

FRIDAY, APRIL 9, 2010

## Re-Cap From Social Fresh Portland: Corporate Blogging Panel



Another great session at [Social Fresh Portland](#) was the afternoon panel on Corporate Blogging with [Mike Volpe](#) of [Hubspot](#), [Kristy Bolsinger](#) of [RealNetworks](#), and [Andrew Sinkov](#) from [Evernote](#). Starting the panel off with a bang, their first question was "should you, as a business, be blogging?" The short answer was "yes." The long answer was "you're an idiot if you don't." Sinkov said that blogging is an incredibly important part of getting your company's voice out there. The panel discussed whether blogging should be considered a part of social media, or in its own category, and Sinkov commented that it's a "long form of social media." Volpe agreed, saying that a blog should be the first step in social media, before Twitter or Facebook, because you're not that interesting without it - it's your social media home base. They took an informal poll of the room showing that pretty much everyone in the audience had a corporate blog.

Volpe pointed out that blogging is not about you or your company, it's about your

customers. And if they segregate, you should similarly have separate blogs. Bolsinger cautioned that from an SEO perspective though, they should all be on the same site. Sinkov added that the more content you put on the blog, the more you see spikes of people coming to it. So as soon as you have good content, put it out there, don't wait for it to stack up. Bolsinger said that in her case, she does have a calendar of certain types of posts, which helps to get people coming back and set audience expectations. She suggested [Outspokenmedia.com/blog](http://Outspokenmedia.com/blog) as a great blog to be reading to help audience members learn how to blog better.

An audience member asked how people find blog posts and Sinkov said through Twitter, Facebook links to the post, and media outlets who come there for news. He added that it's important to find out where your audience is and engage with them there. He went on to say that Evernote's blog has become a way for the media to get information from them because they don't do press releases. Bolsinger said that 16% of the visitors to their website also visit their blog, saying that they track everything that happens on their blog. Sinkov said that blogs have more content, but if someone acts because of a tweet that they've seen, then that's great. He doesn't think blogs are "better" than Twitter or Facebook - he's happy with any engagement with Evernote users. Bolsinger keyed in on the word "engagement," saying that 100,000 visitors to your website doesn't do you any good unless they're being converted (or your website sells advertisements). Sinkov said that the people who are reading your blog and following your tweets are the people who want to buy from you. He also mentioned that "blogging is the gateway drug." Some of those tweeting from the session disagreed with that metaphor, saying that it implied there was something bigger out there, but it seemed that Sinkov was suggesting that once you get started with blogging, engaging through Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels is quickly the next step. Volpe cautioned not to wait too long to get into social media, because those who do are not always as successful. If you wait for a case study in your particular industry, you're too late. One of the fears that established companies have that keep them from jumping in is the idea of "getting it right." But Sinkov pointed out that there is no "right" when it comes to social media. He said companies have to try,

and they will probably make some mistakes. Bolsinger added that companies should never let the fear of failure prevent them from trying to get it right in the meantime, but they should have a plan for when mistakes are made. Volpe agreed, saying that you're better off doing something, screwing up, and learning from it. The great thing about social media is that when you screw up, it doesn't hurt as much or last as long as it used to. Sinkov did advise that because not everyone is a great writer, there needs to be editorial control. However, having a diverse community of voices within a company is great.

For those who are afraid to jump into blogging, Volpe said that 1) blogging is easier than you think, 2) fame is a great motivator, and 3) companies can make it a job requirement. If you have the opportunity to change the culture of your company with new hires, you can make social media a condition of employment.

But with more than one person participating in social media for a company, an audience member wanted to know, how do you bring them all together into one blog voice? Volpe said that his company isn't concerned with one corporate voice, so they publish under their individual names. He added that people understand that companies are made up of individuals, so they don't feel that they have to edit for voice or tone. Sinkov said that attribution is important, because different posts under one "voice" can be confusing. Bolsinger said that different people will relate to different authors, and compared having multiple blog authors to an orchestra with different instruments playing the same song.

An audience member asked about automatically allowing comments on posts and how to handle positive and negative comments. Bolsinger said it's a necessity to allow comments. In her opinion, blogging is part of social media, and in the social world, everyone preaches conversation and engagement. Without comments, you're saying that what you have to say is important and what the audience thinks about it isn't. She said not to delete negative comments, but to let them say their piece and address it in a classy, professional and appropriate manner *publicly*. She said she does review

and approve the comments before posting them, for language and spam only. Volpe said that they automatically approve comments to avoid delay, especially for small businesses. He felt that delay because of moderation can lead to a loss of good debate in the blogosphere. He said that they go back and review them later, and delete any ugly or offensive ones at that time, and added that this can also be done using spam software. Volpe said that small businesses should hug anyone who comments on their blogs - and I must admit, every time someone comments on a post I write, I do want to hug them! The panelists were in agreement that if a blog doesn't allow comments, it's not really a blog - Bolsinger used Seth Godin as an example, saying "he's not always right."

Someone asked about whether or not blogging about company news should be done. Sinkov said that they asked their users if they wanted to see news, and they said no - another clear case of getting to know your audience by asking them what they want. Bolsinger said that taking something that someone else has said on their blog and adding your spin on it in a post can be useful. Posts can be inspired by a number of different things, from email listserv comments to industry changes to great conversations you've had with colleagues.

[Darcie Meihoff](#) summed up the panel perfectly on Twitter - "Lots of opinions on how to manage a blog but bottom line, there's no 'right' formula. Do what's right for your company/brand." As [Nancy Myrland](#) said [the other day in a blog post](#) when talking about what's the right social media strategy for your law firm - "It depends."

So what lessons are there for law firms?

- **Blogging is important.** Whether your firm is doing it or not, your clients are. Start by listening to what they're talking about and engage with them through comments or offline to show them that you care about their company and their business. Use this process to think about what you might like to write about in your own blog - are there posts that your clients are writing that you'd like to explore further through your own

writing? Do you regularly write articles on industry happenings within your practice area? Search out some attorney blogs within the area you'd like to write about and see what they're saying.

- **Blogging is not that scary.** Of course there are questions over who's the right person to be blogging for a law firm, and potential confidentiality issues that may come up, but taking the time in advance to create a smart strategy, a crisis communications plan for social media, and identifying the right people to be the firm voices will take away a lot of the questions. There's so much out there that law firms can be talking about and sharing with their clients, potential clients, and legal industry influencers that it's worth taking the leap. Don't worry about "getting it right."

- **Allow comments.** As the panelists said, a blog is not a blog without comments - it's all about engaging. There's always the likelihood that someone will try to engage with you in a negative way, but that's where advance crisis communication planning comes in handy. If you're unsure of the possible scenarios, talk them through with your firm's marketing department or talk with an outside PR consultant. Identify what you would do in each case.

Blogging is an excellent way to highlight your reputation as a leader and expert in your field and it boosts your awareness among the clients/potential clients and influencers in the industry you're targeting. If you're thinking about starting to blog, what questions/reservations do you have? If you're already blogging, what has your experience been?