

THE VOICE OF THE BLOG: THE ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES
OF SMALL BUSINESS BLOGGERS USING BLOGS AS A
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS TOOL

by
Jeffrey Hill

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to

The University of Liverpool

in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

2005

ABSTRACT

THE VOICE OF THE BLOG: THE ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES OF SMALL BUSINESS BLOGGERS USING BLOGS AS A MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS TOOL

by

Jeffrey Hill

Although weblogs are being promoted as a potentially valuable business tool in the trade press and mass-market business literature, informal surveys suggest that only a small number of companies are actually using weblogs. Reliable academic studies about the use of weblogs in business have yet to appear. This study aims to contribute to filling this research gap by investigating the attitudes and experiences of small business bloggers using weblogs as a marketing and communications tool. Qualitative interviews were carried out with fifteen small business bloggers representing a wide range of business activities. The results indicate that weblogs are being used for many different purposes and that the bloggers believe them to be an effective marketing tool. However, this perception is based more on the bloggers' trust in the benefits of the medium than on any measurable ROI (return on investment). Moreover, there is little evidence that dialogue is taking place with customers, although the literature tends to advance this dialogue as one of the main advantages of using weblogs. More research needs to be done to determine who is reading company weblogs and what their effect on consumer behaviour is.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks are due to Dr Cathy Goodwin, my dissertation advisor, for her invaluable advice and encouragement throughout the dissertation process.

I would also like to thank the fifteen small business bloggers who kindly agreed to be interviewed. Without them this research paper would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter	
I: INTRODUCTION	
Background to the Blogging Phenomenon.....	1
Research Project Aims	5
Methodology	6
II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE..... 8	
Overview	8
Virtual Communities and Weblogs	9
The New Marketing and Business Blogging.....	10
Relationship Marketing	11
Viral Marketing	12
Reasons Why Businesses Should Be Blogging.....	13
Humanising the Company	14
Communicating with the Customer.....	15
Building a Reputation.....	15
PR and Media Relations	17
Blogs as a Search Engine Optimisation Tool	18
Blogging as a Business Model.....	19
Drawbacks of Business Blogging.....	20
New Tools for Business Blogs	24
RSS	24
Audioblogging and Podcasting.....	25
Videoblogging and Moblogging.....	26
Small Business Blogging.....	27
III: METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION..... 30	
Choice of Research Methodology	30
Determining the Research Questions	31
Selection of Participants.....	32
The Role of the Researcher	34
Data Gathering Techniques	36
Data Analysis.....	39
Trustworthiness of the Method.....	40

Chapter	Page
IV: RESULTS	42
Why Small Businesses Create Blogs.....	42
The Effectiveness of Blogs as a Marketing and Communications Tool	48
Drawbacks of Using Blogs as a Marketing and Communications Tool	56
Attitudes to the Act of Blogging	60
Experiences of Using New Blog-Related Technology.....	63
V: DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES	67
Discussion of Results	67
Review of Methodology	70
VI: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	71
Appendices	
A. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES	73
B. E-MAIL INVITATION	74
C. DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	75
D. TRAFFIC FOR EVE'S BLOG (MEASURED IN VISITS).....	76
E. THE VOICE OF THE BLOG.....	77
REFERENCES CITED	78
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Blog Use Matrix	43
2. Blog Traffic	51
3. Time Spent Blogging	56

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Blogging Phenomenon

During the past year blogs have become a worldwide cultural phenomenon. Once the preserve of technically-minded enthusiasts, blogging has begun to transform key areas of society such as journalism and politics and now seems set to rival e-mail as a medium for personal communication. The number of blogs is increasing exponentially. In March 2005, *Technorati*, a blog search site, was tracking close to eight million blogs, up from four million just five months before. The number of blog readers is also on a sharp upward curve. In January 2005, the *Pew Internet and American Life Project* reported that blog readership had increased by 58% in 2004, claiming that 'blogs had established themselves as a key part of online culture' (Rainie, 2005, p. 1).

Evidence for the blogging revolution is not only statistical. *Merriam-Webster*, the dictionary publisher, chose 'blog'¹ as its 'top word of 2004', defining a blog as 'a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks'. Bloggers featured in the 'People of the Year' lists of both *Time Magazine* and *ABC News* in 2004. Finally, the purchase of *Blogger*, one of the original online blogging tools, by *Google* in February 2004 and the launch of a blogging service, *MSN Spaces*, by *Microsoft* later that same year, are clear indications that blogging is more than a passing fad.

¹ The word 'blog' is an abbreviation of the term 'weblog', coined by Jorn Barger in December 1997. Both terms are used interchangeably throughout this study. See Blood (2002) for a detailed history of weblogs.

Businesses are also beginning to appreciate the power of blogs, a trend reflected in the business press. In its January 2005 issue, *Fortune* put blogs at number one in its '10 Tech Trends to Watch for', arguing that blogs are changing working practices in the areas of advertising, marketing and PR (Kirkpatrick & Roth, 2005). Similarly, The *Harvard Business Review* named blogs as one of its 'Breakthrough Ideas for 2005', commenting that 'blogs are the most conversational of all the forms of media, and marketers can't afford to be left out of the talk' (Sawhney, 2005). In February 2005, *The Economist* devoted a whole article to Robert Scoble, *Microsoft's* 'celebrity blogger'², in which it was suggested that blogging might lead to the death of traditional public relations. However, proof that blogs had finally entered the business mainstream was given in May 2005, when the front cover of *Business Week* boldly proclaimed that 'Blogs will change your business'.

In fact, some global companies have been using blogs for a number of years. In 2002, the software firm *Macromedia* was among the first to encourage its employees to start blogging. The company realized that blogs could provide a forum for its managers to discuss new products with developers and answer their questions. The response was very positive. Blogs are credited with 'humanising' *Microsoft*, a company which had been widely criticised for its aggressive business strategies. In February 2005, *Microsoft* had over 1,400 blogs listed at blogs.msdn.com. Even Bill Gates himself was reported to be thinking about starting a blog (Dudley, 2004). Many companies, including *Google*, are using blogs internally for project and knowledge management. Others have created blogs for external marketing, PR or communication purposes. In fact, blogging is now emerging as a corporate job, and ads for bloggers have begun to appear on online job boards (Needleman, 2005).

² Significantly, *The Economist* felt obliged to give a definition of the word blogger ('somebody who keeps an online journal to which he posts thoughts and web links several times a day'), suggesting that blogging was still something of an unknown quantity to many of its readers.

As blogs require minimum financial outlay and only basic technical know-how, the barriers to entry are virtually non-existent. At one end of the scale, Bob Lutz, vice-chairman of *General Motors*, blogs about everything from management issues to new GM models in his *FastLane Blog*. At the other, 19-year old student Keiko Groves uses her blog as a means to promote her Internet-based clothing business. Steve Rubel, a well-known PR blogger, calls her 'the future of marketing' (Rubel, 2004). While such claims are impossible to substantiate, small businesses would seem to be uniquely positioned to take advantage of the blog phenomenon. According to Joshua Allen, *Microsoft's* first blogger, 'small businesses need blogs even more than big ones, because they live off relationships, and blogs build relationships very effectively' (Israel, 2005a).

Interest in the blog as a business tool has coincided with a growing realisation that traditional marketing methods are no longer suited to today's fragmented markets and increasingly cynical customers. The nineties saw the introduction of new forms of marketing, including relationship marketing, buzz marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, one-to-one marketing, opt-in marketing, guerrilla marketing and viral marketing, to name but a few. Blogs have the potential to fulfil many of the aims of these new marketing methods. They are a form of instant publishing which enables companies to 'have conversations' with their customers while projecting a more human face. At the *Search Engines Strategies Conference* held in New York at the beginning of March 2005, PR marketing and research professionals agreed that blogs 'will soon be an indispensable marketing tool' (O'Malley, 2005). However, the number of businesses currently using blogs for marketing or PR purposes remains small. A survey carried out in October 2004 by *Technorati* (Sifry, 2004) estimated the number of corporate bloggers at 5,000, over 20% of whom worked for just two companies: *Microsoft* and *Sun Microsystems*. A case study released in March 2005 by *MarketingSherpa*, a well-

known online media company, found that business blogging was barely registering on the proverbial radar:

Blogs may be hip and trendy, but they don't do diddly-squat for most people's businesses. After four years of research, *MarketingSherpa* reporters estimate that only .03% of the 34.5 million existing blogs are driving sales or prospective customers to their bloggers (MarketingSherpa, 2005).

Finally, in May 2005, *eMarketer*, a New York 'meta-market research' company, released a report entitled *The Business of Blogging*. An informal survey found that 'just 4% of major US corporations have blogs available to the public - and even fewer produce active sites with the link and feedback features that most readers associate with true blogs' (eMarketer, 2005).

The results of these surveys highlight a paradox. If blogs are potentially such an effective marketing tool, as the business press, books on blogging and specialist blogs would have us believe, why are so few companies using them? The answer may be simply that the business blogging phenomenon has not yet reached the 'tipping point'³. Alternatively, businesses may not be convinced that blogs offer a suitable return on investment. Press reports about companies firing rogue bloggers and concerns over confidentiality may also have contributed to the slow take-up.

³ The 'tipping point' is a concept popularised in Malcom Gladwell's book (2000) of the same name. It refers to the moment when critical mass is reached and a small change leads to a much bigger one.

Research Project Aims

Despite the proliferation of articles, white papers, books and blogs promoting blogging as the 'next big thing' in marketing, research-based studies investigating blogs as a business tool have yet to appear. Blogging success stories have tended to focus on a limited number of familiar names such as *Microsoft* and *General Motors*. However, anecdotal evidence reported in the business press and on the Internet indicates that some small businesses are using blogs successfully.

The current research project aims to make a contribution to filling the gap in the academic field by investigating the attitudes and experiences of a sample of small business bloggers who are using blogs as a marketing and communications tool. The term 'marketing' is employed here in its widest sense. According to the *Chartered Management Institute's Dictionary of Business and Management* (2003) 'marketing aims to build long-term relationships with customers and with other interested parties and to provide value to them'. Kotler (2003, p. 13) lists 'relationships and networks' as one of his core marketing concepts. The extent to which small business bloggers are using blogs to build relationships with customers will be central to this study. Another key question concerns the bloggers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of blogs as a marketing and communications tool. Comparisons will also be made between the image given of business blogging in the published literature and the first-hand experience of the interviewees.

The complete list of research questions is as follows:

- in what ways are small businesses using blogs as a marketing and communications tool?
- to what extent are small business bloggers using new blog-related technologies such as RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and audioblogging?
- how effective do small business bloggers consider blogs to be as a marketing and communications tool?
- what criteria are being used by bloggers to determine the effectiveness of small business blogs as a marketing and communications tool?
- what has been the experience of small business bloggers regarding the drawbacks of using blogs?
- how do small business bloggers feel about their blogging activity?
- what similarities and differences exist among small business bloggers working in different sectors?
- is there an effective blogging model which can be used by other small businesses wishing to start a blog?

Methodology

Mason (2002) states that qualitative research has 'an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about *how things work in particular contexts*' (p. 1, italics in original). She also highlights the 'richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity' inherent in qualitative methodologies. Since the aim of this project is to explore the attitudes and experiences of small business bloggers and to provide an insight into the world of small business blogging, the qualitative interview method was chosen. Random

sampling methods being inappropriate to qualitative research, the interviewees were selected using purposive sampling (White, 2002, p. 64).

Fifteen interviews were carried out with small business bloggers representing a wide range of business types and personal backgrounds. Two thirds of the interviews were conducted using the telephone or Internet telephony. Of the remainder, one was held face-to-face and the rest by e-mail. The voice interviews were recorded and transcribed. The findings from the interviews were organised by themes and analysed with reference to the published literature and research aims.

In order to gain first-hand experience of blogging technology, the researcher set up a blog: *The Voice of the Blog* (see Appendix E). This resource blog featured links to sites and articles about small business blogging. Contacts were invited to visit *The Voice of the Blog* to find out more about the project, and edited versions of the interviews were posted here. These posts generated a certain amount of additional discussion within the business blogging community.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

Over the past year, there has been an explosion of press articles, white papers, e-books and, of course, blogs on the topic of business blogging. A number of mass-market books about blogging have also appeared. For instance, Blood (2002) and Stone (2004) give a general overview of blogging, while Gillmor (2004) and Hewitt (2005) focus on the impact of blogging in the media and politics. The latter three books also contain sections on business blogging. Susannah Gardner (2005) was the first author to produce a whole book devoted to business blogging: *Buzz Marketing with Blogs*. To date, this work remains the most complete introduction to the subject. However, several more business blogging books have been announced. For example, Robert Scoble, *Microsoft's* chief 'technical evangelist', is writing a book online. The provisional title is *Blog or Die*, which leaves little room for doubt as to the stance Scoble will take.

