

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

THE CORPORATE BLOG AS A TOOL FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

This major research paper investigates the corporate blog as a tool for strategic communication. Using Erving Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory, it draws parallels between the use of a blog and the strategic presentation of self as outlined in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and the communication tactics used by Rogers Communication and Radian6. It ultimately concludes that each company communicates key messaging differently based on their presumed objectives for the medium.

Table of Contents

1) Introduction.....	p. 3
2) Literature Review.....	p. 6
<i>The Blog</i>	
<i>Self-Presentation Theory</i>	
<i>New media</i>	
3) Methodology.....	p. 16
4) Results & Discussion.....	p. 21
<i>Balance</i>	
<i>Frequency / Contributors</i>	
<i>Hyperlinks</i>	
<i>Multimedia</i>	
<i>Themes</i>	
<i>Search Engine Optimization</i>	
<i>Giving & Sharing</i>	
<i>Quantity vs. Quality</i>	
<i>Content Marketing</i>	
<i>Engaging / Commenting</i>	
<i>Nature of the Business</i>	
5) Conclusion.....	p. 41
6) Appendix.....	p. 44
7) Bibliography.....	p. 47

Chapter 1: Introduction

As mainstream communication channels become more focused on digital platforms, organizations are finding ways to improve their digital reputation. Having a company website was once thought to be enough to ensure that prospective customers had ample information to research a potential purchase beforehand. The Internet has turned what used to be controlled, one-way messages into real-time dialogue with millions (Sacks, 2010), which has dramatically shifted the media landscape, allowing users to choose the lineup of news to their liking. Through this one-way communication websites, brands could only publish the information that was beneficial for the company and its reputation; but as emerging technologies like blogs and social media have become more prevalent, consumers now have the ability to actively pursue the products that interest them, rather than serve as passive consumers subjected to messages from companies. Blogging is an important aspect of a communications plan that delivers new information frequently. In fact, companies that blog get 55 per cent more website traffic (Hubspot, 2010) than those who do not and more than half of all Internet users read blogs at least monthly (eMarketer, 2010). Unlike traditional forms of outbound marketing like direct mail, telemarketing, and mainstream media advertisements, the corporate blog relies on very different tactics. The Internet user is completely in control of the webpages he or she views, and the time that he/she spends

on a particular website. The user has no obligation to view a message in its entirety or wait for the commercial advertisement to end. In order to gain and maintain the user's attention, the corporate blog tries to "pull" the user in with interesting and engaging content, like blog posts, videos, interviews, and other forms of digital content.

Anderson (2010) argues that, "marketers have gained entirely new advertising and marketing platforms, but consumers have simultaneously gained an unprecedented degree of empowerment in marketing relationships, beginning in the dot-com era and culminating in the present social media era," (Anderson, 2010 p. 2). This means consumers have the technology to research, contact, compare products and make contact with an organization at their convenience, thus almost relegating the companies to a passive role. In response, it has become increasingly important for companies to monitor, interact, and engage consumers on these channels and the conversations around their brand. Brands are now realizing an opportunity to leverage these new platforms to communicate *with* their potential audience not *at* them, as they could not before with traditional means like newspapers, radio, television, and the company website. This raises the question: How are organizations communicating through these digital platforms? What tactics are they using on two-way channels, like a blog, to enhance their reputation, while managing the risks involved in public discourse?

This study will assess the blog as a communications platform and explain how organizations use the platform to publish outbound messages to a mass audience. The research will examine how the blog is used to strategically communicate to specific and broad publics, and how that might affect the organization's reputation. It will also investigate the aesthetics of two companies' blogs, the team that manages each, and the topics those teams write about. The research will be grounded in Self-Presentation Theory as outlined by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Using Self-Presentation Theory, this research will analyze the corporate blog and explain how organizations tailor messages to convey different meanings to their audience. Additionally, this paper will investigate the strategic tactics used within each post to communicate information that not only interests the end-user but also adds value to the brand or product the company is promoting and provides a return on their blogging investment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Blog

Short for weblog, Herring et al (2004) define the blog as a “frequently modified web page, in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence,” (Herring et al., 2004). Blogs are viewed as fundamentally different than other forms of computer-mediated communications (CMC) such as email and personal websites (Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2004). Just one element of new media, the blog became popular in the aftermath of several historic events and natural disasters over the last 12 years, such as the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. These incidents served as a catalyst for people to share their grief, express their anger, and debate their ideas and opinions through web blogs or “warblogs,” as they were known at the time (Catalano, 2007). Other events, such as the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia and Hurricane Katrina have given rise to the blog as a medium to publish one’s thoughts and opinions. These events have demonstrated how private citizens, organizations and government can “successfully disseminate information; raise awareness; engage in public dialogue; influence or manage reputations, crises, and issues; and build communities,” (Catalano, 2007 p. 249).

