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## Should Your Business Blog?

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*Blogging can help you simultaneously market your company, improve your Web presence and generate new sales leads. Are you logged in?*

By: MATT ALDERTON

Farylrobin has a fun brand. It's young, it's fresh and it's just a little bit edgy. In other words, it's everything a chic, fashion-forward shoe empire should be. Still, Farylrobin, a 6-year-old designer of women's footwear, decided last year that it was suffering from an identity crisis of sorts. Based in New York, the company's eight employees were struggling to animate their corporate image in order to turn their brand concept into a palpable brand reality.



Photo by: iStockphoto

"We were looking for a way to bring life to the brand," says Jim Biolos, head of operations at Farylrobin. "We wanted to go out to our customers with more personality than just a simple Web site would allow, and we wanted a tool that we could use to engage our customers, whether that be retailers or individuals."

In need of an instrument that would amplify their voice and magnify their flare, Biolos and crew turned to the blogosphere. And in 2006, Farylrobin's official blog was born.

Called [The Nest](#), the blog is home to a wealth of information that's intended both to engage and entertain. While CEO and founder Faryl Morse blogs most often, all employees can be found typing in their two cents from time to time. Sometimes they write about their business. Sometimes they write about their customers. Sometimes they write about their product. Usually, though, they write about themselves.

"Some of it is not at all related to the shoes, just to the life of the company and the people in the company," Biolos says. "If we're successful, the blog will help retailers think more favorably about us and buy more, it will get consumers interested and asking around for our shoes when they go into a store, and it will attract potential employees, who may look at the blog and think, 'This would be a fun place to work.'"

Online for just over a year, The Nest is already seeing promising results, including increased Web site traffic, positive feedback from buyers, more successful brand marketing efforts and attention from the press.

Of course, Farylrobin isn't the only company that's discovered the benefits of blogging. Thousands of small businesses have discovered that blogging—whether they have three readers or 3,000—can empower their business with fresh credibility, new sales and a powerful platform with which to engage their customers.

### What's a Blog?

Before you can decide whether blogging is a good idea for your business, you need to understand what it is, exactly, says Ted Demopoulos, author of [What No One Ever Tells You About Blogging and Podcasting](#). He describes a blog as a simple, easy-to-edit Web site. "Anyone that can write an e-mail can update a blog," he says.

Short for Web log, a blog is essentially an online journal. It drives Web site traffic—search engines love blogs and readily catalog their posts—and is a place to post frequently updated articles, which tend to be short and are generally written in a conversational manner. And thanks to tools like [Blogger](#) and [Typepad](#), publishing them is easy and automatic.

That's what a blog is. Equally important, however, is what a blog can—and can't—do for your business. "The advantages of blogging are the visibility it can offer a business and the credibility it can offer a business owner," says Asheville, N.C.-based communications consultant Shonnie Lavender, founder of [MyBlogCoach.com](#). "Small businesses often don't have as many resources to devote to advertising or PR campaigns, so having a blog that can be your 'spokesperson' 24-7-365 is particularly useful."

A blog can accomplish a lot for your business. It can't do it overnight, though. "The downside to blogging," Lavender says, "is that it takes time to see the benefits and it takes time and attention to actually accomplish."

### Start by Setting Goals

If you want to start a blog, Demopoulos recommends establishing a purpose for it before you ever publish your first post. "Before a company starts blogging, there should be a goal for the blog," he says. "Why are we doing it?"

Potential answers to that question are many, he adds, including:

- To improve your search engine rankings
- To attract new customers to your Web site
- To drive repeat traffic to your Web site
- To establish yourself as a credible subject matter expert
- To help brand your business
- To reposition your business
- To attract press for your business

- To communicate with your customers

Whatever your reasons for blogging, Lavender says it's critical to explore them up front. "A successful blog is one that achieves the goals a blogging business owner wants to accomplish," she says. "This is why it's critical to clearly establish goals when you start blogging and to track your progress toward those goals."

### The Content Question

If you're like most small business owners, you understand clearly the benefits of blogging—but assume that you don't have anything to blog about. The reality is, however, that almost every business has something of value to say. A landscaper could blog about lawn care tips. An accountant can blog about taxes. A work-at-home parent can blog about balancing career and family. And all businesses, in any industry, can blog about the challenges of running a small company.

"The way I think about it," Biolos says, "is, if I were a business owner and I went to a networking event, and I was meeting new people, what would I want to talk about? Would I have anything to say? If you would have something to say, that would be the basis for a blog."

A business blog should not be a personal diary, though. Instead, it should be a place to share information, insights and inspiration relevant to your market space. According to Demopoulos, you have to blog about something that's important not to you, but to your customers. "You don't want your blog to be a marketing-only mouthpiece," he says. "The focus should be on your potential customers, and you shift it there by giving them value, by giving them useful information."

Lavender agrees. "If your customers have common questions," she says, "you could post answers to these questions. If your industry has a negative reputation, you might write about how your company is not like the stereotype. If your customers feel dependent on you, you could offer some 'do it yourself' tips. Focus your content on what will add value to the lives of your readers."

In other words, remember the central writing lesson that your seventh grade English teacher taught you: Write what you know.

### Remember: Be Yourself

No matter who you blog for or what you blog about, there is just one rule in blogging, according to Demopoulos: Be yourself.

"You want to portray yourself as honestly as possible so that when people engage you, you're just as advertised," he says. That means when you're blogging, you blog as yourself, representing your own opinions and using your own voice.

And if your voice isn't that of a stellar writer, don't worry. The point is to be authentic, not always eloquent. "You don't really need to be able to write well," Demopoulos says, "because a blog is conversational. It's written like you speak."

### Always Engage

A final lesson for would-be bloggers is that a blog is not a one-way communication tool. Instead, it's interactive, designed for engagement, discussion and connection.

"You want to always allow for some feedback mechanism so that people can communicate with you," Demopoulos says. Options include opening your entries for public comment or, at the very least, providing an e-mail address where your readers can reach you.

"Interact with others online," Lavender stresses. "This includes responding to your readers who take the time to leave comments or send you e-mails. This also means visiting others' blogs and leaving your own comments to gain that blogger's attention, as well as the attention of his or her readers."

If you're still intimidated by the big b-word, consider the e-word—exposure. The more you get, the more green you'll likely see, experts insist. So, get typing. Your readers are waiting.


*The editors of the ProNet Small Business Resource Center practice what they preach; read their small business blog online now at [www.shopfloorblog.com](http://www.shopfloorblog.com).*

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