The abundance of trade and journalism sources on business blogging contrasts sharply with the lack of academic works. Standard marketing textbooks (e.g. Kotler, 2003; Jobber, 2004; Smith & Taylor, 2004) make no mention of blogs whatsoever. Turban *et al.* (2004, p. 357) devote half a page to the subject of weblogs, remarking surprisingly that 'blogs are not yet used for commercial purposes'. Searches on *LexisNexis*, *ProQuest* and other databases for academic papers relating to the business applications of blogs yielded negligible results.

The lack of research into business blogging may be due to the recent nature of the phenomenon. In fact, it was only towards the end of 2004 that blogs finally gained widespread acceptance as a business tool. Up until then the words 'fad' or 'craze' were regularly to be found in blog-related articles (e.g. Anderson, 2004). In November 2004, *Forrester Research* published a report entitled *Blogging: Bubble or Big Deal?* (Li, 2004). According to *Forrester*, 'blogging will grow in importance, and at a minimum, companies should monitor blogs to learn what is being said about their products and services'. However, the report's title indicates the uncertainty which surrounded business blogging at the time.

Although interviews with business bloggers appear regularly in the media (e.g. Bruner, 2004a; Wackä, 2004), no researcher has undertaken a scientific study of the attitudes and experiences of small business bloggers. This is a deficiency which the current paper aims to address.

The remainder of this chapter first puts the blogging phenomenon into the wider social and business context and then goes on to examine a number of key themes which appear regularly in the published literature and which have direct relevance to the research questions.

Virtual Communities and Weblogs

The collective term 'blogosphere' is regularly used by journalistic sources to refer to weblogs as a social network. However, the existing blogosphere has developed from humble beginnings. The early weblog community consisted of a small number of technically-minded individuals who were familiar with HTML (Blood, 2002). It was not until the appearance of

the first weblog tools and hosting services such as *Blogger* in 1999 that the 'big bang' occurred (Bausch *et al.*, 2002). These tools allowed users to create a weblog easily and introduced features such as automatic archiving and a choice of multiple templates. Once weblogs became accessible to more people, the original weblog community fragmented. Derek Powazek (2002), an author with long experience of creating community sites, describes the process by which weblog communities are formed:

Any weblog with comments can quickly turn into a community of one, attracting a small group of people who are interested enough to follow along and participate. And if each of these readers then starts a weblog of his own, with comments that the others take part in, you wind up with a giant, interconnected, ever-evolving community (Powazek, 2002, p. 266).

The role of blogs in creating virtual communities is probably the area which has seen the greatest amount of blog-related academic research. *The University of Minnesota* maintains a website entitled *Into The Blogosphere* featuring an online collection of essays which 'explores discursive, visual, social and other communicative features of weblogs' (Gurak *et al.*, 2005). The project represents perspectives from various fields including Sociology and Communication, but none of the posted essays mentions the business blogosphere.

The New Marketing and Business Blogging

In 1999, *The Cluetrain Manifesto* proclaimed 'the end of business as usual' and declared that 'markets are conversations' (Levine *et al.*, 1999, p. xxii). There followed a further ninety-

four 'theses' setting out a new agenda for corporate marketing in the Internet age. *The Cluetrain Manifesto* is considered as a bible by many business bloggers (Rendon, 2004), despite the fact that it makes no mention of weblogs at all. The work may be seen as the culmination of a long process of disenchantment with conventional marketing methods leading to a more customer-centred approach. This section will review the literature relating to some of the key trends in marketing over the past fifteen years or so of the Internet age and explain their relevance to business blogging.

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing first appeared as a concept in the 1980s, long before the Internet became an essential business tool. Egan (2004, p.19) describes the shift from the transactional marketing model with its heavy reliance on marketing to 'anonymous masses' to an approach which emphasised the importance of developing relationships with identifiable customers. The need for such a change was explained by Regis McKenna in his pioneering work *Relationship Marketing* (1992). McKenna suggested that companies faced 'the end of loyalty' as a result of increasing customer choice. The solution was to 'integrate the customer into the company, to create and sustain a relationship between the company and the customer'. This new approach represented:

...a fundamental shift in the role and purpose of marketing: from manipulation of the customer to genuine customer involvement; from telling and selling to communicating and sharing knowledge; from last-in-line function to corporate-credibility champion (McKenna, 1992, p. 4).

Kaye claims that 'unlike narrowly targeted advertising and email newsletters, blogs build trusting relationships with customers that actually fulfill the promise of one-to-one marketing' (2003, p. 4).

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a concept which has its origins in the Internet. The term was invented by Steve Jurvetson, a venture capitalist, to describe the method used by *Hotmail* to develop its e-mail service (Godin, 2001, p. 67). Most of the standard marketing textbooks mention the term. For example, Jobber (2004, p. 572) refers to viral marketing as 'electronic word of mouth', while Smith and Taylor (2004) give the following description of the process involved:

It is not "accidental" spreading but, rather, carefully planned spreading of the message online. Two elements are required: first the idea itself, and second, the seeding (Smith & Taylor, 2004, p. 632).

The two main benefits of word-of-mouth sources are that they are convincing and low cost (Kotler, 2003, p. 575).

Although e-mail was the original vehicle which allowed ideas to replicate and spread like a virus, anecdotal evidence reported in the business press suggests that weblogs are equally well-suited to the task. For example, *Fortune* journalists Kirkpatrick and Roth (2005, p. 64) recount the story of entrepreneur Shane McQuade, inventor of a backpack with built-in solar panels. McQuade asked a friend to feature the product on his 'green design' blog. Within

hours the product had moved up the blogging hierarchy until it reached *Gizmodo*, a gadgets blog which receives tens of thousands of visitors every day. McQuade was inundated with orders and refers to blogs as 'the ultimate word-of-mouth marketing channel'.

A related concept is buzz marketing. *Buzzmarketing*, a specialist website, says that it is about 'capturing attention of consumers and the media to the point where talking about your brand becomes entertaining, fascinating, and newsworthy' (Buzzmarketing, 2005). In a paper for the *Harvard Business Review*, Dye (2000) investigated the marketing practices at more than 50 companies and found that buzz affects not only the entertainment and fashion industries but also agriculture, electronics and finance. She forecast a world in which 'buzz will dominate the shaping of markets', citing forums such as *Epinions.com* as generators of buzz. In a mass-market business book, Gardner (2005, p. 11) considers that 'the power of blogs is *buzz*, or conversations that bounce from blog to blog and gather mass and impact'.

Reasons Why Businesses Should Be Blogging

This section of the literature review summarises the main arguments being made in favour of using weblogs as a tool for marketing and communications. Since business blogging has not yet begun to feature as a research topic in academic journals, the material reviewed will consist largely of popular business books, articles in the business press and blog postings. The one exception is an online paper entitled *Blogging the Market* by George Dafermos (2003), who has done research into virtual communities. Although the paper is journalistic in style and lacks a rigorous research methodology, it does feature interviews with a number of well-known business bloggers including Rick Bruner and David Winer (referred to as Dave

Winner), and includes a useful bibliography. Dafermos is unrelenting in his enthusiasm for weblogs and concludes that 'the case for weblogs is irresistible: massive productivity gains through far more efficient communication, collaboration and knowledge management' (Dafermos, 2003, p.82).

Humanising the Company

Corporations do not speak in the same voice as these new networked conversations. To their intended online audiences, companies sound hollow, flat, literally inhuman.

(Thesis 14, The Cluetrain Manifesto)

While traditional websites are increasingly being seen as platforms for empty corporate rhetoric (Levine *et al.*, 2002), weblogs have acquired a reputation for authenticity, transparency, honesty and openness, four qualities regularly mentioned in the trade literature (Gardner, 2005; Kaye, 2003). Robert Scoble, *Microsoft's* chief technical evangelist, is widely credited with giving the software giant a more human voice by blogging openly about company issues. In an article entitled *Chief humanising officer*, *The Economist* (Anon, 2005, p. 58) goes so far as to suggest that Scoble's example 'might mark the beginning of the end of "corporate communications" as we know it'. Scoble's own *Corporate Weblog Manifesto* (2004) begins with the words 'Tell the truth. The whole truth. Nothing but the truth'. He even recommends linking to a competitor if their product is better.

Communicating with the Customer

Unlike forums and newsletters, the vast majority of weblogs are accessible to anybody with an Internet connection⁴. Moreover, the comments feature of blogs provides a simple way for readers to respond to posts. This potential for interaction is often mentioned in the published literature. According to Gardner (2005, p. 20), 'the biggest strength of blogs is in establishing dialogue with readers'. Kaye (2003, p. 18) uses the term 'customer relationship blogs' to describe blogs which 'allow businesses to connect with their customers in a personalised, immediate way'. She gives several examples including an Indian restaurant in Northfield, Minnesota, which used its blog to rally customer support when threatened with the loss of its lease.

Weblogs also provide a way to reach the niche audiences which are so important to small businesses. For example, Kaye (2003, p. 37) tells the story of niche manufacturer *Clip-n-Seal*, which used a blog to market a device for resealing bags. By tracking and monitoring what visitors are reading and responding to, companies can 'hone specific content and promotions for very high interest micro-audiences, which can then be delivered by weblogs at a fraction of the cost of conventional offline and online marketing' (IMN Inc., 2003).

Building a Reputation

Blogs can be used to demonstrate expertise in a particular business area. Gardner (2005, p. 15) cites the example of a law firm which has created a blog specialising in Brain Injury

⁴ Exceptions include password-protected blogs and internal company blogs.

Law. Top executives such as Jonathan Schwartz, President and COO of *Sun Microsystems*, and Alan Meckler, CEO of *Jupitermedia*, have used their blogs to establish a position as 'thought leaders' in their particular domain. While small business owners might have less lofty ambitions, blogs do provide a means to make a name for oneself. As Biz Stone (2004) points out:

Blogging is especially useful for small-business owners, consultants, freelancers, and anyone who will benefit most from being known as an innovator in his or her particular field of expertise (Stone, 2004, p. 163).

Hewitt (2005, p. 131) employs the term 'earned credibility' and sees this, along with the authentic voice, as 'the crucial difference between websites and blogs'. Crumlish (2004) takes a similar view:

...business weblogs can help companies manage an online profile and generate the sort of reputation or aura of goodwill that enables strangers to trust each other and make commitments or transactions online (Crumlish, 2004, p. 181).

However, Scoble (2004) introduces a note of caution. He warns corporate bloggers never to lie or hide information since you can never regain your credibility once you have lost it.

PR and Media Relations

The death of PR has been announced on more than one occasion (e.g. Stern, 2003). Thesis 26 of *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (Levy et al., 2000, p. xxiv) states that 'Public Relations does not relate to the public. Companies are afraid of their markets'. Scoble and Israel (2005) believe that blogs are the answer:

[Blogging] is necessary because the other communication tools - press releases, ads, banners, websites, brochures, PowerPoint presentations are all irreparably broken. People neither believe nor trust the slickness of corporate materials and spokespeople (Scoble & Israel, 2005).

The PR industry has been slow to take blogs seriously. However, Steve Rubel (2004), one of the most influential of the small band of PR bloggers, believes that blogs are having a profound effect on his profession:

The proliferation of Weblogs and RSS news feeds has changed the practice of public relations forever. Despite all of the hype about media consolidation, we are no longer living in a mass media world dominated by conglomerates (Rubel, 2004).

Rubel uses the term 'micro persuasion' (also the name of his blog) to refer to the process of influencing influential bloggers. This skill is important not only for PR professionals but also to the individual company blogger who wants to communicate company news or respond to press coverage.

Blogs can also be something of a PR nightmare since it is almost impossible to control information once it escapes into the blogosphere. *Kryptonite*, an American bicycle lock manufacturer, discovered this to its cost in September 2004 when a blogger posted a video showing how its best-selling lock could be picked using the top of a *Bic* pen. The story was reported on other blogs and eventually reached the mainstream press. The episode is expected to cost *Kryptonite* over \$10 million (Kirkpatrick & Roth, 2005). If the company had had a blog, it could have responded more quickly and, perhaps, limited the damage. The incident clearly demonstrates that companies ignore the blogosphere at their peril.

Blogs as a Search Engine Optimisation Tool

The business blogging community has become increasingly aware of the blog's value as a Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) tool, although the mainstream media has so far tended to ignore this feature. Many business blog pundits have highlighted the fact that search engines are naturally attracted to blogs' constantly-updated, keyword-rich content. For example, Chaney (2005) describes blogs as 'search engine magnets'. As if to illustrate this point, Hurlbert (2005) reports that his blog, *Blog Business World*, ranked #8 out of 158 million results on a *Google* search for the two-word phrase 'business world'.