Today, more than a third of U.S. companies use blogs for marketing purposes (Um, 2010) and according to the 2011 State of the Blogosphere Report, three million new blogs

come online every month. Blogs were once considered diaries but have now morphed into being used for an assortment of different purposes including the transmission of thoughts, opinions and ideas (MarketingProfs, 2008, p.6). Journalists see them as alternative news sources (Lasica, 2001), educators and business people view them as an environment for knowledge sharing (Festa, 2003; Ray, 2003), and individuals use them as vehicles for self-expression and empowerment (Blood, 2002). The power behind blogs is the conversation that ensues in the comment section. Frequent updates give the audience incentive to return to the page, unlike traditional static websites. The power and reach of a blog is endless because bloggers often link to other blogs, which means they have the potential to reach an audience not possible with traditional marketing vehicles (MarketingProfs, 2008 p. 6).

Who is blogging?

To understand who is doing the blogging, we turn to the 2011 State of the Blogosphere report conducted by Technorati, an Internet search engine that indexes and ranks 112 million blogs and 250 million pieces of social media content. The study has been conducted annually since 2004. The report highlights five types of bloggers:

- 1) Hobbyists that blog for fun
- 2) Part-time professionals that blog to supplement their income
- 3) Full-time professionals who consider blogging their full-time job
- 4) Corporate bloggers who blog on behalf of a company or organization

5) Entrepreneurs who blog for a company or organization they own

The report indicates that 60 per cent of respondents consider themselves hobbyists and blog “for fun.” This means they do not report any income, spend less than three hours a week blogging and 70 per cent of them blog to express their opinion. Both full and part-time professional bloggers represent 18 per cent of all bloggers and corporate bloggers make up eight per cent of the blogosphere. 70 per cent of corporate bloggers do it to share expertise, 61 per cent to gain professional recognition, and 52 per cent to attract new clients (Technorati, 2011). Entrepreneurs make up the final 13 per cent of the blogosphere and 76 per cent of them say they blog to share expertise, 70 per cent said they blog to gain professional recognition, and 68 per cent to attract new clients. 20 per cent of people writing the posts have been blogging for more than six years and 35 per cent of corporate bloggers worked in a journalism, media or professional writing role before writing for a blog (Technorati, 2011). As of 2010, there were approximately 900,000 new blog posts added to the blogosphere every 24 hours (Anderson, 2010 p. 169) and that number has presumably increased.

Corporate blogging in the larger scheme of marketing

At its most fundamental level, blogging provides a mechanism for an organization to communicate directly with its customers (MarketingProfs, 2008 p. 11). Marketing was once

a one-way form of communication, whereby companies projected messages onto the consumer. Messages were broadcasted through traditional forms of media including print, radio and television using public relations tactics or direct marketing. The Internet changed all of that with its ability to target geographically dispersed audiences en masse. A potential customer just like a potential critic can be in the same region or somewhere across the globe.

“Blogging takes marketing advances one step further by transforming marketing into a two-way conversation. It allows the organization to initiate conversation with the audience and provides a platform for the audience to respond; all of which is marketing intelligence in itself.” (MarketingProfs, 2008 p. 11).

Blogs come in many shapes and sizes. The type of blog affects how a prospective audience views it. It can be a CEO blog—written by high-level executives; or an aggregate blog, authored by several people using different voices and perspectives; or a staff blog, which allows companies to show their human side by letting employees speak honestly about their daily challenges and successes. It could be a specialist blog—which is like a CEO blog, but tends to provide a larger scope of topics and a venue for a company to develop conversations with customers about specific subjects by creating a space where customers can discuss what is important to them. One of the last forms of blogs is a customer

evangelist blog—which is written by an organization’s customers about their products. An effective example of this is Starbucks <http://starbucksgossip.typepad.com>.

