Blogging and Other Social Media
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Blogging and Other Social Media

Exploiting the Technology and Protecting the Enterprise

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WITH DERYCK HOUGHTON
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How to Use this Book

This book is aimed at both organizations that already use social media, and those considering the matter for the first time. It is not only a practical guide to using the different forms of media; it also acts as a guide to the wider issues such as and considers social media from a number of perspectives.

For those unfamiliar with social media, we recommend starting from the beginning and working your way through Parts 1 and 2. These two parts should not be ignored even if you already use social media, we hope that they help you get even more out of the exciting new types of participation that the internet has on offer.

If you are thinking about using a particular form of social media (for example, wikis), again go straight to the relevant part of either chapter in Parts 1 or 2. For those considering using social media within their organization, for example, to collect know-how or assist with a project, go to Part 3.

The final part is a guide to the risks associated with social media. Chapter 18 gives an overview of the law. Chapter 19 looks at managing online reputation.
The web is fundamentally about people – though it wasn’t really seen like that until comparatively recently. The worldwide web was and is a web of ‘sites’, and the current transformation that is convulsing both the worldwide web and the markets that rely on and feed off it is, perhaps, in economic terms a ‘correction’ that is pushing it into being a web of people who use sites as communication nodes to communicate with other people. In that sense, ‘Web 2.0’ is taking the topology of the internet and mapping it to the social world we want to live in.

This probably needs explaining further. The ad hoc interconnectedness of the internet is being increasingly mirrored in the social relationships and enablers for those relationships as they exist online. In other words, the medium is now heavily influencing the messages, methods and modes of communication we use to interact with each other. This is arguably the nature of the Web 2.0 ‘revolution’, which is, of course, not a revolution at all: now that the infrastructure is in place for mass collaboration, it must happen.

The reason Web 2.0 is not a revolution is that it was bound to happen. It was the next logical step for the actors to take. The web is a stage on which new kinds of online lives are being acted out. Without people, it would have no reason to exist. Without people to use, explore and expand it, it would not be expanding. So the web is fundamentally about people, but now the infrastructure increasingly allows us to create the ‘value’ that can be exploited for corporate gain.

The possibility of value that is created by the users themselves, rather than by the creators of the sites they interact on, is an irresistible idea. Web 2.0 sites represent, in a sense, the very essence of the ‘build it, and they will come’ idea of the web. They represent the previous Net generation’s urge to make information free, separating corporate messages from what people really want to do online – talk to each other. But, of course, Web 2.0 also represents
a potentially limitless free ride – sites whose content creates itself. Who needs journalists when bloggers do it for free? Who needs consumer experts when real, live consumers can tell each other what their experiences were really like? Any company that can work out how to make money from creating the ‘room’ in which a community can interact and play most likely doesn’t need to create very much content for that community. Build it, and they will come. This isn’t to say building it is easy – the various travails that have troubled Facebook over what to make available and how good are examples of the privacy and commercial challenges such companies face. This also isn’t to say that blogging will make journalists redundant, or that online grassroots consumer action will remove the need for meaning – quite the opposite, I would say.

The reality is, of course, that we are truly working for the corporate world – sites are made and we put the content on them, we make them popular, we provide advertiser information, and all for no salary. Before, we interacted with websites in a more lop-sided way; we consumed information and advertising on the side, or shopped in places that made our lives easier. In essence, something was offered out for consumption and we either consumed it or we didn’t. This mode of online life is still huge, and while high-street retailers’ bricks and mortar stores can carry on selling DVDs and CDs for hard cash, it will remain in its growth phase – when the users of the web realize they are paying for all that mall space and those staff salaries and not for the content, the drive to take it all online will be only briefly halted by the hopeless pleas of telecoms firms struggling to cope with the load. Perhaps the work of the record companies and their law firms might hold it up a bit, too. But the initial online world of ‘more of the same, just online’ is being radically redrawn.