However, there is currently an ongoing debate in the business blogosphere as to whether it is appropriate to use blogs primarily as SEO tools. Paul Woodhouse (2005), author of the award-winning *Tinbasher* blog, puts the purist's point of view:

To improve your search engine rankings is simple and can be done quite easily with the aid of a blog. It's fairly easy to write the odd post with keyword filled content and also quite easy to use keyword filled hyperlinks to point at the rest of your site. BUT, it's quite pointless if you haven't got other blogs linking to you giving you some pagerank that you can filter through these links. Going to other blogs and commenting, or talking about other blogs is vital to your survival as a blog and a blogger. If your blog just sits there and is used as an easy web publishing tool for company news, then you're wasting its potential (Woodhouse, 2005).

A negative effect of the SEO capabilities of blogs is the appearance of what is known as spam-blogging. In an article entitled *Will spam-blogging be the death of blogging?*, Shah (2005) defines spam blogs as 'fake blogs that are created by robots in order to foster link farms, attempted search engine optimisation, or drive traffic through to advertising or affiliate sites'. She encourages companies to use blogs 'the way they were meant to be used' and not just as SEO tools.

Blogging as a Business Model

Although the business community originally focused on blogs as a marketing and communications tool, interest is now growing in blogs as business model in their own right. A *Knowledge@Wharton* article (2005) suggests three ways in which blogs could generate income:

- selling keyword-based ads via a service such as *Google's AdSense*.

- using a subscription model (though it remains to be seen whether readers will be willing to pay for content).
- being acquired by a larger company such as *Gawker* or *Weblogs Inc.*, the main players in the niche publishing sector. Their blogs attract millions of visitors and make money through advertising revenue.

Gardner (2005, pp. 232-246) devotes a whole chapter to 'Making Money with a Blog'. Her ideas include using affiliate programmes and selling blog-branded merchandise. She also suggests the 'tip-jar approach', which amounts to asking readers for monetary donations. However, some independent bloggers think it is in bad taste, or even unethical, to solicit money from blog readers.

The Drawbacks of Business Blogging

Despite the intensive promotion of blogging as 'the next big thing' in the trade press (e.g. McIntosh, 2005), a number of commentators are sceptical about the business potential of blogs. One of the most vocal sceptics is Robert Bly, a well-known direct marketing copywriter:

I have yet to find a single marketer who says that a business blog has gotten him a positive return on investment. I know plenty of online marketers who make millions of dollars a year from their Web sites and e-zines, for instance. But I've not seen a blog whose creator says that the

time and effort spent on it has directly put money into his pocket (Bly, 2004a).

Bly's post raises two key issues. The first concerns the value of blogs compared with other marketing media such as e-mail, white papers, e-zines and Web sites. Bly considers the latter media to be better formats for publishing information to establish one's expertise.

Bly's second issue relates to ROI (return on investment). Two weeks after starting his own blog in October 2004, Bly (2004b) posted the following comment: 'I am concerned that, since for me time equals money, my blogging is costing me a lot of money ... with no visible ROI other than fun'.

Although Bly's position has come under attack from other marketing bloggers (e.g. Weil, 2004a), he is not alone in questioning the return on blogging investment. Scrivens (2004) highlights the dilemma facing businesses which see blogs as a way of increasing sales:

In a traditional marketing sense, companies measure marketing ROI by seeing how many products they sell after an ad campaign launches.

However, how do you measure mindshare that can be produced by a blog? You can't, really—and that may scare some organizations away.

You could measure the traffic that the blog receives, but traffic does not equate to money in all cases (Scrivens, 2004).

The ROI issue is central to the debate on business blogging and constitutes one of the key research questions in the present study.

A number of potential drawbacks and dangers exist in the business blogging domain. McGovern (2004) identifies several disadvantages of blogs, including the problem of time:

...blogs are easy to start and hard to maintain. Writing coherently is one of the most difficult and time-consuming tasks for a human being to undertake. So, far from blogs being a cheap strategy, they are a very expensive one, in that they eat up time. As a result, many blogs are not updated, thus damaging rather than enhancing the reputation of the organization (McGovern, 2004).

Michael Gartenberg (2004) of *Jupiter Research* highlights three separate issues which companies need to deal with. The first concerns monitoring the blogosphere for references to the company or brand. The second relates to the need for companies to have guidelines for official corporate blogs:

Establishing policy and knowing who is saying what is critical. There are worse things in the world than not having a weblog and corps are right to tread lightly and to carefully establish policies and rules before they jump in (Gartenberg, 2004).

The third issue concerns 'employees personally blogging but identifying themselves with the company they work for'. Once again, Gartenberg stresses the need for weblog policies just as a company would have phone and e-mail policies.

Unofficial employee blogging is an area of some concern. Kirkpatrick (2004) reports that companies are worried about 'unflattering portrayals and leaks' and mentions several incidents which have led to employee bloggers being fired. Neither will companies be reassured by a report entitled *Web Logs: Blog Threat Management*, published by *Janus Risk Management* (2004), which concludes that 'while blogs have a legitimate use, online journals pose serious threats to enterprise confidentiality, integrity and availability'.

However, as Kellaway (2005) makes clear, a willingness to take risks could make the difference between an effective blog and one which becomes an exercise in 'corporate speak':

The point about blogs is risk. If they are made risky in any way - either through publishing negative comments, or because the author is honest about themselves or their business, people will take notice. If they are merely another conduit for sanitised corporate information, or exercises in executive vanity, they will go the way of corporate mags, the voicemails and the company spam (Kellaway, 2005).

There is general agreement among commentators that trust is an essential factor when blogging for business (e.g. Scoble, 2004). Companies which have abused that trust by creating 'fake blogs' or using blogs as just another advertising medium have tended to meet with ridicule in the blogosphere. Kaye (2003) uses the term 'adverblog' to describe weblogs that 'actively market on a particular brand, product or service, often using fictional personae as the blog authors'. *Dr Pepper*, a US soft-drinks company, incurred the wrath of the blogosphere in 2003 when it launched a viral marketing campaign for its new *Raging Cow* drink. The company briefed a number of young bloggers who were encouraged to blog about

the product. This they did without revealing their connection with *Dr Pepper*. When the truth leaked out, there were calls for a boycott of the product. Bruner (2004b) gives a detailed account of this incident.

New Tools for Business Blogs

A number of blog-related technological innovations are attracting interest in the published literature. Gardner (2005, p. 207) suggests that these new tools can add value to a blog by increasing its functionality and usefulness.

RSS

You should be fired if you do a marketing site without an RSS feed
(Scoble, 2005).

While Robert Scoble's assertion may be deliberately provocative, many commentators view RSS as the key to leveraging the power of blogs (e.g. Weil, 2004; Barbour, 2005). RSS stands for *Really Simple Syndication* or *Rich Site Summary*. It is an XML-based 'pull' technology which enables the distribution of online content by means of 'news feeds'. Once readers have subscribed to an RSS feed, they receive updated content automatically via a feed reader or news aggregator such as *Bloglines* or *Newsgator*. Weil (2004b) identifies several advantages of using RSS rather than e-mail as a means of distributing content. From the publisher's point of view, RSS offers a way of bypassing spam filters and avoiding e-mail

overload. For the consumer, RSS is a practical way to receive news and information which avoids the need to visit multiple websites or blogs.

Although RSS is seen by some commentators as an even more significant development than blogs themselves, a March 2005 report from *Jupiter Research* predicted that the 'adoption rate [of RSS] for marketing purposes will remain low during the next 24 months'. According to Alam Khan (2005), only 6 percent of consumers have installed an RSS reader and the 'adoption rate will change little until the reader's functionality is embedded into browsers or e-mail clients'. However, this may happen sooner rather than later as *Microsoft* is 'taking blogging very seriously' and has plans to bundle a free RSS/news aggregator with *Internet Explorer 7* (Wyman, 2005).

Audioblogging and Podcasting

While standard blogs use text as a means of delivering content, tools such as *Audioblog* have made it relatively easy to incorporate sound files into blog posts. An extension of audioblogging is podcasting. *Wikipedia* (2005), an online encyclopaedia, gives the following definition:

Podcasting is the practice of making audio files available online in a way that allows software to automatically detect new files and download them. Most podcasts are MP3 files distributed through RSS, but other formats and other types of files, such as video, can also be podcasted (Wikipedia, 2005).

Spencer (2005) gives four reasons why companies should podcast: to gain first mover advantage, to develop customer loyalty, to give the company a more human voice and to exploit the PR value of a new technology.

Although weblogs are not the only means of publishing podcasts, the ease with which weblogs can be updated makes them an ideal distribution tool. The twice-weekly *For Immediate Release* podcast by PR professionals Neville Hobson and Shel Holtz is supplemented by a blog which provides a content summary and running order as well as links for the various items mentioned in the show. The *F.I.R.* podcast is a prime example of how to establish oneself as an expert in a particular field of business.

Videoblogging and Moblogging

Video blogs, or vlogs, are a variation on weblogs, using video rather than text as their main content. Moblogging involves posting video, photos or audio from a mobile phone to a blog. Junnarkar (2005) provides an overview of these blogging offshoots and notes that 'syndicated feeds devoted to tracking new video are springing up along with vlog and moblog directories, promising to drive traffic to your video and photos'. While the business potential of these new technologies has yet to be proved, any feature which drives traffic to a website or blog is likely to attract the interest of companies.

Small Business Blogging

In March 2005, *Harris Interactive* conducted a telephone survey of 399 small businesses (HP, 2005). Ten per cent of the small business owners polled had included weblogs in their marketing plans, suggesting that there could be a significant increase in small business blogging over the next few years.

However, most of the literature relating to business blogging makes little or no distinction between blogging for a large or medium-size company and blogging in a small business context. For instance, Gardner (2005, p. 1) states in her introduction that 'this book is useful for you whether are the head of the marketing department in a huge corporation, the CEO of an Internet startup, or a small business owner'. She has no separate section on small businesses. Likewise, Kaye (2003) gives many examples of small business blogs but makes no reference to the specific characteristics or advantages of this particular type of blog.

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that small business blogging is beginning to be considered as a category in its own right. A search⁵ on *Google* for the term 'small business blogging' returned over 6,000 results. The vast majority of these results related to blog posts. As long ago as 2002, when blogs were still far from being a common business tool, Dan Bricklin, a well-known software designer and blogger, identified a key feature of small business blogs in a seminal online article:

In many cases, it is the intimate person-to-person nature of a blog that helps establish and maintain a relationship with an existing or potential

⁵ Search conducted on 23 June 2005.

customer. For many small businesses a personal relationship is their main difference from a "faceless" large organization (Bricklin, 2002).

Bricklin goes on to give examples of small businesses which could benefit from having a blog. These businesses include the consultant, the bed and breakfast and the specialty retail store. Bricklin also considers that crisis management is an area where blogs can play an important role:

Small businesses and organizations can't rely on press conferences and local media to tell their story in the way a large national company can. (They also don't have some of the legal restrictions of publicly held companies to muzzle them.) A blog can be used to instantly respond to local news coverage, provide information to all interested parties, and have explicit written material for the press to refer to (Bricklin, 2002).

Forthcoming books promise to deal with small business blogging as a separate area. Shel Israel informs us on his blog that a chapter of the book he is writing with Robert Scoble 'will be about small businesses and home office bloggers' (Israel, 2005b). Meanwhile, Griff Wigley, a blogging consultant, is planning a whole book on the subject of small business blogging:

The audience for a book on Small Business Blogging is primarily the very small organization: companies, non-profits, and governmental entities with less than 50 employees; the self-employed consultant or contractor; the mom & pop retailer; the independent sole proprietor; the

small professional group in private practice; a small association. It's the small entity that most needs and wants its web site to reflect and complement the personal way which it conducts itself with its customers, members, constituents, clients (Wigley, 2005).

It remains to be seen whether researchers will follow the lead of non-academic writers and start to focus on small business blogging as an area for scientific investigation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Choice of Research Methodology

Research aims should dictate research methods (Weiss 1994, p. 9).

This research project aims to investigate the attitudes and experiences of small business bloggers who are using blogs as a marketing and communications tool. The most appropriate research method for obtaining the data required to carry out such a project was deemed to be the qualitative interview study. The justification for using this method can be found in the relevant literature. For example, Weiss (1994, pp. 9-11) lists seven research aims which would justify using a qualitative interview study as the basis for a research project. The first three - developing detailed descriptions, integrating multiple perspectives and describing process - correspond closely to the aims of the current project. Mason (2002) gives a number of reasons for using qualitative interviewing as a method, the first of which is as follows:

If you choose qualitative interviewing it may be because your *ontological* position suggests that people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research questions are designed to explore. Perhaps more importantly, you will be interested in their perceptions (Mason, 2002, p. 63).