This research investigated the use of multimedia including images, videos, whitepapers, case studies and informational graphics (hereafter referred to as an infographic) to accompany blog posts. Additionally, it will look into how organizations attach appropriate tags and categories to their blog posts. They often include the name of companies, products, and events, as well as industry terms.

Advantages and disadvantages of blogging

One obvious constraint preventing some organizations from adopting the blog as a tool for strategic communication is the time and effort or commitment required. Depending on the size of the organization, operating a blog can require a full-time position or more. Blogs have the potential to negatively affect the reputation of a company if managed improperly. There is always an element of risk when a company exposes itself to the potential for criticism and public displeasure. Alternatively, blogging can be a beneficial way to communicate with customers, prospects and stakeholders. The reciprocal nature of blogging offers the organization a limitless virtual space for the sharing of new information and customer updates, and a venue for hosting contests. Additionally, the blog also provides individuals and organizations with a publishing mechanism that eliminates the

gate-keeping powers of the mass media and enables the organization to be the main point of contact with the consumer regarding concerns, complaints, and suggestions. A corporate blog offers consumers a platform for reciprocal communication with a company.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) refers to the methods used to boost the ranking or frequency of a website in results returned by a search engine, in an effort to maximize user traffic to the site (Dictionary.com, 2012). If a company has a website, they want people to visit it. Whether its function is to disseminate information, promote shopping or other commercial transactions, or generate advertising revenue, a site won't be effective if no one sees it (Russell, 2007 p. 2). "Since most Internet users rely on search engines to find websites, good search listings can dramatically increase site traffic," (Russell, 2007 p. 2). Search engines like Google, Yahoo! and Bing 'crawl' the web and look for things like page titles, body copy, inbound/outbound hyperlinks, keywords, click-through rates, and authentic and relevant content. On Google alone, 10.3 billion searches are conducted every month (comScore, 2010) so ranking high on search engines could have a positive effect on sales. To quantify the power of SEO, Forrester Research published the following statistics from a 2006 study:

- 93 per cent of all internet traffic is generated from internet search engines

- 99 per cent of Internet searchers do not search beyond the top 30 results
- 97 per cent of them never look beyond the top three results
- Top 10 positions receive 78 per cent more traffic than those in positions 11-30
- 65 per cent of online revenue is generated from websites in the top three positions on search engine results pages
- 93 per cent of global consumers use search engines to find websites

SEO is something this research will analyze to understand how organizations tag and categorize each blog post to ensure the largest possible audience discovers each blog post.

One concern for marketing executives is the risk of a blog bringing more negative publicity to the company than positive, but Anderson (2010) argues that the existence of the communication tool is more important than the contents that occur on it. By cooperating and providing a blog for its customers where the good and the bad can be thoroughly hashed out, the company reduces its chances of customer defection into forums where they could do more harm and less good (Anderson, p. 10). Also said company might have no moderation control on remote online forums and discussions.

An effective blogging presence can humanize a brand. People increasingly distrust big companies (Israel & Scoble, 2006) so a blog is a useful tool to build trust and make a person feel connected to the organization in a way that a marketing brochure cannot (Wright, 2006 p. 28). The platform itself, compared to other forms of controlled

publication, is a relatively cost-effective, easily accessible channel that can broaden the reach of an organization's communication initiatives.

“One may not have millions, or even thousands, of customers, but in the world of blogging, everyone has an equal voice. No matter how big or small your business, or how many people are interested in your products, blogging provides a unique opportunity for you to talk to your potential customers—at least those who happen to be online and reading—and for them to talk to you”(Wright, 2005 p. 25).

After delivering consistent information to an audience, blogging can position a brand as a thought-leader in its respective industry. Having a high-ranking staff member write a blog post is just as effective as writing a column in the newspaper or speaking at a professional conference. The blog is an additional vehicle to market a company, its products, and its people.