Journalists know this well. If at any point in reading this book you wondered why you should take advice as a business on social media and related topics from lawyers, rather than, say, web-heads, it might help to remember that the online world is a world of communication. Journalists have always relied on one or more people in the background in publishing businesses who can tell you whether what you’re doing is going to cost you a small fortune – or possibly send you to jail. Journalists rarely embark on a career in the press without legal training, for very good reasons. This doesn’t mean they stay out of trouble all the time – all decisions to publish are based on degrees of legal risk, and the only safe magazine, newspaper or website is one filled with blank pages.

It is this last point that I feel makes a bunch of lawyers worth listening to when it comes to the advantages and pitfalls of Web 2.0 and beyond. People like me listen to them all the time. We don’t always do as they say, but we know
why they say it. The only really safe way to engage with this brave new online conversational world is not to engage with it at all.

Lawyers are experienced professionals in the art of communication, like journalists, PR people and marketers. The areas covered in this book span the current world of social media, and as I’ve pointed out the world of social media is one of communications. Brand value and product saleability could hinge on what companies do in the social media areas their consumers inhabit, and will certainly hinge on what their consumers say about them. Marketing and advertising companies are learning those lessons and the tools to leverage the power of ‘the wisdom of crowds’ – such as it is. But when the word on the street is negative, the liberating nature of the internet means companies may also have little to no realizable right of redress with those saying damaging things about them – take-downs can take ages (though often they are straightforward) and the words on a blog today can do enormous damage to a company, with the unhappy complement that the value of suing a blogger for libel is most likely nil. Even bringing the libel suit could cost you even more brand damage. David and Goliath comparisons have rarely been more aptly made.

This is not all about blogs. In fact, Web 2.0 (or 3.0) probably will not be ‘about blogs’ in a few years at all. Blogs to me are one of the symptoms of a society that is rapidly and often blindly metamorphosing into the Information Society. Will millions of Africans take to blogging as Africa is wirelessly connected? Will the Chinese blog their way into their future as the next world superpower? Possibly – but consider this: ten years ago, no one used Google – now the company rules the internet. Five years ago YouTube didn’t exist. Two years ago probably no one in the UK had heard of Facebook. Blogging, as words on a web page, may look to the new web users of 2013 as archaic as bulletin boards do to us now.

This is not to say blogs are already ‘over’ – their usefulness for disseminating information is unarguable. The way they can be used to personalize corporations and create one-person information businesses is a modern marvel. But in the same way that most people online have graduated straight to video, as it were, Web 2.5 bloggers may be very different animals from today’s web writers.

The enormous upside for businesses of the social media ‘revolution’ is that it should let businesses talk more openly and constructively both within themselves and with their customers. The need for, and some of the results of, the so-called ‘Web 2.0 revolution’ were in fact presaged at least as far back as 1999, if not well before, by various people, including the a group of web activists who wrote down their thoughts as the Cluetrain Manifesto. Let’s not
forget that in 1999 most people had barely started to use Google. I mention Cluetrain because it holds some of the key lessons companies that want to swim in the fascinating waters of Web 2.0 and beyond need to learn. They stem from the basis that, as I have said, the web is all about people.

It is not necessary to read the Cluetrain book to get the essence of what was being said in 1999 – just the opening paragraphs on their website will do:

A powerful global conversation has begun. Through the Internet, people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting smarter – and getting smarter faster than most companies.

These markets are conversations. Their members communicate in language that is natural, open, honest, direct, funny and often shocking. Whether explaining or complaining, joking or serious, the human voice is unmistakably genuine. It can’t be faked.

Most corporations, on the other hand, only know how to talk in the soothing, humorless monotone of the mission statement, marketing brochure, and your-call-is-important-to-us busy signal. Same old tone, same old lies. No wonder networked markets have no respect for companies unable or unwilling to speak as they do.

They will only sound human when they empower real human beings to speak on their behalf.¹

In a very real sense the Cluetrain manifesto was a call to arms for Web 2.0, and it came true – companies that do not provide a human face in some way generate a reputation for poor customer service that spreads like wildfire and is very hard to correct. From price comparison websites for almost everything you can think of to online social networks discussing anything from the quality of parenting books to what kind of financial advice to take, the global market as an increasingly disintermediated conversation between people is hardly a million miles from the truth already. Just imagine where it will be in five years.