Although respondents' attitudes and experiences could have been explored using a quantitative survey approach, this method was rejected. Indeed, the goal of the research project was not to undertake a statistical analysis using uniform questions and pre-defined categories but to obtain fuller responses in order to 'gain in the coherence, depth and density of the material each respondent provides' (Weiss, 1994, p. 3). Similarly, White (2002, p. 33) believes that 'unstructured interviews are excellent where the aim is to understand the perspective of the interviewee and the personal meanings they attach to different situations'.

Determining the Research Questions

Once the general topic of small business blogging had been chosen, a number of research questions were defined. The aim was to produce a coherent set of questions that would give an insight into what is happening in the field of small business blogging. At this stage in the project, the researcher had an open mind about the outcome. As Mason (2002) says:

...qualitative approaches usually entail formulating questions to be explored and developed in the research process, rather than hypotheses to be tested by or against empirical research (Mason, 2002, p. 19).

Selection of Participants

The interviewees were selected by non-random (non-probability) sampling. White (2002) identifies three forms of non-random sampling including 'purposive sampling':

This is often called judgemental sampling, because the researcher picks the sample they think will deliver the best information in order to satisfy the research objectives in question (White, 2002, p. 64).

The first step in selecting the participants was to identify a number of blogs which met the following criteria:

- the blog should be directly connected to a small business or self-employed professional person
- the blog should have been updated recently and regularly
- the blog should not be exclusively dedicated to promoting a product or service (so-called 'adverblogs')
- the blog should have an identifiable author

Although the total number of blogs runs into millions, with thousands more being created every day, the number of small business blogs is tiny in comparison. What is more, there are no directories or indexes of small business blogs. However, a list of about fifty potential candidates was finally drawn up using a variety of methods. The majority were mentioned in blog postings, articles and books studied as part of the Literature Review. A few

more were found using search tools. Finally, participation in business blogging forums such as *Ryze* resulted in a small number of additional contacts being made.

The initial list of fifty small business blogs was narrowed down to twenty, the aim being to obtain a cross-section of interviewees from different business sectors and backgrounds while avoiding duplication of business types. Using the contact information provided on the blog, a personalised e-mail was then sent to each of the twenty chosen bloggers inviting them to take part in the research project (see Appendix B). A resource blog, *The Voice of the Blog* (see Appendix E), was created and contacts were encouraged to visit this blog to discover more about the project.

The original aim was to carry out between ten and twelve interviews by e-mail or phone. However, the positive replies to the e-mail invitations exceeded that number and the final list contained fifteen names. This sample was large enough to provide a wide body of experience while remaining manageable in terms of the time and resources available and falling within the range suggested in the literature. For example, Kvale (1996, p. 102) states that 'in current interview studies', the number of interviews tends to range from five to twenty-five.

Of the fifteen interviewees, ten were based in the USA, two in the UK and one in each of France, Canada and India. Thirteen were male and two female. Five were self-employed and ten worked for small companies. The range of business activities represented by the interviewees was varied and included manufacturing, retailing, construction, publishing, real estate and consultancy. A list of interviewees, identified by pseudonyms, along with their business activity is given in Appendix A.

The Role of the Researcher

A major task of qualitative researchers is to manage the subjectivity of their work (Holliday, 2002, p. 23).

During a research project, the researcher is called upon to play a number of different roles. Firstly, he must decide on the research question(s) to be investigated. This decision is likely to be a subjective one, based on the researcher's own interests or needs. However, one of the main tasks of the researcher during the research process is to achieve a necessary degree of objectivity.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) define 'objectivity' in qualitative research as follows:

...objectivity does not mean controlling the variables. Rather, it means openness, a willingness to listen and to 'give voice' to respondents, be they individuals or organizations. It means hearing what others have to say, seeing what others do, and representing these as accurately as possible (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43).

According to Mason (2002), the fact that the researcher is an active participant in the research act means that objectivity is an impossible goal:

Qualitative research should involve critical self-scrutiny by the researcher, or *active reflexivity*. This means that researchers should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research

process, and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their 'data'. This is based on the belief that a researcher cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached, from the knowledge and evidence that they are generating (Mason, 2002, p.7).

In the current project, the challenge for the researcher was to put aside his own experience of blogs and blogging and view the activity with a fresh eye. During the interview phase, in particular, it would have been all too easy to introduce a personal bias. However, as McCracken (1998) points out:

The first objective of the qualitative interview is to allow respondents to tell their own story in their own terms. The investigator seeks to keep as 'low' and unobtrusive a profile as possible. In the case of question formulation, it is crucially important that the questions be phrased in a general and nondirective manner (McCracken, 1998, p. 34).

Aware of the potential pitfalls posed by qualitative interviewing, the researcher thus adopted the role of detached interviewer. This approach was facilitated by the fact that the majority of the interviews were conducted by telephone or VoIP⁶, allowing the interviewer to be less obtrusive.

During the data analysis phase of the research project, the role of the researcher is to make sense of the mass of data and structure it in a way that provides answers to the research

⁶ VoIP stands for Voice over Internet Protocol and is a technology that allows one to make telephone calls using a broadband Internet connection instead of a regular phone line. The main advantages are much reduced costs and better sound quality. For this project, *Skype* was the VoIP service provider used.

questions. Holliday (2002, p. 119) comments that 'the act of selecting examples will always be as creative as any other aspect of the writing process'. He also considers that 'another criterion for good data is that the researcher sees the familiar as strange and does not see things as taken for granted' (2002, p. 97).

Data Gathering Techniques

As the researcher is based in France and all but one of the participants were living outside of France, only one face-to-face interview was possible. Of the remaining interviews, five were carried out by e-mail and ten by telephone or VoIP. In one case (Alan), an e-mail interview was followed up by a phone interview. Mason (2002, p. 62) mentions all of these methods as being appropriate for qualitative interviews. The main drawback of e-mail or phone interviews compared to face-to-face interviews is that non-verbal information such as facial expressions and gestures is absent. Weiss (1994, p. 59) notes that 'it's better to be there, but telephone interviews are the next best thing'. Therefore, telephone interviews were preferred to e-mail. Appendix C gives details of how each interview was conducted.

Before each interview, time was spent researching the background of the interviewee. Their blog provided an overview of their professional activity and an introduction to their blogging voice. Several interviewees and their blogs had been the subject of articles in the press or on other blogs. Information gleaned from these various sources was used to personalise the questions used as the starting point for the interview. The fact that the interview questions were not standardised meant that the interviewer was able to explore

specific topics relating to the blogger's own situation as well as more general themes common to all. Mason (2002) stresses the importance of varying the questions:

Your approach to making analytical comparisons in your data set will certainly not depend on having asked all interviewees the same set of questions. You will assume that in order to achieve data that are comparable in key ways, far from giving everyone standardized questions in a standardized form, you may well need to ask different questions of your different interviewees - precisely so that you can generate situated knowledge with all of your interviewees (Mason 2002, p. 65).

However, preparing a list of questions in advance does not mean that the interview is pre-determined. The interviewer must be able to 'think on his feet'. As Mason (2002) points out:

Most qualitative interviews are designed to have a fluid and flexible structure, and to allow researcher and interviewee(s) to develop unexpected themes (Mason, 2002, p. 62).

McCracken (1988) makes a similar point:

...the questionnaire that is used to order the data and free the interviewer must not be allowed to destroy the elements of freedom and variability within the interview (McCracken, 1988, p. 25).

The interviews were thus semi-structured. Mason (2002, p. 62) prefers this term to 'unstructured', because 'no research interview can be completely lacking in some form of structure'.

The telephone/VoIP interviews lasted about thirty minutes on average. According to Weiss (1994, p. 56), 'Half an hour seems about the minimum time for an interview'. However, he was referring to face-to-face interviews, which are probably less intensive. The face-to-face and telephone/VoIP interviews were recorded on audiocassette and transcribed verbatim.

Although only one interview was carried out face-to-face, a comparison of the transcript of that interview with those of the telephone interviews is revealing. The exchanges in the face-to-face interview are much shorter and the interviewer plays a more obtrusive role. In the phone interviews, on the other hand, the interviewees develop their ideas at much greater length, often diverging into areas unrelated to the original question. This variation may be due to the fact that it is more difficult to interrupt one's interlocutor on the telephone. However, it does suggest that phone interviews have the advantage of allowing unexpected themes to develop more easily.

Following each voice interview, a transcript was sent to the interviewee by e-mail. In most cases the interviewee was able to make corrections or modifications which clarified the meaning. All interviewees gave their consent for an edited version of the interview to be posted on *The Voice of the Blog* and were generally enthusiastic about this initiative which gave them and their blog added exposure.

Data Analysis

The interviews carried out for this research project generated over seventy pages of verbatim transcripts. The analysis of this 'raw data' with reference to the published literature and research questions constituted the most challenging part of the project. According to McCracken (1988, p.42), 'the object of analysis is to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular'. In order to arrive at this goal, a three-stage process was employed. The first stage consisted in collecting and transcribing the data to produce a corpus of raw data. Holliday (2002, p. 99) considers that 'the carving out of data already takes the researcher at least one step from social reality, and is the first act of interpretation'. The next stage involved taking relevant data from all the interviews and re-arranging it under thematic headings. The main themes were chosen on the basis of the research questions. However, careful re-reading of the interview transcripts led to some less predictable themes emerging. This procedure was greatly facilitated by the fact that the data was available in the form of computer files. Not only could the data be 'sliced' and re-arranged at will but searches for specific words or phrases could be carried out. Various terms are used in the literature to describe this process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) use the term 'conceptual ordering' while Weiss (1994) talks of 'coding and sorting' and Mason (2002) 'cross-sectional indexing'.

Once the data had been arranged under thematic headings, the final stage in the process could be undertaken: using extracts from the data along with analysis and discussion to form the basis of the relevant sections in the written study. As Holliday (2002) notes:

The text of the written study is thus considerably removed from and relatively uncomplicated by both the reality of the social setting and the data as it was initially collected (Holliday, 2002, p. 100).

Trustworthiness of the Method

A key issue in any form of research is the extent to which the method (and therefore results) can be trusted. The two measures of confidence generally used are reliability and validity. Mason (2002, p. 187) states that 'reliability is sometimes measured by observing the consistency with which the same methods of data "collection" produce the same results'. The difficulty with applying measures of reliability to qualitative research lies in the fact that the qualitative approach lacks the standardized instruments commonly used in quantitative research. Mason (2002, p. 188) acknowledges this problem and suggests that the researcher should, however, be in a position to demonstrate that the 'data generation and analysis have not only been appropriate to the research questions, but also thorough, careful, honest and accurate'. It is the belief of the researcher that the results presented in this study are an accurate representation of the attitudes and experiences of the bloggers who were interviewed. The fact that verbatim transcriptions were made of all the interviews and submitted to the interviewees for checking attests to the accuracy of the raw data. Whether the same results would have been obtained from a different panel of respondents is open to question. Ex-small business bloggers who have tried blogging and given up for whatever reason were not included in the sample. Therefore, a bias in favour of positive attitudes towards blogging is likely to have been introduced.

The other measure of confidence is validity. A valid methodology is one which measures or explains what the researcher claims to be measuring or explaining (Mason 2002, p. 191). All the interviewees were able to analyse and comment on their blogging activity, and the data collected was rich in examples of the ways in which blogs are being used by small businesses. Moreover, the semi-structured interview format, by its very flexibility, tended to enhance validity by allowing the researcher to adapt his questioning techniques to individual cases.

The final consideration has to do with the extent to which generalisations can be made on the basis of the data collected. Mason (2002, p. 39) uses the term 'generalizabilty' in this context. Qualitative research, by definition, leads to descriptive data and interpretive analysis rather than hard statistical evidence which can be extrapolated:

It [the qualitative tradition] is not intended to capture issues of distribution and generalization. It tells us what people think and do, not how many of them think and do it (McCracken, 1988, p. 49).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter will examine the interviewees' experiences and perceptions of using blogs as a marketing and communications tool. The results have been organised on the basis of themes identified when reviewing the data. A key issue is the perceived effectiveness of blogs when used as a marketing medium. However, a number of other points will also be considered, including the bloggers' motivations for using blogs, their feelings about the act of blogging and their experience of new blog-related technologies. The intention is to let the bloggers tell their story with their own voice.

Why Small Businesses Create Blogs

The interviews revealed that none of the small businesses was using its blog for a single purpose. Moreover, the blog use matrix (Table 1) clearly shows that the 'blogging mix'⁷, or specific combination of purposes for which a blog is used, was different for each of the businesses in the study.

The fact that only four of the interviewees were using their blog for sales purposes indicates that the blog was not primarily seen as a sales vehicle. Relationship building was the most common reason for blogging, with only two interviewees failing to mention this point. This result tends to confirm the view that blogs are an excellent tool for communicating with customers (e.g. Gardner 2005; Kaye, 2005).

