

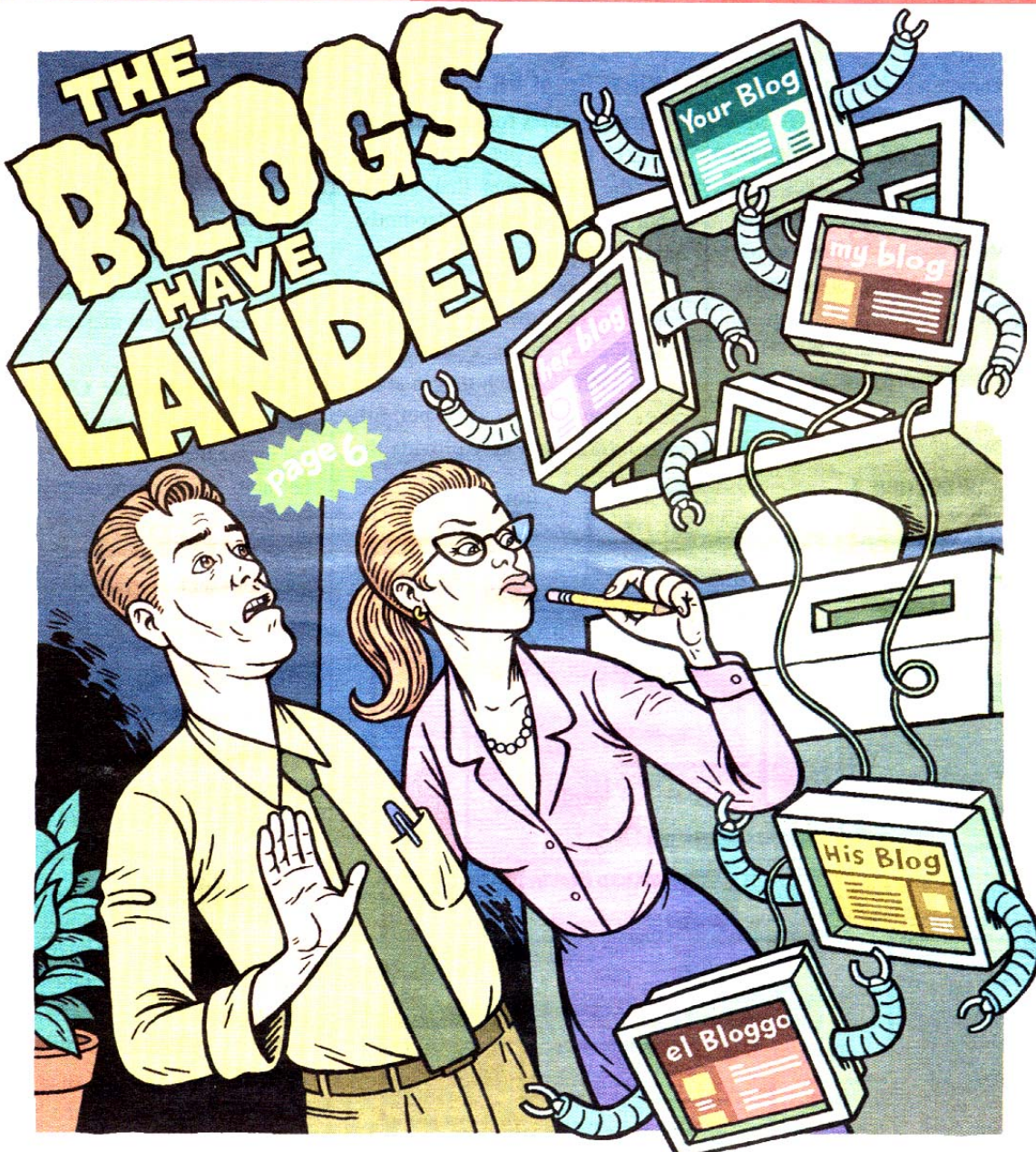
PUBLIC RELATIONS TACTICS

PRSA www.prsa.org

FOCUSED INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS

\$6/AUGUST 2002

WEB WAYS





Pitching Blogs:

Latest Type Of Online Media Vehicle May Provide Valuable PR Opportunities

By Lloyd Trufelman and Laura Goldberg

The name sounds more like a sci-fi character than a legitimate news source, but blogs are rapidly becoming authoritative news sources. PR professionals should keep this new type of media on their radar screens.

What is a blog exactly? Blog is short for Web log — regularly updated online diaries/news forums that feature links to news items and stories from across the Internet's World Wide Web. Most blogs are helmed by a single individual called a blogger. The majority of these self-made Internet pundits are simply Web fans who wanted to bring their own views to the online table. Others are journalists or industry insiders who wanted to create forums for expressing their opinions without editorial constraint.