One of the things you can say about the world in five years time is that most people aged 35 or under will have never known a time without the web in their adult shopping lives. They will automatically gain referrals and opinions on your firm from online peers, some of whom they will never have met but, nonetheless, whose opinion will be valued far above the view they have of your firm’s traditional marketing. It is how they will buy, or at the very least shortlist, everything else, and it would be folly to believe they’d buy your services based on another model.

What Cluetrain was about, if it was about any one thing, was trying to get the corporate world to let its people talk to the people outside. This is now happening in a highly fractured way – from blogs by Microsoft employees to staffers at Web 2.0 companies such as Flickr engaging constantly in online debates with users.

But as companies are gradually pulled into this more personal, and personable, world they will also pull the social media world into themselves. Social media software tools and methods will, I remain convinced, revolutionize the way companies work by allowing effective collaboration and communication across departmental and hierarchical boundaries. Software companies are also convinced of this, and are all, from Google to Microsoft to Adobe to a couple of guys in a garage who no one has yet heard of, developing the next generation of collaborative workflow systems because they know that the workers of the near future will be able to use them in business to make businesses work better.

The proof of all this, at least in very small part, is in your hands – or perhaps on your screen – right now.

There would seem to be several problems associated with having a book about ‘social media’: first, it’s a book, not a website, and as such harks automatically back to ‘dead trees’, authorial elitism and the Old Guard; second, it will suffer from being out of date almost from the moment it’s printed. But, in its defence, this book was produced using an online wiki-style collaborative word-processing environment (Google Docs in this case) by a group of authors in different companies who all have aligned ideas; it could also easily be turned into an online, iterative publication that incorporates work by people outside its author group and includes future chapters on social media currently only being dreamed up in a college dorm room. There is no reason this cannot be done, and I hope that it does happen.
What you are reading is a product of a brave new world of social creativity. The very fact that the sentence ‘this book was produced using an online wiki-style collaborative word-processing environment’ makes sense, that we know what it means, and that it could not have been written 15 years ago with anything like the same meaning behind it, is a neon signpost pointing us along the road to this new world.

All that’s left is for you to work out how to use those tools to enable the conversations that are possible, both within a business, creatively and usefully swapping knowledge and experience, and without, creating interpersonal relationships with future markets. It’s about you, and how you do this. Because it’s all about people.

Rupert White
Technology Journalist
PART 1

Blogs
Introduction to Blogs  

CHAPTER 1

Blogs have had a dramatic impact on the internet, whether we’re talking about personal or corporate, amateur or professional parts of the net. Whilst we cannot be sure about what the first blog was, or when that blog was created, what we do know is that blogs have been massively popular since at least the year 2000. Writing this book in 2007–08, blogs remain an established part of the internet and do not look to be going away any time soon. In this part of the book, we discuss what blogging is, take a whistlestop tour through some of the main issues the prospective blogger need consider, and give guidance on how to set up and maintain a blog.

Whilst this book is aimed at the business user, many of the suggestions and comments given will be equally useful to those considering setting up a personal blog.

What is a Blog?

Blog is a term derived from ‘web log’. A blog is a website where information is displayed in date order, with the most recent information at the top of the page.

The reason for the analogy to a log or journal becomes clear when you browse through a blog; take a look at any of the blogs we mention in this chapter. When you open a blog, as described above, you will see the various entries ordered by date (but with the latest entry first). From the current entry, you can scroll down to read earlier entries. In this way, an actively maintained blog will develop and grow from day to day.

As well as the information being displayed in date order, one thing that all blogs have in common is that the majority, usually all, link to information on other websites. If a statement is made, a blog will typically justify that statement by linking to the source of the information behind the statement.
Authoring a blog, maintaining one or adding an article to an existing blog is called *blogging*. Individual articles on a blog are called *blog posts, posts* or *entries*. A person who posts these entries is called a *blogger*.

For those not of an overly technical bent, the blog concept could offer a fairly arid start to this book. To illustrate in more detail just what the concept means in reality, let’s examine some categories of blog and then some examples of blogs.

