



## Step away from the Blog

*Social media tools work as marketing condiments – never the main course.*

**By Jean Van Rensselar**

If you've experimented with a blog, you already know what a gargantuan marketing task it is to get it off the ground (would have been nice if someone told you that before you created it). In fact, if your company is like most, you probably had to put other activities on hold while you poured resources into the blog. And for what?

If you haven't created a blog and are patting yourself on the back for not giving in to *Everybody's Doing It*, continue patting.

I'm sure you've realized by now that, for the vast majority of companies that published a blog, it was a complete waste of time. For those who are still doing it and are desperately checking several times a day to see if anyone has posted, stop yourself before it's too late. Chalk it off to a failed experiment – but give yourself credit for trying.

Blogs are SO OVER – not because they've run the course of fads, but because they were a bad idea in the first place. If you have one, I implore you to remove it.

You'll be surprised how great you feel when you take it down. It's like resigning from a committee that caused you nothing but headaches. It's a tense and awkward situation, but once you make the move, you'll be surrounded by rainbows and chirping birds.

The best way to remove it is to post advance notice that the blog will be removed on a specific date. Even if no one is posting, you'll want to cover your bases just in case a miracle happens.

So, you may ask, why am I picking on blogs? Because, unlike other forms of social media, they are incredible money, time, and labor wasters. Worse, they lull companies into thinking that they are accomplishing some great marketing feat – on the cutting edge – when the lonely posts sit there pathetically talking to themselves. It's painful to witness.

Really, though, if you are the current or former owner of a blog, it's not your fault. If you recall, there was a lot of brainwashing going on. Here's what the blog geniuses told you:

1. It's almost free to create a blog
2. It will pretty much market itself
3. A blog is going to radically improve your SEO
4. Your clients and prospects are going to post in droves
5. Technorati is going to find your blog and make it an overnight hit
6. You'll never have to pay for advertising again, etc.

Did ANY of these things happen? Instead, didn't it just become one more nagging *should*?

- I should skip the donuts
- I should call my grandmother
- I should check the blog again

So you started a blog and felt coolly smug. As I say this, I'm reminded of the time, when I received a state-of-the-art bicycle for my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. I had a nicer bike than anyone I knew – just sitting on it in the driveway made me feel like an Olympian.

Well, two days later, I went for a bike ride with a friend who had a bike with a front basket and ...ahem...rusty spokes. When the trip was well underway (about a block from home) I turned around and made some snide remark about his bike. While doing so, I lost my balance and rolled down an embankment. My friend sat on his giant sheepskin covered seat with his mouth open. I went to the hospital in an ambulance and my crumpled worthless bike was still lying in the gulley when I got home. Yet another lesson on the perils of smugness.

Before your blog rolls down an embankment – take it down – preserve you dignity. Even if people are posting regularly, are we talking about 3 or 4 people? Even if it's 20 or 30, if it's the same set of people who always post, what's the point?

But this isn't just about blogs, there's a bigger lesson here that applies to the many viable social media tools out there: social media works as a supplement, not a substitute for proven marketing strategies. And as a supplement, it's a must. If your company doesn't have a Facebook page and your executives don't have LinkedIn profiles your organization is in serious danger of becoming an irrelevant Luddite.

This is not to say that Facebook and LinkedIn are likely to appreciably increase visibility, promote your brand, or generate sales. But they say, "We are aware of social media and we understand there is a different conversation out there. We want to participate." More importantly, from a financial, time, and labor perspective, Facebook and LinkedIn *are* relatively free.

While you're mulling all this over, remember that every day that blog sits there on your site; you're exposing your company to unnecessary risks in the form of:

1. Litigation Risks: Invasion or privacy, defamation, sexual harassment, creating a hostile work environment, copyright infringement, trade libel, federal securities fraud, etc.
2. Security Violations: Transferring intellectual property, and revealing confidential (financial) information and trade secrets.
3. E-Discovery Violations: Creating exposure to judicial sanctions by failing to retain records of all blog content

4. Reputation Assaults: You can prescreen content manually or automatically with content management and aggregation tools, but much of what may cause you problems later will slip through.
5. Regulatory Violations: The type of violation depends on your industry.

## And Don't Forget

### Blog Posts are Permanent

Inaccurate, incomplete, deliberately defamatory content, confidential information – once posted - lives forever on the Internet.

### Blogs Can Send Visitors Away from Your Site

Blog posts traditionally include links to other sites. If your blog is part of your company's website, do you really want to send visitors away?

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The bottom line is that, when it comes to blogs, there are no guarantees of any benefits. The risks, on the other hand, are all guaranteed. There is absolutely no reason to ever create or maintain a blog unless your target demographic blogs regularly – which is basically moms, seniors, gamers, passive-aggressives, and the painfully shy (perfect for viral marketing).

If you really love the idea of having a blog, but not so much the blog itself, look for other marketing tools that will provide the same benefits without the risks. For example, if you're interested in informing clients and prospects, consider a periodic email campaign instead.

The thing that pains me the most isn't so much that blogs persist, but that some companies – having dodged the bullet for this long - are still thinking about creating a blog. If this is you – take a breath, go have a couple donuts, and call your grandmother.

### About the Author

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