



21Publish
Cooperative Publishing

Your Corporate Blogosphere

Selecting a Solution to Enable
More Efficient Workplace
Communication & Knowledge
Sharing"

May 12th 2005

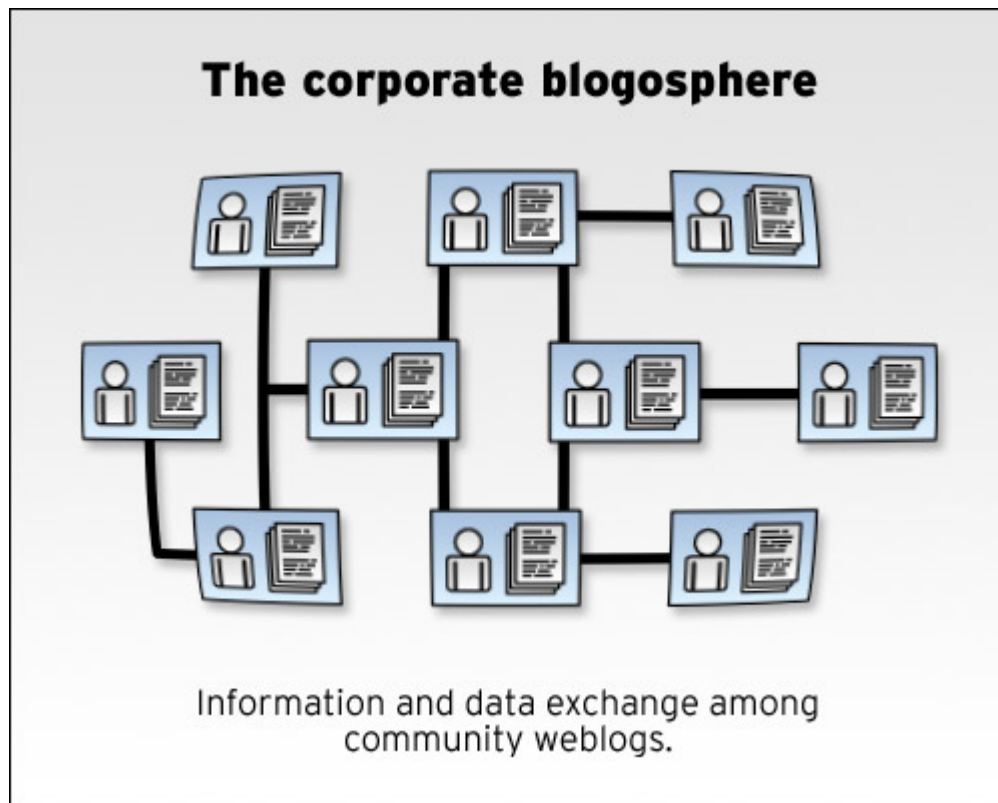
“Your Corporate Blogosphere – Selecting a Solution to Enable More Efficient Workplace Communication & Knowledge Sharing”

What Is A Corporate Blogosphere?

A corporate ***blogosphere*** is a collection of employee blogs (also known as weblogs) that facilitates worker communication within a company (i.e., within the Intranet).

People create personal blogs using next-generation software, known as “blogging platforms”, which are essentially combinations of repository, website, content server, and publishing software. Blogs capture the thoughts of people. One simply writes information in a text editor and then publishes and distributes their thoughts via the web. Readers can view the blogs of others and engage in conversations through the use of direct commenting or creation of blog entries that reference the original blog entries.

Now the collection of all personal blogs in the world is collectively referred to as the *blogosphere*. It is basically a network of individuals that both generate original ideas and reference postings on other blogs and information sources on the web. Blogs have worked very well both because they not only allow an author’s personality to show but also combine web publishing, communications, and interaction functionality.



Recent history related to personal blogs provides insight about the potential of corporate blogospheres. Consider the following phenomena:

1. an explosion of personal blogs has occurred with the development of a lively community of people publishing, sharing, and discussing ideas,
2. people with shared interests have formed subcommunities and developed personal relationships,
3. blogs have significantly enlarged the publicly accessible knowledge base across the world, and
4. blog-related technologies have enabled people to dramatically reduce *transaction* costs for conversations (which now provides

additional options to either reduce total costs or increase the number of conversations).

Thus, given the right tools companies are beginning to realize that they can improve intracompany communications through leveraging the benefits of improved communication demonstrated in the world of personal blogs.

Why Should Businesses Have A Corporate Blogosphere?

Corporate blogospheres provide an efficient means to incentivize and activate interpersonal conversations within a company. Current conversations include transient email discussions that do not contribute to the knowledge repository of the company.