**Categories of Blog**

Blogs can be categorized in many different ways – most blog directories divide them by subject matter. The categories of blog are incredibly varied; here are some of the main categories:

- academic
- arts
- blogging – how to blog
- business and professional
- entertainment
- financial
- food
- jobs and careers
- technology
- personal
- politics
- sports.

Within these broad categories, there are often hundreds or even thousands of blogs, which can be further categorized. For example, within the business and professional category, there are blogs on every type of business and profession that exists. Taking law blogs as simply one example, these fall into at least three categories:
1. **'Pure law' blogs**: Written by legal academics, the purpose of these blogs is to discuss a particular area or areas of law. Whilst most of the writers of these blogs are university academics, sometimes they are written by professionals from law firms, patent agents or trade mark agents.

2. **Law firm blogs**: Written by a specific law firm, or sometimes a lawyer at a particular law firm, these blogs generally discuss and provide information on legal areas that the law firm practises. These sorts of blogs are usually less ‘academic’ in feel than the pure law blogs, and discuss wider issues than the law itself. For example, law firm blogs often discuss the work of that firm and commercial subjects.

3. **Personal blogs**: Diaries and commentaries written from a personal perspective by people who happen to be lawyers. Whilst these may touch upon legal subjects, the main focus is on the person and their feelings rather than on the law from an academic or business perspective.

The same is true of many other blogging subject areas; blogs are as diverse as their writers. To get an idea of the spectrum of blogs, take a look at the vast directory on Technorati (http://www.technorati.com).

**Examples of Blogs**

**LIFEHACKER**
(http://www.lifehacker.com/)

Lifehacker is a popular US blog that tells you how to ‘streamline your life’, normally by using technology but sometimes by more ‘low-fi’ means. In a typical week, Lifehacker will blog on how to use your existing technology more efficiently or better, link to useful new software and websites, and even tell you an easy way to de-seed a watermelon!

The blog is owned and published by Gawker Media, an independent media company that produces a range of blogs. It is written by a small team headed by Gina Trapini. Lifehacker was launched in 2005. We spoke to Trapini, who told us that the blog was inspired by the term ‘life hack’, coined by tech. journalist Danny O’Brien in 2004. O’Brien did a presentation at O’Reily’s ETech conference called ‘Life Hacks: Tech Secrets of Overprolific Alpha Geeks.’ You can see more about it at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_hack
Lifehacker is funded by the advertising that is featured on the blog.

Since its launch, Lifehacker has rapidly risen to be one of the most popular blogs. It has received many awards, including being rated by *Time* magazine as one of the 50 coolest websites of 2005 and winning ‘Best Group Blog’ in the Weblog Awards 2007.

Like a number of successful blogs, the writings of the Lifehacker team have turned up in a more traditional form of media: the book. At the time of writing, *Upgrade Your Life: The Lifehacker Guide to Working Smarter, Faster, Better* was in its second edition.¹

**IPKat**

(http://ipkitten.blogspot.com/)

The IPKat is one of the best-known and most successful of all law blogs. As its name suggests, IPKat is about intellectual property (IP) law and is written mainly from a UK and EU law perspective. A mixture of written-word and pictures, it is read by IP owners, administrators, law students, practising lawyers, patent attorneys, trade mark attorneys and even judges. It sometimes receives information on IP law developments from the people involved in those developments, so is often the breaker of news. IPKat has a large international readership; as of May 2007 it was receiving over 25,000 visits per month and had over 1000 subscribers to its email list, together with an unquantifiable number of readers via RSS feeds (we discuss RSS later in this chapter).

IPKat was founded in 2003 – a time when most people had not even heard of blogs – by Jeremy Phillips and Ilanah Simon while both were members of the Queen Mary Intellectual Property Research Institute in the UK (Jeremy is now Research Director, Intellectual Property Institute and Ilanah has since been appointed to teaching positions at UK universities Brunel and UCL). They still write a lot of content for the blog but have since been joined by another academic, Johanna Gibson and a patent attorney, David Pearce.

Jeremy and Ilanah founded IPKat in part because of their frustration, as law teachers, at having to tell students to refer to legal texts when even the most recently published of those texts were often out of date. The blog was a way of allowing students to keep up to date with the latest developments; it

could report on a Court ruling even before it had made it into the law reports generated by the legal press.

