, and distribute information in the form of text, data, voice recordings, and movies through a variety of means for educational, marketing, advertising, and informational purposes. In this tip sheet, the “know how” of blogs and the resources needed to create a blog for any organization is included with a case study on the left about how Ball State University pursued the implementation of blogs to further their goals.

Blogging Is Here to Stay

Some might entertain the idea that blogging and other functions of Web 2.0 are fads. Many believe social networking is here to stay; it is simply too powerful and entertaining. Blogging is much like an online journal where the user may write about what he/she wishes, post videos, audio (pod casts), and photos. What makes this different from past online journals is the collaboration of multiple users on the blog site by the ability for others to post comments.

Due to this power, online organizations should begin to find ways of presenting their organization's views, while also considering what is being said about the organization from the general online public. Ball State officials found, while searching for postings about Ball State University on www.facebook.com, a profile titled, “I hate BSU Parking Services” with a membership of 4,466 and another profile titled, “I Heart Parking Services” with a membership of only three. This example demonstrates the need for increased awareness from the organization itself, yet can also provide a powerful way for an organization to use this very method to communicate and interact with the community around them by the creation and use of Web 2.0 applications.

First Steps

Consider the following project goals and how they can be met through blogging:

- Develop an interactive community within the organization
- Personalize recruitment tools that speak to young people and parents
- Set the organization apart

¹ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Search word “Web 2.0”. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2#_note-0>.

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Compensation: Helps Keep Bloggers Engaged

Bloggers were asked to spend about one hour and create one post per week for the school year.

Their compensation package included:

- iPod®
- Griffin iTalk
- Digital Camera w/Web quality video capability
- Accessories: cases, firewire, memory cards

Parents Read These Blogs Often

Parents and freshmen were randomly sampled for four weeks during summer orientation

Respondents who reported visiting the blog site:

- 15% freshmen (n=1225)
- 78% parents (n=139)

Parents also seemed more likely to visit repeatedly as opposed to most students, who would visit once or twice.

Promote Your Blog!

Promotion of the blog through newsletters, posters, the main Web site, and online banners will help boost the impact that the newly created blog site will have.

- Help jump start and advertise programs involving advocacy and fund raising
- Improve co-production of different projects and less “reinventing of the wheel” in different states and organizations
- Engage more individuals in the community as volunteers, students, professionals, and as potential bloggers

Parents Use Blogs to Learn What Their Children are doing — Audience and Bloggers

Identify who is the potential audience and who should be chosen to write the blog. Consider the number of view times received from parents, youth, and other organizations who will view the blog and whether they will get an unvarnished view or not.

Choosing who to blog is also very important in the form and kind of message being sent out to the larger community. For the bloggers at Ball State, undergraduates were chosen from differing backgrounds that had been recommended by deans, chairs, and key professors. These bloggers were asked to post once a week, so consider the appropriate form of compensation for the people chosen to blog or post. These bloggers are the key to the blogging site, and what they say represents Ball State for the larger population.

Train Bloggers: Issues to Cover

Staff and new bloggers may or may not be equipped to handle new trends of Web 2.0, completely understand security issues in relation to their online work, or properly secure their own personal Web 2.0 applications.

Training sessions should:

- Cover legal concerns such as state and federal securities laws that deal with possible violations of intellectual property laws pertaining to copyrights, trademarks, and other idea-type property.
- Deal with communication-related issues — creating and managing blogs with the technologies being used such as preparing photos or posting pod casts.

The resources needed for the actual creation of the blog is minimal. Depending on the organization, different costs will need to be covered including the hosting site cost, different e-tools needed, security measures, and maintenance. Most blogging technologies are free, with only the hosting site charge needed to be paid. Employees or IT services can provide the training for bloggers or maintain the site, and there are many helpful resource pages online to assist with the creation of the blog. As blogging has become more and more mainstream for young adults and youth, it is important for an organization to be aware of these new technologies and perhaps try for themselves the many amazing ways of reaching different audiences online. As an organization looking for new ways to catch the public's eye, blogging is one method to reach out.