

Fast and Fearless – the Future is Blogs

You can't avoid them – the blogs. They're so plentiful that the opinions they offer are forming part of news reports. Given the evident potency of blogs, therefore, the question is should blogs remain within their current sphere of influence, helping individuals to share their personal opinions on with the world, or should they be adopted by brands as communication tools?

The fact is that the marriage between blogs and brands is no longer a vision. Personality brands, like Seth Godin or Tom Peters, already blog the net. And brands like Weight watchers, LEGO, Apple or Harley Davidson already appear on a frequent basis, not on behalf of their brand-builders, but promoted by their fans.

This raises a potential danger: gradually the control over brand messages is being drawn away from brand builders and being redirected by consumers. So should brands begin investing in posting their own frequent blogs on the net, representing their points of view and personalities? Could you imagine Disney blogging its fans about its characters, Nokia about its latest products or Microsoft about its virus issues? Yes, I'll bet you can. The action would probably help

brands get closer to their consumers by reaching right into those core communities of fans. But exploiting this avenue takes commitment.

In fact, the problem would not be for companies to write the blogs, but to write useful blogs. To achieve this, you have to be flexible and able to react promptly. Companies are simply not armed with the flexibility and quick response time required to run a relevant, interactive and engaging blog. The medium would pose a risk of producing small one-page press releases rather than interactive, current points of view.

However the prospect raises an interesting question. Brands of the future will need to handle this discipline effectively – the discipline of quick action. They'll need to dare to exhibit opinions fearlessly and share them with the world, avoiding litigation and unhampered by the risk of it. But, as we know, companies tend to avoid political issues. Corporate entities feel obliged to clear their opinions with every quarter, eliminating all risk of offending any sensibilities, and thus, sanitizing their points of view into meaninglessness. This sterilisation is death to achieving the momentum needed to sustain and inject value into a blog.

Tomorrow's brands will need to be able to transgress current inhibitions. In many ways, this could be the ultimate test for brands, reflecting organizations' confidence and coherence, demonstrating brand self-esteem and ownership that unhesitatingly speaks for itself, promotes opinions and shares them in hours rather than in weeks or months. Just as manufacturers and retailers learned the "just in time" thinking in the nineties, brands will need to adopt another "just in time" dimension to their self-management: the ability to share information, just in time, with their consumers.

In contrast, if brands don't make this evolutionary leap soon, companies will be left behind a consumer population which expects timely email responses, prompt fulfilment of orders, and brand blogs in minutes. A phenomenon which, in my latest book, BRAND sense (www.brandsense.com), call HSP (Holistic Selling Proposition) brands will need to emerge with coherence in order to deal with consumers holistically, becoming



part of the individual's minute-by-minute experience of everyday life.

However, companies are far from this point. To establish an organization that enables true HSP branding, brands, which could handle the blog challenge, requires dramatic structural, systemic and communications changes. Stay tuned. In my next column I'll give you the hints you need to prepare your company for the branding future – a future in which effective, 'just in time' blogs are as natural and easy a part of communication as press releases are today.

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