To put a perspective on the significance of corporate blogospheres, companies like Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein have benefited from these in promoting discussion and sharing of information. In the words of CIO JP Rangaswami, “We think of it as the open-source marketplace of ideas. It lets us expose concepts or issues to a wide audience and discuss them appropriately.” Other companies, like Google, have provided all employees with internal blogs. Uses include keeping track of meeting notes, sharing diagnostic information, exchanging snippets of code, and providing management status updates. Additionally, business books like James Surowiecki’s “The Wisdom of Crowds” have recently skyrocketed because companies are learning about the statistically measured benefits of harnessing the power of groups of people.

So why should companies have a corporate blogosphere?

To Motivate the Voice of the Employee – Blogs enhance and reward the voices of individuals, and this can be extremely

motivating. Origination of content and ideas can be tracked, and as a result, there is increased incentive to share knowledge. Individuals may even raise their profile and career prospects by publishing reputable information on blogs. Search mechanisms also help to make knowledge findable (unlike email).

To Facilitate Interdependence - Companies like Microsoft have thousands of bloggers ranging from executives to trench-level workers. Blogs have successfully been used to intensify communications between all levels of a company. Such communications complement existing efforts where companies spend money to hold sales conferences, conduct video conferencing, and share knowledge in face-to-face meetings. Because bloggers can organize information into communication “channels” and conversations, people can participate in subcommunities or conversations they deem worthy. People can also build on top of ideas of others, thus lending additional credit to those individuals that provide useful and constructive information. Thus, although file sharing and email communication have been effective means on communicating in the past, there are ways to take workplace communication to a higher level with corporate blogospheres.

To Organize Information (Pull Versus Push Mechanisms) – Email and newsletters have tended to be the mechanism of choice for computer-based communication. People refer to these techniques as “pushing” information out to audiences. This can be inefficient and create a lot of excessive noise. Blogs and the predominant syndication mechanism associated with blogs, known as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, enable people to choose to view information that is most relevant to them (a “pull” based mechanism). Some blogging platform vendors have also developed

other mechanisms (e.g., which subscribe individuals to updates to specific conversations) for promoting community discussions while minimizing information overload associated with email conversation.

In summary, a corporate blogosphere improves worker communications and enlarges a company's knowledge base because it rewards and recognizes the individual, encourages heightened interdependence between workers, and provides a way to more efficiently organize certain types of conversations.

"Knowledge is the new capital, but it's worthless unless it's accessible, communicated, and enhanced." – *Hamilton Beazley, Strategic Leadership Group*

Corporate blogospheres help to capture knowledge and fill the gap between email conversations, project management, and daily operations.

What Should You Look For In A Corporate Blogosphere Solution?



Having covered why businesses should have a corporate blogosphere, it is useful to describe what one should look for in terms of technology. Businesses that wish to implement a corporate blogosphere should seek out a professional blogging platform, and not all blogging platforms are alike. Blogging platforms suited for corporate blogospheres cover four areas well: 1) ease of use, 2) support for community interaction, 3) reliability and security, and 4) cost-effective deployment.

Ease of Use

Traditional blogging platforms handle support for single users quite well. Corporate blogospheres, however, may consist of tens, hundreds, or thousands of users. Ease of community administration is a necessity. Administrators of the blogosphere must be able to list community members, create subcommunities for departments or groups, and manage general access and communications. It can be easy to take for granted administration capabilities such as registering users, communicating with users through email, and being able to predefine features or templates.

Equally important, however, are the ease-of-use features that integrate blogging into everyday work. For example, corporate blogging solutions need to support email. Employees thrive on email. It's a natural part of work whether on the road or in the office. With appropriate blogging solutions, users can have the option to publish thoughts and ideas by sending them via email. Yet another important example of an ease-of-use feature is having single sign-on integration with other tools and services, like the company intranet.

Support for Community Interaction

Companies naturally have subcommunities of people that share ideas and thoughts. Many of these subcommunities form directly

from the departments and groups within a company. Other subcommunities may be less formal because they cut across organizational and reporting boundaries. An ideal corporate blogosphere solution permits the formation of both of these types of subcommunities.

Subcommunities are best implemented by permitting either the company or individuals to define authors, co-authors, and reader groups on-the-fly. Special consideration should be given to security as many blogging platforms do not support out-of-the-box the concept of a secure intranet.