Whilst the blog was not created for any purpose other than easily to distribute IP news, the writers tell us that it has significantly raised the profiles of the IPKat bloggers and is a springboard for the generation of revenue from activities as divergent as the holding of seminars on literacy for IP writers, the licensing of content, and collaboration in the production and promotion of commercial IP conferences.

**COMMODITY TRADER**
(http://commoditytrader.com/)

As you might have guessed from the name, this is a blog about commodity trading. The blog is regularly updated and contains concise and well-explained news on the commodities markets and the general financial markets. The blog’s tag cloud indicates that Commodity Trader’s pet subjects are futures and gold. The blog was named as one of the top 50 business blogs by UK newspaper The Times in 2007: http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/media/article1923706.ece

These are just a few examples of business and professional blogs from the thousands in existence.

**Blogs as an Information Resource**

Blogs offer a new and easy way for businesses to stay in the know.

Until recently, businesses have relied on certain types of resource to keep up to date with industry developments:

- Subscription-only information services such as LexisNexis, which can take the form of periodically updated volumes of information in hard-copy form (e.g. law reports), and, more recently, searchable online websites and email updates;
- Newspapers;
- Industry journals and periodicals.

By and large, such information comes from a relatively small number of sources.
Blogs are an incredibly useful addition to these resources. In some fields, blogs arguably call into question the need for the traditional resources. Why buy a monthly trade journal when the trade blogs have already reported on the big issues and weeks ago?

**Reading Blogs**

What follows is an overview of the ways in which blogs can be used to find information and news about your chosen field.

**ACCESS BY WEBSITE BROWSER**

In their design, blogs are simply website pages, meaning that they can be viewed using a browser just like any other website. Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox are two popular website browsers (most current operating systems come with a website browser as part of the package).

**RSS NEWSFEEDS**

Browsing any number of blogs or other sites trying to stay up to date with developments in your field soon becomes laborious. For this reason, most blogs feature **RSS newsfeeds**.

RSS stands for ‘really simple syndication’. Dave Winer has come up with a succinct definition of RSS newsfeeds, describing them as:

> automated web surfing ... It gets you more news for the time you put into using the Internet. If you don’t want more news, then RSS is probably not for you. But if there are subjects that you are intensely interested in, and if the people covering the topics also offer the information in RSS, then your computer (or a Web site) can make web surfing a richer and perhaps more productive experience.²

Another good description of RSS comes from legal technology expert Dennis Kennedy, who says:

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With RSS and a news aggregator, each of the new posts from the blogs I care about automatically appears on my computer in an organized, easy to read-and-manage way in a news aggregator or news reader. I don’t have to go to each blog individually. The new material from the bloggers I want to read, after I ‘subscribe’ to the RSS feed is available to me in one place at my fingertips. That’s magical.³

Technology consultants Commoncraft have produced a great online video explaining RSS, which can be found at:

http://www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english

An individual RSS newsfeed usually consists of the headline of a blog item, plus maybe one or two sentences of text either summarizing the blog item, or quoting the first two lines of the item’s text.

RSS newsfeeds can be viewed on aggregator software/services. With an aggregator, surfing through multiple blogs is replaced with viewing them all in one place. Aggregators allow you to choose the blogs that you are interested in and, once chosen, collect all the newsfeeds from those blogs together and display them in one place. An aggregator can display newsfeeds in a number of different ways, usually by showing the last few newsfeeds from each of your chosen blogs. Some aggregators will notify you when a new newsfeed appears, and show you which items you have not read. Some include search functions, so that you can search all the newsfeeds (and sometimes, the connected blog posts) in one go.

Podcasts (discussed in Part 2) use newsfeed technology, which means that many aggregators can also act as a handy way of keeping an eye on your favourite podcasts.

There are a lot of RSS newsfeed aggregators freely available. Here are some examples:


• **Google reader** ([http://reader.google.com](http://reader.google.com)): A newsreader that is web-based rather than being software. Also free.

• **My Yahoo** ([http://uk.my.yahoo.com](http://uk.my.yahoo.com)): Another web-based newsreader. Again, free of charge.