⁷ Term invented by the researcher.

Table 1 - Blog Use Matrix⁸

	Humanising Company	Relationship Building	PR	Demonstrating Expertise	Networking	SEO	Sales	Customer Support
Phil	✓	✓	✓					
Chris	✓		✓					
Dan		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Eve	✓	✓				✓		✓
Ben*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Tom*		✓		✓	✓			
Alan		✓				✓	✓	
Frank*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jim*	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Keith				✓		✓		
Rick		✓	✓		✓			✓
Leela*		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greg*		✓		✓	✓			
Steve*	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Mike	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

* indicates self-employed blogger

Phil, who is responsible for marketing in a manufacturing company, saw a clear link between humanising the company and relationship building:

The purpose of the blog is to give our company a human voice. When you write something on a website, it can sound pretty generic because it's non-personal. We try to make all of our messages extremely personal in order to develop relationships with customers and prospective customers. The blog makes that easy. Whenever you have something to say, you just say it. The audience knows who wrote it because it has the author's name at the top and it's written in first person.

⁸ A box which is left unchecked does not necessarily indicate that the blogger was not using the blog for that purpose, only that it was not mentioned during the course of the interview.

Several interviewees found that the blog had definite advantages over a traditional website. Steve, a blogging coach⁹, described a website as a 'dry, impersonal brochure that is just sitting there'. A blog, on the other hand, gives readers an insight into the way a company operates. Mike, the webmaster for a UK-based manufacturing firm, had no doubts about the benefits to his company:

A website is only an online brochure. There's obviously a lot more that goes on behind the scenes on a daily basis where you can actually expand upon who you are as a company. It's obviously the whole transparency thing - what you're like as a company, the personalities behind the business. I really do honestly believe that people can actually judge whether they want to do business with you.

The human factor was particularly important to self-employed bloggers. Greg, a management consultant, talked about his blog providing 'some branding of my own personality' while Jim, who runs his own communications consultancy, took a similar view:

In small companies what you're selling more than anything else is the human side. If I have a blog, then people can know me before I even start working with them, so when I walk into the first meeting they already have an idea about who's going to turn up, what this person can do and a little bit about their personality. So half the work's already done.

⁹ A person who helps companies and individuals to create and maintain a blog. Debbie Weil is a well-known executive blogging coach: <<http://blogwrite.blogs.com/about.html>>

Blogging as a means of demonstrating one's personal expertise was another area seen as particularly important by self-employed bloggers. Jim referred to his blog as a 'living CV' while Ben, a professional blogger, used the word 'portfolio', saying that his blog was 'an example of my writing I can show potential clients'. Tom, a lawyer, started a blog when he left his law firm to start up his own business:

I thought the blog would be at the same time a way to get the word out about what I was doing, to cover some issues and to, in an informational way, market my expertise, my practice and my business.

All the self-employed bloggers were using blogs as a networking tool. Greg stressed the importance of his blog in this respect:

The blog's primary purpose is as an informal communication channel on business topics with my direct network of contacts (who tend to be non-bloggers). My business is based on maintaining network contacts so this is an efficient way to maintain a balance of offline/online contact.

Several companies were using blogs for PR purposes. For small companies with limited resources, a blog represents an inexpensive means to disseminate information to potential customers and the press. Rick, the founder of an audio publishing service, found that his blog provided a way into the mainstream media:

I think it's a great tool to alert your readers to what you're doing, and also the press. We've actually done that and had stories picked up and people

calling us to ask us if they could use similar content for a story that they're doing.

As stated in the literature review, there is some debate as to whether blogs should be used as SEO vehicles (Woodhouse, 2005). Although the blog use matrix shows clearly that none of the bloggers interviewed was using their blog solely for this purpose, SEO was an important consideration for many of them. Leela, an online publisher, was typical:

The blog is a way of growing my business. I use it a lot to enhance my search engine listings. I find it very useful for search engine rankings because I've got very good results using blogging. Even though I've only been using *Blogger* and *Wordpress*, I'm quite happy with the results I've got with them.

Blogging coach Steve highlighted the SEO benefits for small businesses:

A lot of these businesses are small enough where they're not about to buy a *Google* text ad, let alone pay somebody to optimize their site for search engines, so another major benefit that I pitch is that once you add a weblog to your site, it's much more search-engine-friendly and as long as you keep it up to date, use the language of your business and links where appropriate, your rankings in a *Google* search will over time gradually rise.

Not all of the interviewees were interested in SEO. Phil said that he did not use his blog as a reciprocal linking tool in order to drive traffic since 'it won't do you any good if you bring irrelevant hits to your site'. However, on the whole, SEO was considered to be a key argument for maintaining a blog.

All of the reasons for blogging listed in the blog use matrix are frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g. Gardner, 2005; Kaye, 2003). However, the interviewees reported a number of other uses. Phil used his blog as a crisis management tool when one of his company's products got some bad publicity and said that the blog helped to give his company a voice (cf. Bricklin, 2002). Keith, who blogs for a London-based language consultancy, viewed his blog as 'an educational tool' and used it as 'resource bank' for his company. Ben and Leela saw their blogs as a means of self-expression, while Tom stated that 'there are business purposes but it's also in a way my art'.

Ben was the only interviewee making money from his blog through advertising. His was one of the few blogs with enough traffic to warrant the use of an ad programme such as *Google's AdSense*. However, traffic is not the only consideration when deciding whether to accept ads. Tom, whose blog had by far the most visitors among the self-employed bloggers, thought that the inclusion of ads would compromise the integrity of his blog:

I want to protect the credibility and I want to build on things that help me and I'm just not sure that for the average blogger, especially on a niche topic or even a blog that's associated with your business, that the advertising model really makes sense. It causes more problems than it's worth.

These results indicate that the interviewees were creating a blogging mix appropriate to their own specific needs. However, Gardner (2005, p. 41) warns against falling 'into the trap of trying to everything at once'. She suggests starting several blogs if you have different aims in mind. In fact, Eve's company was the only one with multiple blogs. Significantly, Eve was also the only full-time company blogger among the interviewees.

The Effectiveness of Blogs as a Marketing and Communications Tool

Blogging represents an opportunity cost for companies, consuming resources that could be employed elsewhere. The question examined in this section is whether the bloggers consider that the investment in time and money is justified by the results obtained. First, however, it is necessary to determine how the effectiveness should be measured. One commonly used measurement tool used in marketing is ROI (return on investment). The *Chartered Management Institute* (2003) defines ROI as 'a ratio of the profit made in a financial year as a percentage of an investment'. However, the term ROI is often used more loosely to signify the benefits which accrue in relation to the resources employed. As stated in the literature review, there is an ongoing debate as to whether business blogs provide an acceptable ROI, or any ROI at all (Bly, 2004a; Scrivens, 2004).

Although none of the interviewees had carried out a quantitative analysis to determine the ROI of their blogging activity, several were able to identify specific opportunities which had come about as a result of blogging:

My blog has generated four qualified freelance opportunities for me since launching about five months ago in September 2004. Three of these opportunities are somewhat different than my traditional management consulting. One deal fell apart. One won. Two pending (but high expectations for both 75%+ probability) (Greg).

It brings me national and international contacts in ways that are always surprising, so I get more speaking engagement invitations, I get article/interview requests and all of that helps to get the word out about my coaching (Steve).

Other bloggers were able to point to benefits of a less concrete nature. Eve, who is company blogger for a food manufacturer and part of the public relations department, likened blogs to 'any PR effort' since the results are 'somewhat intangible'. She added that:

Our CEO has agreed to just play it by ear and we're going to assume that there is some value in terms of a return to our company in doing this at this moment. It's very hard to measure but everybody knows it works.

Some blogs were less successful in generating business. Keith openly admitted to a lack of positive results but seemed fairly relaxed about the fact:

In terms of business it's brought at the moment it's zero but who can tell, once we develop it a bit more, add a few more categories and then we'll see how it goes.

For small companies with limited resources, a blog can provide a solution to the problem of establishing a marketing presence. Dan, the Chief Marketing Officer with an online advertising company, was one of several interviewees who had used a blog to market their company from the outset:

When we started our company over a year ago now, our blog and also blogging was really our only marketing tool. We didn't have a big budget for marketing, so what we decided to do was to start establishing ourselves as an expert in our particular field: RSS Advertising. We started participating in the community and up came this great viral effect. We got customers through our weblog, we got speaking engagements through the weblog and that was the catalyst, that really started it off.

SEO and relationship building were the two benefits most frequently mentioned by interviewees. For Leela the two go hand in hand:

So far I've been measuring the effectiveness in terms of search engine rankings and also I measure effectiveness by the kind of publicity you can get for yourself. I measure the success by the kind of visitors I get because of my blog posts. It's a brand building exercise, it's not just in terms of sales and profits and stuff like that. Blogging is more about building relationships. I think blogging has also helped me to do that, so that's also how I measure the effectiveness.

Mike linked his blog to improved performance in terms of both lead generation and search engine results:

Obviously, you've got more people looking, you've got better targeted key words and not only are we getting more enquiries, we're getting a better quality of enquiry. As opposed to people who are sending you an e-mail, doing the rounds, sending a quote off to maybe five or six companies, people are now starting to ring up. We're now actually getting fewer e-mail enquiries and far more telephone enquiries which are transferring more into sales. I'd say the blog bolsters the web site, but it's starting to bring in traffic in its own right.

One of the difficulties of determining the effectiveness of using blogs for SEO purposes is the lack of accurate measurement tools. Attitudes to traffic varied considerably, as did the traffic itself. Some interviewees were not measuring traffic at all. Others were able to give up-to-date statistics. These are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 - Blog Traffic

	TRAFFIC	NOTES
Mike	'70 visits per day'	'gone up tremendously this past month ever since I got some PageRank'
Ben	'1,000 visitors per day'	
Alan	'144 page views'	January 2005
Jim	'3,000-4,000 visits a month'	
Frank	'3,000 hits per month'	
Tom	'200,000 hits per month'	December, 2004. Blog has increased traffic to website fifteen fold.
Eve	Record of 29,146 visits in one month	August 2004

Accurate statistical comparisons are impossible since some bloggers were measuring hits while others were measuring visits¹⁰. However, the figures do give some idea of the great variation in traffic. The only blogger able to provide detailed statistics was Eve (see Appendix D). An intriguing feature of Eve's figures is the variation in the number of visitors from month to month. Eve attributed this to blog-related events organised by the company. For Eve's company, the amount of traffic is the determining factor in deciding whether to continue with a particular blog:

The traffic is real variable. It's sometimes up, sometimes down. We've just internally decided that if the traffic doesn't keep moving upwards, then we'll pull the blog and try something else.

However, a blog does not need high levels of traffic to be effective. As Bricklin (2002) notes:

...the purpose of a blog is not always to get the largest and widest readership possible. The purpose is usually to communicate with interested individuals. Even in business, the number of those individuals may be very few, but the impact of the communications can have economic impact far beyond its cost. For example, for a business selling high-ticket items or services, one sale can make up for the time cost of a whole year of frequent blogging (Bricklin, 2002).

¹⁰ A 'visit' occurs when someone comes to a site and views one or more pages. A 'hit' is a request by a browser for a file (e.g. an image). A single visit might therefore generate several hits.

One of the most frequently cited marketing benefits of blogs cited in the literature (e.g. Gardner, 2005) is communicating with customers. However, the traffic statistics only indicate how many people are visiting the blogs; they do not give any sense of the dialogue or 'conversation' which may be taking place. Customer feedback, via the blog's comments feature or to an e-mail address given on the blog, is potentially a valuable source of marketing information. According to Jeff Weiner, *Yahoo's* senior vice-president, 'Never in the history of market research has there been a tool like this [the blog]' (Baker & Green, 2005). Rather surprisingly, there was little evidence of conversation with customers among the bloggers interviewed. Even Eve's multiple blogs generated only a limited amount of dialogue:

The number of comments is not huge and we do intentionally try to put some controversial topics in there every now and then to get people revved up. It hasn't been a lot so far and we just assume that people are reading it but they're just not taking the time to comment.

This sentiment was echoed by other bloggers:

Would love to have more comments. That said, most of my customers contacts are executives, not bloggers, and not used to posting (Greg).

Yes, I get a few comments, especially on my search engine blog. When I post something controversial or emotional, you do get comments for that (Leela).

Some bloggers were getting feedback by other means:

It would be nice to get more feedback. What little I have received has been in the form of emails, not comments posted on the blog (Alan).

Three interviewees did not have comments enabled on their site. Two of these cited comment spam as a contributing factor. The problem of spam, which was mentioned by other interviewees, poses a threat to the conversational potential of blogs:

Spam ruined e-mail for me, I'm not going to give the spammers another platform to ruin blogging which is something I really love (Tom).