To understand how blogging—thought of by many as a seemingly endless string of casual conversation or journal entries—can be beneficial to a company, this paper turns to Erving Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Granted, a blog can be an individual's personal diary, but it can also be much more. It can represent the work of a team that composes strategic posts that provide the audience with something that interests and engages them as well as bringing some added value back to the company by way of

customer service, brand awareness, or increased revenue. While Goffman does not speak directly to corporate blogging, some of his principles in *The Presentation of Self* can be applied to better understand the strategic use of the platform. This paper will first outline the theory, new media and the landscape, and the blog as a communications platform. Then, it will draw correlations between how organizations leverage a corporate blog to communicate key messaging to their target audience.

Dramaturgy

Self-presentation stems from Goffman's theory of Dramaturgy, which is the idea that social interaction can be analyzed in terms of how people live their lives like actors performing on a stage. Goffman posits that,

“all actions are perceived to be social performances with the aim of not only achieving whatever the inherent purposes the action may have had, but also that of giving off and maintaining certain desired impressions of the self to others” (Goffman, 1959 p. 4).

Each conversation, then, is an individual's performance of presenting himself or herself to leave specific impressions on others. Goffman outlines several aspects that define an effective performance that can also be applied to corporate blogging. An audience must

“believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he/she appears to possess and that the task they perform will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be” (Goffman, 1959 p.18).

Similarly, someone reading a blog post must believe that the person or organization that is communicating key messages *actually possesses* the attributes and expertise they claim to. Actors must be fully taken by their roles, believe in them and present a show of realness (Goffman, 1959 p.40), similar to corporate bloggers. If not, the audience or potential customer might dismiss the performance as insincere or the organization as untrustworthy. Goffman argues that actors must dramatically highlight and portray key facts that might be unapparent in conversation. When contributing to a blog, the company must portray certain information so that it is clear to the audience that the claims are legitimate. During conversation or in outbound messages, the company must convey important information and key messaging so as not to confuse the audience. Actors must have a realization that all aspects that are included in the dramatic performance—including information that requires quick judgments—assures the audience of the strength of the performance (Goffman, 1959 p. 42). The corporate blog is an open communication channel but organizations should be aware that anything they publish on the channel is a ‘scene’ in their performance. Similar to writers and bloggers, actors often rely on audience

cues to gauge the strength of their performance and vice versa. In blogging, a post can be assessed by the number of times it is shared on other social networking websites or the number of comments a post receives. Sentiment of comments and other forms of feedback provide cues into the success or failure of a given performance. Feedback is an important feature in drama and corporate blogging but the latter showcases that feedback for all to see on the Internet. Finally, Goffman's analysis of performance indicates that an actor must use appropriate levels of misrepresentation. Goffman argues that many performers have ample capacity and motive to misrepresent the facts; only shame, guilt, or fear prevents them from doing so (Goffman, 1959, p. 59).

There are several parallels between Goffman's understanding of social interaction, dramatic performance, and the use of a corporate blog as a tool to facilitate those digital performances. As a platform, a blog affords the audience the ability to join or observe a public interaction. The inherent risk of committing to such conversations has resulted in a very strategic approach to writing blog posts, promoting a brand, and fielding comments. This research looks to relate corporate blogging to the strategic presentation of self.

Self-Presentation Theory

Self-Presentation Theory is a way of communicating images to others (Baumeister, 1982; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and the act of conveying one's self-concept

to others by various means according to situational demands (Goffman, 1959). The theory is often used to study how people tailor the messages they send to convey different meanings to their audience. It has also been called impression management, which emphasizes people's attempts to control how the self is presented (Schlenker, 1980). Face-to-face, individuals present an image of themselves through various verbal and non-verbal expressions like facial gestures and body language. Virtual exchanges often do not allow for those non-verbal cues so self-presentation can sometimes be subtle, very deliberate, or some hybrid of the two. In essence, self-presentation and impression management are about strategically building an image to portray who we want others to think we are (Goffman, 1959). For example, instead of wearing a certain article of clothing, one might write a blog post endorsing the brand or style, which has a similar effect on the image of the brand and the person promoting it (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Failing to convey the intended image can be detrimental to an individual or an organization's reputation and credibility, but successfully presenting the desired image might lead to an enhancement of self (Swann, 1987).