The latest versions of the Firefox and Internet Explorer web browsers also include aggregators. At the time of writing, both are very basic, containing far fewer features than the specialist aggregators listed above.

### Finding Blogs

#### FINDING BLOGS USING GENERAL SEARCH ENGINES

Because blogs are websites, you can find them using search engines such as Google ([http://www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk)) and Ask.com ([http://www.ask.com](http://www.ask.com)). A search along the lines of ‘[subject matter] blog’ will result in a list of relevant blogs.

Although sometimes effective, this method is not exactly systematic or efficient. You are having to do the hard work and trawl through the search results, a lot of which will be irrelevant.

#### FINDING BLOGS USING BLOG SEARCH ENGINES AND DIRECTORIES

There are a number of search engines designed especially for finding blogs, of which Technorati ([http://www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)) is probably the best known. Technorati’s purpose is to record details of blogs and their content. At the time of writing, Technorati claimed to be tracking over 84 million blogs.

Another good general blog directory is Blogcatalog ([http://www.blogcatalog.com/](http://www.blogcatalog.com/)). Google also has a blog search facility ([http://www.google.co.uk/blogsearch?hl=en](http://www.google.co.uk/blogsearch?hl=en)).

Like the English-language parts of the wider internet, the English-language blogs are predominantly American. For readers based elsewhere, a good place to start is a blog search engine or directory specifically aimed at their particular location. Examples are:

• **The Australian Index** ([http://theaustralianindex.com/](http://theaustralianindex.com/));

• **Britblog** ([http://www.britblog.com](http://www.britblog.com));
• **Kookkoo** (http://www.kookkoo.com/country/index.html) – a blog directory with listings by country.

There are also various blog directories on specific subject matters, and even blogs-on-blogs in particular areas. Here are some examples:

• **iBlogBusiness** (http://www.iblogbusiness.com/) – directory of business blogs;

• **Blawgreview** (http://blawgreview.blogspot.com/) – a regular report on what law blogs (known as ‘blawgs’) have been discussing;

• **Medworm** (http://www.medworm.com/rss/blogs.php) - a medical blogs filter and directory;


**ONE BLOG LEADS TO ANOTHER …**

Once you find a blog that you like, you will soon find others. This is because of a form of ‘word of mouth’ referral particular to blogs. With blogs, ‘word of mouth’ is translated into the common practice of bloggers providing links to other blogs. They do this:

• **Within their content**: For example, a report on the latest development will typically include references to reports on the same story by other blogs.

• **In ‘blog rolls’**: These are lists of the blogs that the blog writers are fans of. If you like the blog you’re reading, the chances are that you will find at least some of the blogs on the blog roll useful.

**What are the Benefits of Blogging for Business?**

Writing a blog can have various benefits for businesses. Here are some of the main benefits:

• **Be your own publisher**: in order to communicate your message to the world, you no longer need to understand HTML code to get it on a website, or go through your marketing people or PR agency.

• **You have a ready audience**: of people waiting to read your blog; the internet is no longer something accessed by a minority of businesses.
Many are now familiar with it, and look to it for information. As we will see, the content of blogs is trawled by the search engines, meaning that your content will come up when someone searches on your subject matter.

- Speak with your own voice: by using a blog to distribute information, you are communicating directly with the outside world. In contrast with publicity done through marketing or PR agencies, blogging does not dehumanize your message. It's the genuine you, and that will be apparent to readers.

- Blogging is inexpensive: there are many ready-made platforms out there that you can use to blog. No expensive development costs need to be incurred, and no marketing agency needs to be paid to get your message out there.

- Blogging raises your profile: whilst many read blogs, there are still far more readers than there are writers. By blogging, your profile will inevitably be raised, both in the eyes of your industry peers and potential clients. Blogging gives you the ability to demonstrate knowledge on your subject matter in a direct manner.

- You can interact with clients and industry peers from your desk: from our experience, blogging is a brilliant and subtle form of networking, and can lead to strong bonds being formed between people in businesses who would not normally meet, and from around the world.

- Benefits from collaboration: with blogging, you can tap into a knowledge pool which is truly global. By writing a blog, you can contribute to this pool. In other words, you are collaborating with your business rivals in a way that benefits all without damaging any.