Beyond authoring and reading rights, however, blogging platforms geared toward communities should go further to enforce and encourage interaction. As an example, mechanisms that allow users to systematically track both important discussions and follow-ups to comments that users have made to other people's blog entries are highly desirable. Such mechanisms are not present in all blogging platforms. Additionally, blogging platforms that both permit aggregation of publication feeds and support content list generation are also beneficial because the platform serves as a launching pad for ideas.

Security and Reliability

To accomplish the concept of a corporate blogosphere, administrators may initially look to traditional blogging platforms. While some solutions may be convenient on first blush, they may neither be designed for intranet-type applications nor groups of people. Such solutions may lack either the reliability of hosted platforms or the security of well-architected Java solutions. In any case, a company should consider both security and reliability. As

related to this, companies should also consider how maintenance and automatic updates will be performed.

Cost-Effective Deployment

A corporate blogosphere should provide peace of mind while doing so at an effective price point. Corporate blogosphere solutions need to support a growing number of users as a company expands its blogging needs internally and externally, so pricing should be sensitive to both small and large numbers of users. Entry-level pricing should permit most companies to get into the game and to start to see benefits without having to go through extensive corporate budgeting procedures. Once a company begins to see the real benefits of a corporate blogosphere, the pricing for scaling should be straightforward and sensible.

Applications of Corporate Blogospheres

It is often useful to think about corporate blogospheres in two ways: 1) facilitating general workplace communication and 2) facilitating specific processes within the workplace (“themed blogs”).

Facilitating Workplace Communication

Why should you spread blogging to your employees? Corporate blogosphere solutions are excellent forums for making sustained workplace communication more effective. If you have ever watched postings on an online bulletin board or lurked in a chat room (or know someone that does), it's amazing what can be found out about people's interests, needs, problems, and attitudes. Rich dialogue occurs in these forums, and members can prevent information overload by choosing to subscribe to discussions they feel are important to them. Properly designed blogging platforms can provide the benefits of traditional forum software while going further

to both motivate individual employees and enable the rich linking of conversations.

Another reason for spreading blogging to your employees includes building trust. Best-of-breed companies excel at getting departments and functional groups to work together better than the competition. Blogging fits perfectly with this strategy because blogging is built on trust. In a corporate blogosphere employees are motivated to post and share information. When employees post useful and constructive thoughts, the market of readers rewards those individuals, and the company gets better and smarter as a whole. On the other hand, similar mechanisms keep employees in check where self-promotion or unconstructive behavior exceeds the individual's value-add (open-source information markets at their best!).

Facilitating Specific Processes Within the Workplace ("Themed Blogs")

Once companies have taken the steps to improve workplace communication through implementing a corporate blogosphere, the market typically guides them towards forming blog conversations for specific processes within a company. Areas may include:

- **Management Communications** – using blogs from CXO through line management roles to cover certain topics such as key account developments, customer success stories, and workplace challenges.
- **Business Best Practices** – sharing information on functions such as utilizing project management methods, handling tough customer service calls, rewarding employees, and managing field force work.
- **Technology Best Practices** – increasing communication and sharing info about computer configurations, using new technologies, or exchanging snippets of software code.
- **Internal Customer Support** – establishing formal yet loosely structured communications channels between departments so that feedback can be achieved, e.g., information technology support channel for the business units that IT supports.

Summary of Benefits of Corporate Blogospheres

Companies who want to implement corporate blogospheres want to take workplace communication to the next level. Companies that can adapt the phenomena experienced in the personal blogging space to the corporate world will gain tremendous benefits. Think about how telephones, email, and the Internet have changed business effectiveness. Corporate blogospheres will have the same effect on businesses.

So whether your business has chosen to utilize blogging for external marketing purposes or communications, remember that intracompany blogosphere solutions require a different foundation. The best corporate blogosphere solutions provide ease of use, community support, and group security and reliability features in a cost-effective way. This is the time to jump in and get your feet wet. Good luck!

About 21Publish

21Publish is a turnkey software solution for creating your own private label blog service.

The 21Publish solution has fully customizable templates to support your corporate design needs. It provides a centralized hub from which to build, manage, and deploy your intracompany blogosphere. As an on-demand solution you can easily scale the service according to your needs.

21Publish is located in the United States and Europe serving customers like Amnesty International, Pace University, and Mercury Interactive. 21Publish is a spin-off of 20six, Europe's leading blog service. 20six has established blogging communities in UK, Netherlands, Germany and France. 21Publish was founded by Stefan Wiskemann who also co-founded 20six and ricardo.de, the European Internet-Auction company that went public in 1999, before merging with QXL in Europe's biggest ecommerce merger.

Please visit 21Publish at <http://www.21publish.com>.