New Media

The way consumers communicate with each other has changed dramatically over the last decade and the same is true for how consumers gather and exchange information

about products (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). The plethora of new media platforms has given access to a wider audience. Deighton and Kornfield (2009) argue that “the digital innovations of the last decade made it effortless, indeed second nature, for audiences to talk back and talk to each other” (2009, p. 4). New media enables users to create and distribute their own information while also partaking in the promotion and engagement around that information. Just as they browse websites like eBay, Amazon, and Kijiji they also have the ability to create a profile and sell products of their own; they are as much retailers as they are consumers. The evolution of new media presents several opportunities for communication between the organization and the consumer because it, “offers companies multifarious ways to reach consumers, communicate with them, and measure their communication, browsing or purchase-related behaviors,” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) describe five defining features of new media in *The*

Impact of New Media on Customer Relationships:

Digital: which means that there is no extra cost for producing multiple copies so digital communications is easily distributed without the traditional gatekeepers like publishers. Anyone with an Internet connection can be a blogger, reporter, or recording artist.

Pro-active: users contribute valuable actions to new media such as commenting, writing reviews, and testing new products. This feature differentiates from television, where the user is largely passive.

Visible: new media channels allow the user to view the actions of others and vice versa. Entries on blogs, community forms and social networks leave paper trails that provide insights into the habits of the user.

Real-time and memory: interaction on new media is instantaneous and the conversations, good or bad, are left available for many years.

Ubiquitous: by joining new media, users and organizations make a commitment to be present and within reach at all times, often through a mobile device.

These five features affect how organizations leverage a corporate blog to strategically communicate and provide insight into why the platform may or may not be successful in an organizational setting. The blog, Self-Presentation Theory and new media work interchangeably to influence the results of this research. This paper will now introduce a methodology for conducting primary, qualitative research on the corporate blog in a professional setting. It will seek to understand how concepts of Self-Presentation theory can be applied to the strategies and execution of a corporate blog.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To evaluate the strategies of corporate blogging, I will use a Grounded Theory approach as defined by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in *Awareness of Dying* (1967). Grounded Theory is a systematic way of developing a theory based on a set of documents (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It involves the open coding, defining and categorizing of information that ultimately derives a general theory from that information. This research will use a qualitative approach to investigating the blogs of two corporations: Radian6 and Rogers Communication. While the study is qualitative in nature, it does include some quantitative items that simply provide additional insights to the results. To gather data, this research collected 30 blog posts—15 from each company that were published between January and February of 2012. It also took into consideration the functionality of their blog, the aesthetics, and the features that each communication platform has afforded the user.

Each company was selected based on certain criteria. Both companies are Canadian, fall within the technology industry, and operate a blog. Radian6 has roughly 600 employees, has been in business for five years, and targets a global audience. Rogers has 28,000 employees, was founded in 1960, and is focused almost exclusively on the Canadian market. Radian6 sells a social media measurement tool and targets businesses small and large. Rogers sells a wide range of telephone, Internet, and cable television products and

services and targets both the individual consumer and businesses. There are a sufficient amount of similarities between the two companies to draw meaningful conclusions from a comparative analysis.

This research involves the open coding of four key communication tactics that were discovered in the data before they were formally defined. This paper will first identify each tactic, then it will highlight the results, explain the implications, and identify some conclusions and areas for further research. It will also track statistics for the number of authors each organization uses, the use of hyperlinking between websites, the use of multimedia, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and social networking shares. All of this information should bring some additional insights that will enhance this paper's understanding of the corporate blog as a tool for strategic communication. The four noticeable tactics that surfaced within the data are as follows:

1) **Informational sentences:** defined as "to impart or communicate knowledge to another," (Merriam-Webster). For the purpose of this research, the working definition will be any sentences that teach or educate the audience on a particular idea or suggest that they take a particular action. For example, Rogers Communication might inform their audience that "over 150,000 gadget lovers were in Las Vegas last week to check out the latest gear, software and technology at the

world's largest consumer technology trade show: CES 2012." Radian6 might teach, "the term *primary network reach* refers to the total number of followers to whom you can directly push your message." Informational content is a common pattern among blog posts and this research will seek to understand how that affects the company's strategic presentation of self.