- You keep in touch with the technology used by those around you; simply by blogging, you will learn about many of the technologies that drive the internet, and will be aware of developments. This will help your business adapt and change with the times.

- Moving with the times: if you do not at least consider blogging (and the other types social media that we discuss in Part 2), you are soon going to look out of step with your staff and your clients. A number of drivers are already turning blogging into normal business practice: established publishers are producing blogs; marketing people are using blogs; established content management
systems are incorporating blogging features; new graduate recruits within your business and those of your clients will almost certainly be existing users of blogs and social media. To put it another way, most young graduates have not experienced a time without text messaging and online interaction. In five years’ time, blogging will be as normal for businesses as having a website is today. The culture will have changed: blogging will on balance be less geeky, less chummy, more commercialized. This mirrors what happened to the web itself only ten years ago.

• Blogs are a great tool for communication within organizations: see our chapters on collaboration and the use of blogs and social media internally in Parts 2 and 3.

**Blogs Aren’t Just Websites**

Whilst blogs are websites, not all websites are blogs. Blogs contrast with ‘standard’ websites in a number of ways:

• Compared with blogs, websites tend to be more ‘static’, and updated only rarely. This is perhaps because whilst blog platforms are designed so that users can easily add new content, most websites are custom built and less easily editable. With most business websites, adding new information is often left to external web designers or the IT department. With a blog on the other hand, new information is entered into a simple form (usually with the title, the category, and the body of the article) and then put online. This may sound dry, but the effects for the user of such a system are quite dramatic compared with that of a traditional website.

• Blogs usually contain facilities allowing for easy filtering of content, for example by date, category, author or other attributes. Websites do not generally allow for content filtering unless specifically designed to do so.

• The content on blogs is normally from specific writers, even for business blogs. In contrast, business website content is not generally attributed to anyone in particular.

• On a blog, *individual pieces of content* are often linked to individual pieces of content elsewhere. With a website, links tend to be to particular pages on which the relevant content can be found.
Blogs are interactive, in that they allow for readers to comment on content. On a well-received (or badly received!) piece of content, the feedback and further points made by readers can be just as important as the original content itself. Websites do not allow for this kind of writer–reader interaction.

People can easily stay informed of the latest blog content by using technology such as RSS newsfeeds. We looked at RSS newsfeeds earlier in the chapter. From our experience, they are incredibly useful. Not many websites use such technology, so to find out what’s going on from several websites, you have to invest the time and labour involved in clicking through each site.

**Blogs versus Letters/Email**

Most businesses use paper and email to communicate, both with clients and internally. Is keeping a blog ‘better’ than writing a letter or sending an email? As you’d expect, there isn’t a yes/no answer to this question. It all depends upon what you want to communicate, who to and in what circumstances.

One highly relevant question that you might ask is: how many people do you want to communicate your message to? Where businesses need to communicate with numbers of people, blogging can often do a much more efficient job than a mass-mailshot or email.

For example, on a large project involving many people, huge amounts of emails/letters/memorandums are exchanged by the project team to keep each other up to date. This is a very inefficient and resource-intensive way of operating. Team members can be missed off the distribution list for a particular email/letter/memorandum. The content itself may be out of date before it’s even been received by the rest of the project team. Managing all the various messages flying about can be a huge burden, both for the recipients (who have to file them all) and for the IT systems that have to process, forward, store and back-up the emails.

In this scenario, a blog can provide an attractive alternative to emails, letters and memoranda for team communication. All team members have access to the blog (which can be made private and secure), and so can read updates posted by colleagues and post their own. The blog can also be a forum for discussion, with team members able to comment on the information uploaded. Using a
blog, the ‘admin’ burden can be immediately reduced, and real communication improved.

In contrast, where you are only going to communicate with a few people on a short-term basis (for example, a project), it’s probably best to stick to tapping out an email or letter rather than using a blog.

There are also situations where another type of social media may be more suitable than a blog, or may be used in conjunction with a blog. We consider these other types of social media, and how they can be used, in Part 2. First, though, we need to look at how to create and write a blog.
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