Frank, a self-employed realtor, was forthright in his assessment:

Comments are for people with time to delete tons of comment spam.

Any consideration of ROI must also take into account the cost of setting up and maintaining the blog. This cost was generally considered to be insignificant:

We have hardly spent any money. We bought the software, hired a contract designer once or twice for a couple of hundred dollars worth of work but it's really minimal (Eve).

I think that one of the best parts about blogging is the low barrier to entry. It's very inexpensive, very accessible (Rick).

I don't have any conclusive evidence to say whether or not the blog is worth the money we invested in it or the time I spend on it. But the investment is pretty minimal: a few hundred bucks in dev and a few minutes of someone's time each week (Phil).

ROI is much more difficult to measure. A blog is pretty inexpensive to run so the ROI is about paid back if you get one decent job a year from the site. The time investment I also view as a community building activity (Chris, owner of a construction company).

When evaluating the costs of blogging, the interviewees tended not to take into account the amount of time they spent on this activity. This 'hidden' cost can be considerable, as highlighted by Tom, the lawyer:

Somebody was saying that they had worked up some sort of calculations and figured that the average blogger probably spends around \$10,000 worth of time on his or her blog during the course of the year. That sounds plausible to me.

A number of interviewees were asked to put a figure on the amount of time they devoted to blogging. The amounts varied enormously, as the following table shows:

Table 3 - Time Spent Blogging

	POSTING FREQUENCY	TIME SPENT	NOTES
Phil	At least once a week	Twenty minutes for a typical post	
Chris	Once a week	10-15 minutes per post. Less if short.	
Tom	Minimum of 3-5 posts per week	10 hours plus a week	
Frank	1-3 posts per week	'Not much'	
Jim	Not every day	Half an hour	Does not include time spent thinking what to write
Keith		First hour of the day; five days a week	Includes time spent trawling news sites
Leela		3-4 hours per day	Includes reading up on news
Alan		Two hours per post	
Eve		60% of working time	Takes care of five blogs

In some cases, blogging had become part of the daily routine, making it all but impossible to estimate its comparative cost in terms of time allocated.

In conclusion, while nearly all of the interviewees believed that their blog was bringing benefits to their company, none was able to measure the ROI in purely financial terms. Moreover, there was little evidence that the much-hyped conversation with customers was actually taking place.

Drawbacks of Using Blogs as a Marketing and Communications Tool

There was a general consensus among interviewees that 'blogging is not for everyone'. Mike felt that the fact that anyone can set up a blog was 'a very strong plus point but also to its detriment' since it is easy to 'make a hash of it'. The experiences related in this section

suggest that companies which jump onto the blogging bandwagon without a minimum of preparation are exposing themselves to unnecessary risks.

Although the interviewees' experience with blogs was mostly positive, several identified problem areas. The most frequently mentioned drawback was the time investment required to maintain a blog. Ben, an Internet consultant and blogger for hire, summed up the situation as follows:

From a small company point of view, one downside is you have another thing you have to make sure you keep up and maintain. It's not like a static website. It's a living, breathing thing. You have to keep working at it and that's downside because it's going to take time.

However, Phil was the only blogger whose company had actually questioned the value of having a blog¹¹:

Having a corporate blog is pretty tough. You don't want to post something unless it's somewhat newsworthy, and something newsworthy doesn't happen every day. We all have a ton of other things to do besides post to the blog, so sometimes it can get pretty stale - like a few weeks between posts. There was some controversy about the blog and whether or not to bring it back. In the end, we decided it would be useful at times and not useful in other times. But the positives outweigh the negatives.

¹¹ It is interesting to note that Phil's blog seems to have been discontinued and is no longer accessible from the company's home page.

Ironically, Eve, the only full-time company blogger, complained that she had not been updating her blogs as frequently as she would have liked due to pressure of work.

If the ROI is not immediately obvious, small companies may decide that the blog is not a priority. Alan, who runs an online retail business in addition to his day job, summed up the dilemma thus:

A drawback could be that a blog could be 'successful' in terms of site traffic and getting customers to return to the site frequently but not a success in terms of revenue generated per unit of input (which would be my time, since the technology itself is free).

While most popular blogging services are free (e.g. *Blogger*) or relatively cheap (e.g. *TypePad*¹²), the cost of training appears to be a limiting factor for small businesses. Steve, the blogging coach, bemoaned the fact that a lot of his clients 'can't afford more than 500 bucks or so to retain me and keep their skills up'. Steve had also found that a lack of technical skills represented an obstacle in some cases. The literature tends to take such skills for granted, but Steve's experience suggests that the older generation of small business owners may be at a disadvantage:

Initially it was surprising to me that a lot of these small business owners don't have some of the low-level technical skills that are required for time-effective blogging. They may have it among their employees but it's an odd kind of phenomenon that many of them are reluctant to ask their

¹² A basic *Typepad* subscription cost \$4.95 per month in June 2005.

employees for help or when they've asked them for help in the past, they've felt stupid or they don't want to reveal their technological illiteracy to their employees even though everybody knows they're lousy at it. One of the things I've started to do more regularly when I pitch a blog to a business owner is ask them to show me their typing skills because that's a major inhibitor.

Eve made a similar point about the audience, suggesting that blogging 'might be a challenge' if your market is 'forty and up'.

Although many commentators (e.g. Gardner, 2005) promote blogging as a way to engage in dialogue with customers, Leela was one of several interviewees to point out the risks involved in such a dialogue:

You have to be careful about what you post sometimes. You can alienate people. A blog is a place where people can respond and sometimes the comments can be nasty, so you have to be very careful how you respond to them. You have to be cool-headed, you can't just shoot your mouth off, especially when people take the trouble to comment on your blog and respond to your posts. There are always people who will try to provoke you. You've got to maintain your dignity when you're responding to people's comments.

Eve told the story of a controversy which had developed on one of her blogs concerning the use of baby formula as opposed to breast feeding:

The fact that it was controversial was good but the comments coming in were personally attacking the letter writer and so I just cut it off at a certain level and said OK we've had the other side have their say we're just not going to print any more of the comments. So that was a kind of guideline we developed on the fly but we'll now apply that if it ever happens again.

This incident demonstrates the importance of monitoring the blog for comments and responding appropriately. However, such vigilance is time-consuming and small businesses need to be conscious of this fact before they embark on a blog. As Ben pointed out, a blog which is not updated regularly can have negative effects on the business:

There's nothing worse than someone starting off a really interesting blog about their small business, posting a few good posts over a couple of weeks and then they stop. Because they've lost their opportunity, they lose their audience almost instantly.

Attitudes to the Act of Blogging

Attitudes to blogging as an activity varied greatly. Even though none of the interviewees regretted having started a blog, some had mixed feelings. Phil, for instance, made the following comments:

I'm glad I've done it. Besides the benefits it directly delivers to the company, I get more of a community feel for the Internet. This helps me in my day to day job, which is to make our site better. I don't think it makes or breaks the company. I don't think people will fall over whatever words I write on the site. I don't think I'd ever want to have a personal blog.

Company bloggers tended to be less committed to blogging than their self-employed counterparts. Eve, the full-time company blogger, made the surprising admission that she had had very little experience of blogs before being appointed:

I was not a person that did blogs myself. I didn't read them, and although I did go to one or two topic areas I might be interested in, I just couldn't stay with it myself. I'm too busy to sit around and read somebody else's writing. That just means I had to put my own prejudices aside and understand that there are people out there for whom this is a very important medium.

Despite Eve's rather dispassionate view of blogging, her blogs have been successful in attracting high levels of traffic (see Appendix D), suggesting that it is not necessary to live and breathe blogs to achieve success as a blogger. However, it should be noted that Eve did have a background in journalism before taking up her position as company blogger.

Other interviewees were more enthusiastic. Chris considered blogging to be 'a very positive experience'. Jim 'couldn't imagine not having it', while Alan stressed the sense of achievement blogging gives:

The blog has that nice feeling of accomplishment: you sit down, you write it, you post it and boom, it's up there.

Blogging was variously thought to be 'really hard work' (Tom), 'moderately hard work' (Greg) and 'not at all hard work' (Jim). Several interviewees considered blogging to be enjoyable and even fun. Tom, the lawyer, demonstrated the passion that blogging can arouse:

Having a website was really exciting at the time. Blogging captured this same excitement for me and maybe it's even more exciting - it's almost like the second chance to do something like that and so I'm just so glad to be participating in this and having so much fun. Maybe I could do something that was more beneficial to my business but I'm getting a second chance to have this Internet excitement again and that's a pretty darn cool thing.

The wide range of attitudes shown by the interviewees towards blogging suggests that there is not one typical profile for a small business blogger. What seems to be an important success factor is a willingness to embrace the medium and learn by doing.

Experiences of Using New Blog-Related Technology

Since blogs first appeared, they have undergone a number of technological transformations resulting in the addition of new features such as comments and *trackback*¹³. What started as a written medium is now developing into new areas with the appearance of audioblogging and videoblogging. Moreover, RSS and podcasting are allowing users to access content in different ways. Although all of these technologies were mentioned during the course of the interviews, RSS was by far the most commonly cited. Several interviewees, mostly tech-bloggers, said that they no longer visit blog sites, preferring to receive the content exclusively via RSS. Tom had even invented a term to describe this behaviour:

I have this new term - I've become feed dominant because after all these years of being on the Internet and living in a browser, I now use this newsreader called *FeedDemon* and because the browser is built in it's become the way I experience the web. I don't go to the point of saying that if you don't have a feed, you don't exist, which some people will say, but I don't actually type in URLs and go to sites anymore, so it's very important for me to find the feed.

On the other hand, Leela's experience suggested that not all users are ready for RSS:

Today I shifted one of my health newsletters to a blog and I had to explain to my subscribers what RSS was. There's a lot of confusion and many of them said they preferred to receive posts by e-mail. They don't

¹³ Trackback is a system originally implemented by *Movable Type* which notifies a blogger when another blog mentions one of his posts. For a detailed explanation, see <<http://www.movabletype.org/trackback/beginners>>.

want to go through the process of subscribing to them by RSS. It depends on what you are trying to achieve, it depends on who you are trying to reach, where your market is.

Steve, the blogging coach, described his own experience with small business bloggers:

Most of my small business owners have never used a news reader themselves. I don't get requests for it because they're not reading other people's blogs, they're just busy with their businesses.

These examples indicate that while experienced bloggers are likely to be early adopters of new technologies, those at grassroots level often lag behind. Steve's comment about his clients not reading other blogs is particularly revealing. For many small businesses, a blog is just a tool and participation in the blogosphere is not part of their agenda. However, by not interacting with other blogs, companies may be missing out on the full potential of blogging, including the 'micro persuasion' effect described in the literature review.

Attitudes to audioblogging, videoblogging and podcasting were generally positive. Several interviewees had experimented with these new tools. Eve's comments suggested a willingness to try new technologies regardless of customer reaction and lack of short-term ROI:

I did one or two audio posts. Somewhere buried deep within my blog you would find that. I'm not sure if our audience would really go for podcasting but it would be interesting to play around with. I think the

underlying theme would be as long as you don't expect immediate, measurable, dollar return, it's a great thing to experiment with and see what works.

Steve thought that audioblogging could be an alternative means of expression for small business owners whose typing skills were limited. However, the only two interviewees who regularly used these new tools were Rick and Ben. Rick, whose company provides audio and videoblogging services, made an interesting comparison between the various forms of blogging and the 'old' media:

I do regular good old-fashioned blogging, I do audioblogging and podcasting and I do videoblogging. And those are three distinct forms of media. And not everyone's going to like one or the other. None of these media are better than the other, they're just different. You either read the paper or you watch TV and you do different things and you behave differently and you act differently when you're doing them.

Rick told the story of one of his customers, which shows that audioblogging is not only the preserve of tech-bloggers. The customer in question, a retired advertising executive, organises fishing trips in the southern United States. He first put up a blog to talk about fishing, and then created an audioblog where he posts interviews with customers. After the trip the customer can send the link to his friends and family. As Rick says, 'I think it [the audioblog] can be used as a viral tool but I also think that it can be used as an information tool'. This anecdote also illustrates the added value which can be provided by an audioblog in terms of building customer relations.

Ben recorded 'off-the-cuff' material for podcasting via his blog while out walking and was enthusiastic about his experiment:

I'm really getting into it, really enjoying it. It's a great outlet, a great way for me to do things, take advantage of time I have when I can't write but I have ideas. I'm getting some good feedback.

Although the number of interviewees using audioblogging, videoblogging and podcasting was small, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that these tools are potentially valuable for small businesses, especially in contexts where a lack of technical or writing skills is an obstacle to more conventional forms of blogging.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

This research project set out to answer a number of questions relating to the use of blogs for marketing and communications purposes by small businesses. The first part of this chapter will discuss the results with reference to the published literature. The second part will consider the appropriateness of the methodology and data collection techniques which were employed.