2) **Sentences that construct a relationship with the reader:** which can be defined as "an aspect of quality that connects two or more things or parts as being or belonging or working together or as being of the same kind" (Merriam-Webster). The working definition will be any sentences that speak *to* the audience not *at* the audience, such as conversing with the audience or posing a question. Each relationship constructing sentence indicates that the organization is writing a post *with* the audience not *at* them, which differentiates it from a website or traditional one-way marketing methods. It leaves the reader feeling as though corporate blogging is something he/she does in collaboration with an organization. For example, Rogers published the line, "We know technology helps keep people close, but did you know Canadians don't really worry about family due to technology advances helping to keep us connected?" This line speaks *to* the audience and the questions serves to activate the reader. Radian6 published this line: "What do you

believe you'll need to help you along the way? What tools will come in handy?" This again differentiates the blog from most other one-way communication channels.

3) **Engaging sentences:** which is, "to involve in activity or to show great interest, " (Merriam-Webster). This research paper will summarize the coded sentences that hyperlink or connect to different sources of information on the web and sentences that encourage the audience to take a particular action otherwise known as a "call-to-action". For example, "To catch up on all the news from CES 2012, check out Connected Magazine's extensive coverage." The term 'check out' indicates that the company is calling the audience to take a particular action that will ultimately benefit them in some way. Radian6 wrote, "Take a look at this video which highlights Clemson's new social media listening center and some of their students' innovative projects." This had a call-to-action, which engaged the audience by encouraging them to view another hyperlinked source. Engaging the audience is very important in blogging. It not only gives the audience something interactive to do that other traditional forms of communication do not offer but it also indirectly promotes the brand.

4) **Self-promoting sentences:** which outwardly “contribute to the growth or prosperity, to present merchandise for buyer acceptance through advertising, publicity, or discounting,” (Merriam-Webster). In blogging, this means publishing sentences that mention the organization, product or service and how they might be useful for the audience. It also includes hyperlinks that drive audience members to other areas of the website or to other promotional company pages. For example, “Rogers has been a proud sponsor of this event for the last 7 years and with over 1,200 guests celebrating it’s sure to be a night to remember.” This is a very direct way of promoting the company within a blog post. Another example might be pointing the audience to additional information within the company website, “For more cable and wireless deals in the spirit of Chinese New Year, check out www.Rogers.com/cny,” or, “the Radian6 widgets helps you determine when you have the most brand mentions,” Both of these sentences are noticeable instances of self-promotion. They also promote their brand in more subtly ways by directing audience members to an additional piece of content: “If you’re interested in the topic, here are some more posts around it.”

Using Erving Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory, I will analyze how each organization injects strategic messaging within the overall structure of their blog post. Informing, constructing relationships, engaging and self-promoting are all elements of corporate blogging that serve to cater to the user. This study will investigate how the text does or does not utilize those themes to communicate with their audience and if any resulting dialogue between the performing and the audience through comments and social media shares occurs. In the end, the research results will show the length of posts, the number of authors, the frequency of posts, the general theme of each post, how each sentence contributes to promoting the brand, and ultimately whether communicating through a blog helps enhance an organization's reputation and returns the company's blogging investment. The research questions I use to frame the study are:

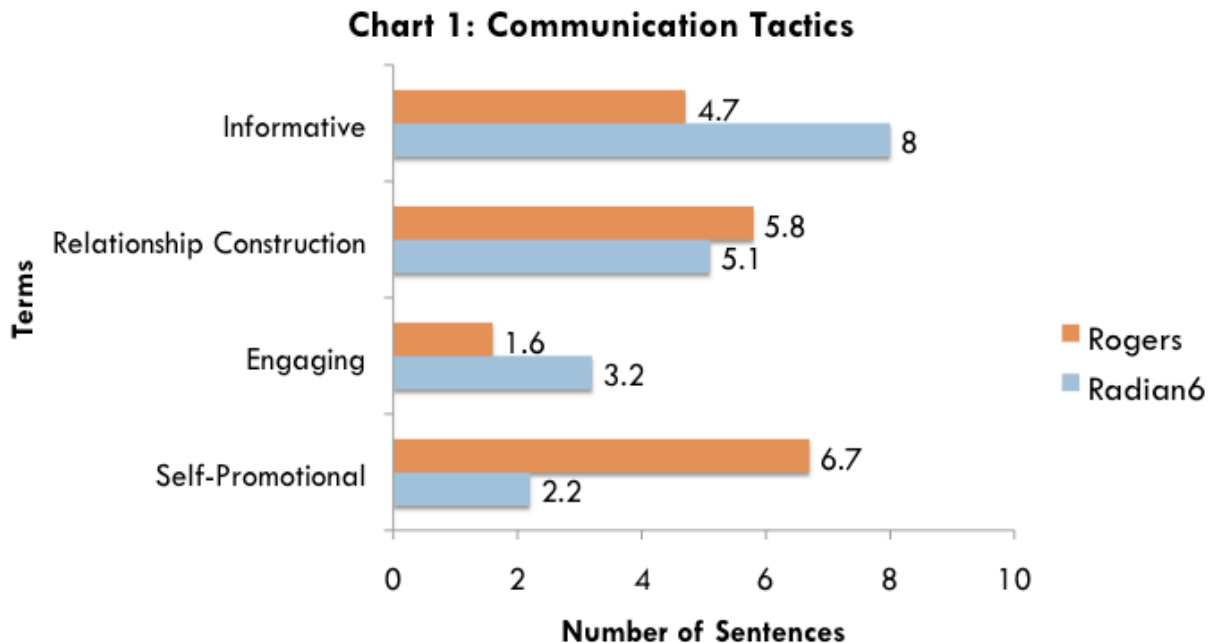
RQ 1: How do organizations use a blog as a tool for strategic communication?

RQ 2: How do they compose blog posts to portray a favorable image of their brand?

RQ 3: What elements of corporate blogging are similar to a performance or strategic presentation?

Chapter 4: Results & Discussion

After scanning and coding all 30 documents, the results (see chart 1: Communications Tactics) highlight some noticeable differences in the way each organization communicates through the use of a blog. The balance between informing, constructing relationships, engaging and self-promoting highlights some interesting aspects of each company's strategy as seen in table 2. Large portions of Radian6 posts were focused on informing the audience; they averaged eight informative sentences per blog post that taught a concept, educated the audience or suggested that they take a particular action.



Slightly more than five times in each post Radian6 had noticeable instances of speaking *to* the audience not *at* them, which was defined as relationship construction. Radian6 did so

by framing their sentences as a collaborative effort to mutually serve both the reader and the writer. For example, Radian6 once ended a blog post with this farewell, “best of luck identifying influencers, engaging networks, and building your fans and followers!” This shows a clear concern for the user and their success. Another strategy for constructing relationships with the audience appeared to be asking questions and speaking *with* the audience. “So what is your potential social media reach — and how much is it worth?” or “What are the metrics that spell success for you?” Radian6 averaged three instances of engaging the audience by hyperlinking to another source or positioning a call-to-action within the post. A notable observation was that Radian6 only mentioned their brand name, linked to an internal source of information, or wrote about the advantages of their product twice per post. All of these were deemed self-promotional. Instead, Radian6 spoke more to informing and constructing relationships with the audience.

The content within the Rogers Redboard Blog had a much more prominent focus on promoting their brand and constructing relationships with the audience. The tone was extremely conversational and gave the impression that blogging was a collaborative initiative. Rogers said things like, “These videos were not your typical demo video or unboxing – quite the opposite (and a little more entertaining if you ask me!)” and they often posed questions like “What feature of the Samsung Galaxy Note are you most excited

about? More than six and a half times per post the company mentioned their brand name or product or hyperlinked to an inbound source of information, which serves to further promote the company. For example, in one post they wrote, “The Sierra Wireless AirCard330U model of the LTE Rocket stick is now available from Rogers,” and “Contact Rogers to subscribe to the service. BlackBerry and Android users can download the Visual Voicemail Plus app from Rogers Mobile Internet Portal.” There were only four and a half instances of Rogers Communication publishing informative sentences per post. Engaging the audience, measured by how often a blog post directed the user to external hyperlinks or had specific calls-to-action, were very uncommon with only one and a half per post.