There are a few Web logs, however, that are collective endeavors, where a community of vocal individuals participates in providing opinion, commentary and links. Some of these sites have an editor filtering through submissions. A handful also allow members to grade contributions, enabling the community to vote on whether or not a suggestion gets prominent placement or makes it onto the site at all. One of the most well-known in this category and perhaps the "granddaddy" of collective blogs is the popular tech news site Slashdot (www.slashdot.org).

Having only emerged on the scene a few years ago, a growing audience of Web-savvy newshounds has quickly taken to getting their news and views from blogs. This trend has caught the notice of established Internet news sources, which have joined in the game. Recently, our client MSNBC.com (www.msnbc.com) unveiled a collection of blogs on its site. In addition, our agency handled press for the successful launch of the pop culture blog Plastic (www.plastic.com), which was begun by the editors behind the Webby award-winning e-zine *Feed* (www.feedmag.com).

Pitching Blogs

Blogs have been known to comment on a variety of issues, ranging from the latest e-mail hoax to a blockbuster action film to the newest PDA on the market. However, as with Slashdot, whose primary focus is open-source software news, many blogs concentrate on a specific topic.

Two of the most important, topic-specific Web logs for media pros are Jim Romenesko's MediaNews (www.poynter.org/medianews) and I Want Media (www.iwantmedia.com). Begun in 1999 as an independent site called Media Gossip before it became part of the Poynter Institute's online offerings, Romenesko's site is particularly notorious for being a first-read among media insiders, often creating a firestorm within the journalism community, through its combination of news and rumors.

Publicists have long sought means for reaching highly targeted audiences, including media reps, in order to drive buzz about their clients. With the kind of traffic and targeting that any of



Blogs are a new medium and, therefore, require a new approach.

the aforementioned sites generate, topic-specific blogs can fit the bill.

So, now the question is how to land your clients in the right blog at the right time in order to reap the benefits of their highly receptive audience.

The most important thing a publicist can do before pitching a blogger is to carefully read his or her blog. Unlike beat reporters at typical news outlets, bloggers are extremely idiosyncratic in choice of subject matter and slant. In order to begin a conversation with one — and it should be viewed as a conversation, rather than a pitch — it is vital that you are well-acquainted with the interests of the blogger. Many of them still consider their sites to be personal forums for their views and perspectives, and are wary of corporate or PR interference.

In fact, many bloggers have no experience at being pitched by publicists. Recently, we conducted outreach to several blogs on behalf of our client *Business 2.0* magazine, which had published an article about the Web log phenomenon (www.business2.com/blog). What was striking throughout the pitching process was the discovery that most bloggers were rarely, if ever, approached by PR professionals. The campaign drove traffic to the story, but it also created a flood of commentary on several blogs — questioning how, or even if, PR pros should get into the mix. Prominent bloggers that joined in the

fray included Paul Boutin ([http://paulboutin.weblogger.com/discuss/msgReader\\$201](http://paulboutin.weblogger.com/discuss/msgReader$201)) and Jason Kottke (<http://www.kottke.org/notes/0204.html#020416>).

A New Approach

Blogs are a new medium and, therefore, require a new approach. It is crucial not to spam bloggers and to be aware of their likes and dislikes before you drop them a line. Canned, conventional pitch letters can be seen as offensive. Their preferred means of communication is e-mail and their address is often prominently featured on the site. When communicating with blogs, make sure to be completely open and honest about why you are contacting them, disclosing your organizational affiliation. Keep it to the point and always make sure to include a link to a published story or item that they might consider featuring. Do not ask bloggers to link to your client's site or latest press release. Bloggers are sensitive about becoming mouthpieces for other organizations and companies, which is the reason they began blogging in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, many bloggers are professional journalists, such as *The San Jose Mercury News* technology columnist Dan Gillmor, who writes Dan Gillmor's eJournal (www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/business/columnists/dan_gillmor/ejournal), in addition to his newspaper duties. The ability to check out journalists' blogs offers an invaluable opportunity to gain insight into their true interests and viewpoints. This information can be the difference between crafting an effective pitch and one that will be deleted. In addition, it is possible that well-tailored pitches to journalist bloggers might not only generate hits on their blogs, but develop into placements in other media outlets as well.

Another boon for PR pros is that bloggers tend to read other blogs and comment on them. It is not surprising to see a single hit on one key blog turn into mentions on several others. For this reason, it is best to begin your campaign by contacting the most popular, targeted blogs. Most blogs feature sidebars highlighting URLs of other like-minded blogs. Any site that is mentioned several times by other blogs, and that is included in a majority of recommended blog lists, should be noted as a primary target.

But what if your client doesn't seem quite right for blog outreach? Blogs can still prove helpful in terms of keeping on top of news and trends that may impact PR campaign strategies.

If a recent decision by the journalism school at the University of California, Berkeley, to offer a graduate-level course in blogs is any indication, these Web forums are going to become increasingly vital to the news media landscape — and more vital to clients who require targeted media outreach. 🍌

Lloyd Trufelman is president and Laura Goldberg is account supervisor for New York-based Trylon Communications, Inc. (www.tryloncommunications.com)