Discussion of Results

This study confirms the view expressed in much of the published literature that blogs have the potential to be an effective marketing and communications tool for small businesses. One of the main advantages attributed to the blog is its versatility, and the interviewees were indeed using blogs for different purposes, most commonly as a relationship marketing tool. The benefits of blogs as a viral or buzz marketing tool were also suggested by the study. Nearly all the interviewees were able to give examples of ways in which their blog had been beneficial to their business in terms of lead generation or networking. However, ROI was not considered by interviewees to be a deciding factor in whether to invest time and resources in a blog. Most had a belief in the positive impact of having a blog despite the lack of measurable results in terms of increased revenue and more customers. The advantage of a blog over a traditional website was illustrated by the interviewees' frequent use of key words such as

'authenticity', 'openness', 'human', 'transparent' and 'honest', all of which appear regularly in the published literature.

A significant difference between the literature and the research results lay in the area of dialogue with customers. The published literature tends to view this conversation as one of the main assets of business blogs. However, the interviews indicated that any such dialogue was one-sided. Customer response to the blogs was generally minimal. This discrepancy may be due to the size of the companies which took part in the study. A large company such as *Microsoft* has hundreds of bloggers who attract many thousands of visitors. Even if a small percentage of those visitors respond, a dialogue will ensue. Most of the small businesses in this study, on the other hand, were using blogs to show potential customers what they could offer in terms of expertise and skills rather than engaging them in dialogue. Despite the limited dialogue, there was evidence that communities of customers were being created, though lack of accurate visitor statistics was a problem.

An aspect of small business blogging which is largely absent in the literature is the nature of the relationship between the blogger's situation and their blogging practices. Whereas the literature tends to talk about small business bloggers as a homogenous group, the interviews showed that there are important differences depending on the size and type of company. For instance, a clear distinction can be made between self-employed bloggers and those who are blogging on behalf of a company. Not only did the former spend more time composing their own posts but they also read and posted comments on other blogs. This 'micro persuasion' (Rubel, 2004) can lead to powerful viral effects. Company bloggers, on the other hand, were not fully exploiting this potential. The blog use matrix (Table 1) clearly shows that demonstrating expertise and networking were not among their priorities. Company

bloggers were more likely to view blogging as just another activity and tended not to interact with other bloggers.

The general consensus in the literature is that blogging is good for business. However, a number of constraints became apparent during the interviews. Lack of time was the problem cited most often. The lack of basic technical skills and an unwillingness to invest financial resources in a blog were also considered to be potential barriers to small business blogging. On the other hand, certain obstacles to blogging regularly mentioned in the literature, including worries about confidentiality and legal issues (Gardner, 2005), did not appear to pose problems for these small business bloggers. Many business blogging articles and books (e.g. Kaye, 2003) advocate the creation of a corporate blogging policy. None of the companies in the study had such a policy and Eve was the only interviewee to mention guidelines.

Experience of new technologies such as RSS and podcasting varied greatly. Interviewees who were familiar with these tools were enthusiastic. However, the lack of reliable data concerning the number of subscribers to RSS feeds meant that most interviewees were still using e-mail newsletters as their main marketing tool.

One of the original research questions asked whether there was an effective blogging model which can be used by small businesses. The results were inconclusive on this point. The fifteen bloggers interviewed differed greatly in terms of their motivations and experiences. Nevertheless, the participants had one thing in common: a belief in the medium as an effective marketing and communications tool. That belief and a commitment to

blogging as a regular activity can be considered as the key success factors for a small business blog.

Review of Methodology

The qualitative interview study proved to be appropriate to the research aims inasmuch as the interviews provided answers to the original research questions. With hindsight, it could be argued that the inclusion of a short quantitative survey would have yielded some useful information regarding certain areas of activity. For example, details of the amount of time spent blogging and posting frequency were available for some interviewees but not all of them. A survey would have allowed for a more systematic comparison of the results¹⁴.

Although the majority of the interviewees were based in the USA, the sample was large enough to encompass a broad spectrum of small business blogging situations. However, the fact that the respondents in the study were all active bloggers means that the results are likely to have been biased in favour of blogging. For this reason, the extent to which the results can be generalised is uncertain.

The use of different data collection methods was not perceived to have had a negative effect on the study. Although the researcher would have preferred to carry out more face-to-face interviews, telephone/VoIP interviews turned out to be a more than adequate alternative. In fact, there is some evidence that the latter have the advantage of allowing the researcher to elicit testimony in a less obtrusive manner.

¹⁴ White (2002, p.68) refers to the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods as 'method triangulation'.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Opinions differ about the usefulness of blogs in business. In response to the pro-blogging *Business Week* cover story mentioned in Chapter 1, a sceptical reader posted the following comment:

To what problem is Weblogging the answer? No problem in reality and every problem in the minds of its boosters....the totality of communication cannot be shoehorned into the form of short, reverse diary entries based on links, with added comments (Business Week, 2005).

Another reader, a consultant, described blogging as 'the ultimate marketing tool' because 'it's cheap' and 'it works'.

These two points of view illustrate the current division of opinion over the use of blogs in business. While blogs have their detractors, there is a groundswell of support for blogs in the media and published literature and business blogging seems to be more than a 'vogue phenomenon'. However, there is a lack of research-based evidence to show whether blogs can be an effective small business tool. The results of this study suggest that small businesses are able to use blogs effectively for a wide range of purposes from viral marketing to SEO. The consensus of the interviewees was that blogs are a valuable tool for increasing the visibility and credibility of a business, despite the difficulties involved in measuring the ROI.

Surprisingly, very few of the interviewees had any idea of who was reading their blog and in what numbers. They were, to a large extent, blogging in the dark. In order to gain a more complete perspective on the effectiveness of blogs as a marketing and communications tool, it would be necessary to survey blog readers to discover how blogs affect areas such as brand image and customer loyalty. Supporters of business blogging tend to assume that customers want to have relationships with the brands they use. However, the experience of the interviewees in this project was that customers were not actively seeking such a relationship by interacting with the blogs.

One final point which should be highlighted is the bias towards the USA which is present in media reports and published literature with regard to business blogging. For the moment, business blogging appears to be a US-centric phenomenon. This bias is reflected in the current research paper since ten out of the fifteen interviewees were based in the USA. An area for further research would be how business blogging is related to national cultures.

Other possible research topics include investigating why businesses are not blogging and examining the internal and external use of blogs by larger companies. However, since blog-related research is in its infancy, the field is wide open. The researcher looks forward to reading the results when they appear.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

PSEUDONYM	ACTIVITY	LOCATION
Phil	Marketing and Customer Service, Cycle Manufacturer	USA
Chris	Owner, Construction Company	USA
Dan	Chief Marketing Officer, Online Advertising Company	USA
Eve	Company Blogger, Food Manufacturer	USA
Ben*	Internet Consultant, Professional Blogger	Canada
Tom*	Lawyer	USA
Alan	Online Retailer	USA
Frank*	Realtor	USA
Jim*	Communications Consultant	France
Keith	Language Consultant	UK
Rick	Founder and Chief Evangelist, Audio Publishing Service	USA
Leela*	Writer and Online Publisher	India
Greg	Management Consultant	USA
Steve	Blogging Coach	USA
Mike	Webmaster, Manufacturing Company	UK

* indicates self-employed blogger

APPENDIX B

E-MAIL INVITATION

Dear (XXX),

My name is Jeffrey Hill and I'm a lecturer at the Normandy Business School in Le Havre, France. I'm currently doing an online MBA with Liverpool University and have chosen weblogs as my dissertation topic. More specifically, I'm hoping to investigate the attitudes, perceptions, practices and motivations of business bloggers. In order to do this, I need to interview a number of small business bloggers and was wondering whether you would be willing to take part in the project. I would like to sample a cross-section of industries and, having studied your company weblog and read your June interview on the CorporateBloggingBlog, feel sure that you would be able to provide some valuable insights into the area of real estate blogging. I'm planning to carry out the interviews by e-mail or phone sometime in February. I've created a blog myself: The Voice of the Blog (<http://jeffreyhill.typepad.com/voiceblog/>), which is designed to be a resource bank for the project.

Very little academic research has been done in the area of business blogging and it will be interesting to see how the phenomenon is viewed from the bloggers' perspective. Of course, you'd have full access to the final paper and the usual undertakings regarding confidentiality/anonymity would apply.

I do hope that you will be interested in participating and look forward to hearing from you,

Regards

Jeffrey Hill

APPENDIX C

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

INTERVIEWEE	FACE-TO-FACE	PHONE/VoIP	E-MAIL
Phil			✓
Chris			✓
Dan		✓	
Eve		✓	
Ben		✓	
Tom		✓	
Alan		✓	✓
Frank			✓
Jim	✓		
Keith		✓	
Rick		✓	
Leela		✓	
Greg			✓
Steve		✓	
Mike		✓	

APPENDIX D

TRAFFIC FOR EVE'S BLOG (MEASURED IN VISITS)

	BLOG 1	BLOG 2	BLOG 3	BLOG 4
April (2004)	1,508	974	988	903
May	1,164	849	809	751
June	1,407	978	952	927
July	1,413	1,168	831	1,110
August	5,745	4,366	5,618	29,146
September	9,449	4,833	6,898	19,300
October	7,762			9,681
November	15,603	4,049	9,659	28,237
December	3,070	3,096	2,469	26,612
January (2005)	3,026	5,337	3,409	5,029

REFERENCES CITED

- Alam Khan, M. (2005) JupiterResearch: RSS adoption not really simple. *DM News*, 21 March. Available from: <http://www.dmnews.com/cgi-bin/artprevbot.cgi?article_id=32220> [Accessed 10 April 2005].
- Anderson, D. (2004) Blogs: fad or marketing medium of the future? *Brandweek*, 29 November. Vol. 45, Iss. 43, p.14.
- Baker, S. & Green H. (2005) Blogs will change your business. *Business Week*, 2 May.
- Barbour, J. (2005) Marketing with blogs and RSS - the hot new tools of 2005. *EzineArticles*, 13 February. Available from: <<http://ezinearticles.com/?Marketing-With-Blogs-and-RSS---The-Hot-New-Tools-of-2005&id=14182>> [Accessed 10 April 2005].
- Barger, J. (1997) Robot Wisdom Weblog for December 1997. *Robot Wisdom*, 29 December. Available from: <<http://www.robotwisdom.com/log1997m12.html>> [Accessed 11 April 2005].
- Bausch, P., Haughey, M. & Hourihan, M. (2002) *We blog: publishing online with weblogs*. Indianapolis: Wiley.
- Bly, R. (2004a) Can blogging help market your product? *DM News*, 2 November. Available from <http://www.dmnews.com/cgi-bin/publogin.cgi?article_id=30900> [Accessed 10 April 2005].
- Bly, R. (2004b) 2 weeks in the blogosphere. *Bly.com Blog*, 30 November. Available from: <<http://www.bly.com/blog/index.php?cat=4>> [Accessed 12 April 2005].
- Blood, R. (2002) *The weblog handbook*. Cambridge, MA.: Perseus Publishing.
- Bricklin, D. (2002) Small business blogging. *Dan Bricklin's Log*, 12 August. Available from <<http://danbricklin.com/log/businessblogging.htm>> [Accessed 3 May, 2005].
- Bruner, R. (2004a) Business blog case study: Stonyfield Farm. *BusinessBlogConsulting.com*, 16 December. Available from:

<http://www.businessblogconsulting.com/2004/12/business_blog_c.html> [Accessed 27 March 2005].

Bruner, R. (2004b) Raging Cow: the interview. *BusinessBlogConsulting.com*, 30 June. Available from: <http://www.businessblogconsulting.com/2004/06/raging_cow_the_.html> [Accessed 12 April 2005].

Business Week (2005) *Cheers and sneers for the blogosphere*. 23 May.

Chaney, P. (2005) Blogs as SEO/SEM tools. *RadiantMarketing*, 1 March. Available from: <http://radiantmarketing.typepad.com/radiant_marketing/2005/03/blogs_as_seosem.html> [Accessed 3 March 2005].

Chartered Management Institute (2003) *Dictionary of business and management*. London: Bloomsbury.

Crumlish, C. (2004) *The power of many*. Alameda, CA: Sybex.

Dafermos, G. N. (2003) *Blogging the market* [online paper]. Available from: <<http://opensource.mit.edu/papers/dafermos3.pdf>> [Accessed 20 January 2004].

Dudley, B. (2004) Bill Gates could join the ranks of bloggers. *Seattle Times*, 25 June. Available from: <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/businesstechnology/2001964841_gatesblog25.html> [Accessed 11 May 2005].

Dye, R. (2000) The buzz on buzz. *Harvard Business Review*, Vol 78, No. 6, p. 139-146.

Economist (2005) Chief humanising officer. *The Economist*, 10 February, p. 58.

Egan, J. (2004) *Relationship marketing*. 2nd ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

eMarketer (2005) *The business of blogging*. 12 May. Available from: <<http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?1003396>> [Accessed 14 May 2005].

Gardner, S. (2005) *Buzz marketing with blogs for dummies*. Indianapolis: Wiley.

Gartenberg, M. (2004) Are you afraid to blog? You might have good reason to be afraid. *Jupiter Research Analyst Weblogs*, 19 October. Available from: <<http://weblogs.jupiterresearch.com/analysts/gartenberg/archives/003951.html>> [Accessed 9 April 2005].

Gillmor, D. (2004) *We the media*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.

Gladwell, M. (2000) *The tipping point*. New York: Back Bay Books.

Godin, S. (2001) *Unleashing the ideavirus*. New York: Hyperion.

Gurak L. *et al.* (eds.) (2005) *Into the blogosphere*. University of Minnesota. Available from <<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere>> [Accessed 22 May 2005].

Hewitt, H. (2005) *Blog: understanding the information reformation that's changing your world*. Nashville: Nelson Books.

Holliday, A. (2002) *Doing and writing qualitative research*. London: Sage.

HP (2005) *HP 2005 Small Business Survey*. 27 April. Available from <http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/press_kits/2005/sbizweek/execsummary.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2005].

Hurlbert, W. (2005) Blogs equal SEO power in searches. *Web Pro News*, 18 March. Available from: <<http://www.webpronews.com/insiderreports/searchinsider/wpn-49-20050318BlogsEqualSEOPowerInSearches.html>> [Accessed 3 April 2005].

IMN Inc. (2003) *Weblogs: realigning business, technology and communication*. [White paper] Available from: <<http://www.imninc.com/pdf/Blogs.pdf>> [Accessed 2 April 2005].

Israel, S. (2005a) Chapter 2. *Naked conversations*, 14 March. Available from: <http://redcouch.typepad.com/weblog/2005/03/chapter_2.html> [Accessed 11 May 2005].

Israel, S. (2005b) Small business cases wanted. *Naked conversations*, 8 April. Available from <http://redcouch.typepad.com/weblog/2005/04/small_business_.html> [Accessed 15 May 2005].

Janus Risk Management (2004) *Web logs: blog threat management*. Dublin: Research and Markets.

Jobber, D. (2004) *Principles and practice of marketing*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

Junnarkar, S. (2005) Bloggers add moving images to their musings. *New York Times*, 24 February.

Kaye, K. (2003) *Business blogs*. Andover: Up2Speed, LLC.

Kellaway, L. (2005) Why executives should steer clear of the blogosphere. *The Financial Times*, 28 February.

Kirkpatrick, D. (2004) It's hard to manage if you don't blog. *Fortune*. Vol. 150, Iss. 7, p. 46.

Kirkpatrick, D. and Roth, D. (2005) Why there's no escaping the blog. *Fortune*. Vol. 151, Iss. 1, p. 64.

Kotler, P. (2003) *Marketing management*. 11th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

Knowledge@Wharton (2005) *Blogs, everyone? Weblogs are here to stay, but where are they headed?* Available from:

<<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/index.cfm?fa=viewArticle&id=1172>> [Accessed 2 April 2005].

Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.

Levine, R., Locke, C., Searls D., Weinberger, D. (2000) *The Cluetrain manifesto*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Li, C. (2005) *Blogging: bubble or big deal?* Forrester Research.

Marketing Sherpa (2005) *7 practical tactics to turn your blog into a sales machine*.

Case study #2937. Available from:

<<http://library.marketingsherpa.com/barrier.cfm?CID=2937>> [Accessed 9 April 2005].

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative researching*. London: Sage Publications.

McCracken, G. (1988) *The long interview*. London: Sage Publications.

McGovern, G. (2004) Blogs and blogging: advantages and disadvantages. *New Thinking*, 23 August. Available from:
<http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/nt/2004/nt_2004_08_23_blogging.htm> [Accessed 9 April 2005].

McKenna, R. (1992) *Relationship Marketing: successful strategies for the age of the consumer*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Needleman, S. (2005) Blogging becomes a corporate job. *Wall Street Journal Online*, 31 May. Available from:
<http://online.wsj.com/public/article/0,,SB111748967859946439,00.html?mod=todays_free_feature> [Accessed 3 July 2005].

O'Malley, G. (2005) Will blogs become the ultimate marketing tool? *Online Media Daily*, March 3. Available from:
<http://publications.mediapost.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.showArticleHomePage&art_aid=27815> [Accessed 17 March 2005]

Powazek, D.M. (2002) *Design for community*. Indianapolis: New Riders.

Rainie, L. (2005) The state of blogging. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Available from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_blogging_data.pdf> [Accessed 11 April 2005].

Rendon, P-M. (2004) Blog talk. *Marketing*, 27 September.

Rubel, S. (2004) The future of marketing. *MicroPersuasion*, 11 August. Available from: <http://steверubel.typepad.com/micropersuasion/2004/08/the_future_of_m.html> [Accessed 11 May 2005].

Sawhney, M. (2005) Blog-trolling in the bitstream. *Harvard Business Review*. Vol. 83, No. 2, p. 39.

Scoble, R. (2005) No RSS? No downloads? No interaction? Fake content? Your fired! *Scobleizer*, 19 February. Available from: <<http://radio.weblogs.com/0001011/2005/02/19.html>> [Accessed 10 May 2005].

Scoble, R. (2004) The corporate weblog manifesto. *ChangeThis*, 24 August. Available from: <<http://www.changethis.com/2.CorporateWeblog>> [Accessed 2 April 2005].

Scoble S. and Israel S. (2005) Village blacksmiths of the information age. *The Red Couch*, 27 February. Available from: <http://redcouch.typepad.com/weblog/2005/02/chapter_1.html> [Accessed 2 April 2005].

Scrivens, P. (2004) Blogs and ROI. *The House of Squarespace*, 28 October. Available from: <<http://blog.squarespace.com/blog/2004/10/28/blogs-and-roi.html>> [Accessed 9 April 2005].

Shah, P. (2005) Will spam-blogging be the death of blogging? *EzineArticles*, 16 March. Available from: <<http://ezinearticles.com/?Will-Spam-Blogging-Be-The-Death-Of-Blogging?&id=21265>> [Accessed 12 April 2005].

Sifry, D. (2004) October 2004 state of the blogosphere: corporate bloggers. *Sifry's Alerts*, 17 October. Available from: <http://www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/2004_10.html> [Accessed 28 March 2005].

Smith, P.R. and Taylor, J. (2004) *Marketing Communications*. 4th ed. London: Kogan Page.

Spencer, S. (2005) Move over blogs: here come podcasts. *MarketingProfs.com*, 22 March. Available from: <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/5/spencer11.asp>> [Accessed 10 April 2005].

Stern S. (2003) The death of P.R. *The New Statesman*, 20 January. Available from: <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FQP/is_4621_132/ai_97232287> [Accessed 2 April 2005].

Stone, B. (2004) *Who let the blogs out?* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Turban, E., King D., Lee J. and Viehland D. (2004) *Electronic Commerce*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

Wackä, F. (2004) Corporate blogger John Mudd. *CorporateBlog.info*, 29 June. Available from: <<http://www.corporateblogging.info/2004/06/corporate-blogger-john-mudd.asp>> [Accessed 27 March 2005].

Weil, D. (2004a). Bob Bly blunders when it comes to business blogs. *Debbie's blog*, 2 November. Available from: <http://www.debbieweil.com/archives/2004/11/02/bob_bly_blunders_when_it_comes_to_business_blogs/index.php> [Accessed 10 April 2005].

Weil, D. (2004b) One more time...what is RSS and why should you care? *WordBiz Report*, Vol. 4, Issue 25.

Weiss, R.S. (1994) *Learning from strangers*. New York: The Free Press.

White, B. (2002) *Writing your MBA dissertation*. London: Thomson.

Wigley, G. (2005) *Small business blogging*. Available from: <http://smallbusinessblogging.com/html/about_the_books.html> [Accessed 15 May 2005].

Wikipedia (2005) *Podcasting*. Available from: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting>> [Accessed 1 May 2005].

Woodhouse, P. (2005) Is the Stonyfield bloghurt experience turning sour. *Blogthenticity*, 5 March. Available from: <<http://blogthenticity.com/2005/03/05/is-the-stonyfield-bloghurt-experience-turning-sour>> [Accessed 3 April 2005].

Wyman, B. (2005) Microsoft to dominate blogging sooner than expected. *As I May Think*, 16 March 2005. Available from: <http://bobwyman.pubsub.com/main/2005/03/microsoft_to_do.html> [Accessed 10 April 2005].

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bodine, L. (2004) Keep on blogging. *New Jersey Law Journal*, 12 January.
- Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G. & Williams, J.M. (2003) *The craft of research*. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Brookes, R.W. (1988) *The new marketing*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Capon, C. (2000) *Understanding organisational context*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Carl, C.R. (2003). *Bloggers and their blogs: a depiction of the users and usage of weblogs on the worldwide web*. M.A. thesis. Available from:
<<http://cct.georgetown.edu/thesis/ChristineCarl.pdf>> [Accessed 23 January 2004].
- Copeland, H. (2005) Blog reader survey. *Blogads*, 12 March. Available from
<http://www.blogads.com/survey/2005_blog_reader_survey.html> [Accessed 12 April 2005].
- Dardi, B.A. *et al.* (2004). Why we blog. *Communications of the ACM*. Vol. 47, No. 12.
- Dickinson, G. (2003) *Weblogs - can they accelerate expertise?* MA dissertation. Available from:
<http://www.participo.com/files/ma/do_weblogs_accelerate_expertise.pdf> [Accessed 20 January 2004].
- Economist (2004) Blogging goes to work. *The Economist*, 11 March.
- Fournier, S., Dobscha, S. and Mick, D.G. (1998) Preventing the premature death of relationship marketing. *Harvard Business Review*. Vol. 76, No. 1, pp. 42-51.
- Geller, L. (1998) The Internet: the ultimate relationship marketing tool. *Direct Marketing*, 61, (5), 36-38.
- Green, H. (2004) All the news you choose - on one page. *Business Week*, 25 October.
- Kenny, D. and Marshall, J. F. (2000) Contextual marketing: the real business of the Internet. *Harvard Business Review*. Vol. 78, No. 6, pp. 119-125.

Kozinets, R. (1999) E-tribalized marketing?: the strategic implications of the existence of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17 (3), pp. 252-264.

Krimen, E. Blogs are huge. *Macromedia*. Available from:
<http://www.macromedia.com/devnet/logged_in/ekrimen_blogs.html> [Accessed 11 May 2005].

McKenna, R. (1991) Marketing is everything. *Harvard Business Review*. Vol. 69, No. 1, pp. 65-79.

McKenna, R. (1995) Real-Time marketing. *Harvard Business Review*. Vol. 73, No. 4, pp. 87-95.

McIntosh, N. (2005) The next big thing. *GuardianUnlimited Online*, 28 April. Available from: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/online/businesssolutions/story/0,12581,1471337,00.html>> [Accessed 15 May 2005].

Pew Internet & American Life Project (2004a). *Content creation online*. Available from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Content_Creation_Report.pdf> [Accessed 20 January 2005].

Pew Internet & American Life Project (2004b). *The future of the Internet*. Available from:

<http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Future_of_Internet.pdf> [Accessed 20 January 2005].

Rheingold, H. (1993) *The virtual community: homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Rodzvilla J. (ed.) (2002) *We've got blog*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Rubel, S. (2005) Micro media is changing the PR practice. *MicroPersuasion*, 18 April. Available from: <http://www.micropersuasion.com/2004/04/whats_this_blog.html> [Accessed 2 April 2005].

Stauffer, T. (2002) *Blog on*. Berkeley: McGraw-Hill/Osborne.

Wackä, F. (2005) Using blogs for project management. *WebProNews*, 10 February.
Available from: <<http://www.webpronews.com/news/ebusinessnews/wpn-45-20050210UsingBlogsforProjectManagement.html>> [Accessed 11 May 2005].

Weinberger, D. (2002) *Small pieces loosely joined*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

Winer, D. (2002) The history of weblogs. *Weblogs.com News*, 17 May. Available from:
<<http://newhome.weblogs.com/historyOfWeblogs>> [Accessed March 28 2005].

Wolff, P. (2005) 11.9 million Korean bloggers. *Blogcount.com*, 10 January. Available
from: <http://dijest.com/bc/2005_01_01_bc.html> [Accessed 12 April 2005].

Yin, R.K. (2003) *Case study research*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.