Table 1: Additional Items

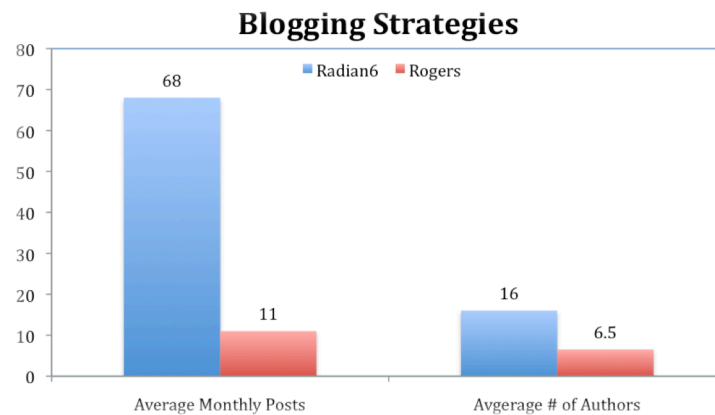
Category	Radian6	Rogers
Total posts per month	68/month	11/month
Average post length	415	453
Total number of authors	16/month	6.5/month
Total number of hyperlinks	69	84
Average number of social shares per post	275/post	33/post
Average number of comments per post	7/post	28/post

Some additional differences (as seen in Table 1: Additional Items below) were most notable in the frequency of posts, the number of people communicating, the use of multimedia, the strategy for optimizing posts for search engines, and the balance between each of the four themes previously introduced. This chart highlights the average number of times each post contained a sentence with one of the four themes that were previously defined.

Frequency | Contributors

The more often a company publishes a blog the more visible the brand is to prospective customers. A recent Overblog study (2012) argued that updating a blog frequently was the most effective way to drive traffic to a website, more so than promoting posts on social media and search engine optimization. The study showed that 33 per cent of bloggers published two to three times per week and 24 per cent once a day. The frequency alone indicated that both Radian6 and Rogers had different approaches to blogging. In the two-month timeframe that this research analyzed, Rogers published 22 posts (11/month) and Radian6 published 136 posts (68/month). Companies that blog at least 20 times per month generate five times more traffic than those that blog only a few times per month ([Hubspot](#) 2012) - only Radian6 achieved this number of posts.

One possible explanation is the number of authors that contribute to the blog (see Blogging Strategies chart below) Rogers averaged six and a half different authors that published at least one article each month during January and February 2012. Radian6 averaged 16 authors each month,



despite being a much smaller company in terms of the number of employees and years in business. Digital communications appears to play a larger factor in the overall marketing strategy of the company. Radian6 has more than double the amount of contributors than Rogers, yet only a fraction of the overall employees. With more contributors comes more content. Radian6 appears to be implementing a strategy known as inbound marketing or content marketing, which will be explained in the coming sections.

Hyperlinks: Inbound & Outbound

The tactic of hyperlinking, the ability to electronically link to another web page by embedding a URL, is an important aspect of blogging (Blood, 2002). Hyperlinks encourage the reader to view another source of information that might help explain a concept, pose a contrasting viewpoint, or simply extend the conversation to another web page. It is very

useful for both the reader and writer because it affords the technology something traditional media does not.

Each company used hyperlinks very differently. Radian6 averaged 4.6 hyperlinks per blog post, while Rogers Communication averaged 5.6 per post. The majority of hyperlinks in a Radian6 blog post were outbound links, meaning they brought the reader to an external source, concept, or reference made in the post. Rogers utilized hyperlinks almost entirely to promote themselves. As opposed to the 42 per cent of Radian6 hyperlinks that linked to an internal company page to promote themselves or their product, 95 per cent of Rogers' hyperlinks directed the audience to an inbound, or internal page within their company website or affiliate companies. They were usually announcing service updates, a third-party product launch, promoting another blog post, or repurposing a press release.

For example:

"Visit www.rogers.com/lumia900 for more information and to register for updates on the upcoming pre-order."

"Today, we're [introducing](#) the next big thing in TV from Rogers: [NextBox 2.0](#)"

"If you haven't already signed up for Rogers One Number, visit [the site](#) to get started."

When Radian6 embedded hyperlinks they were almost entirely positioned at the end of a post and usually suggested another piece of content that the reader might want to investigate—be it an eBook, a blog post, or something on another social networking profile.

For example:

“Any steps I’ve left out? Comment here or tweet [us](#)”

“While you’re at it, see our latest [ebook](#) for great ways to use social media in 2012.”

“Jenn tweets, talks and blogs about Travel, Entertainment and Leisure. [Follow her on Twitter](#) and [check out her most recent posts here](#).”

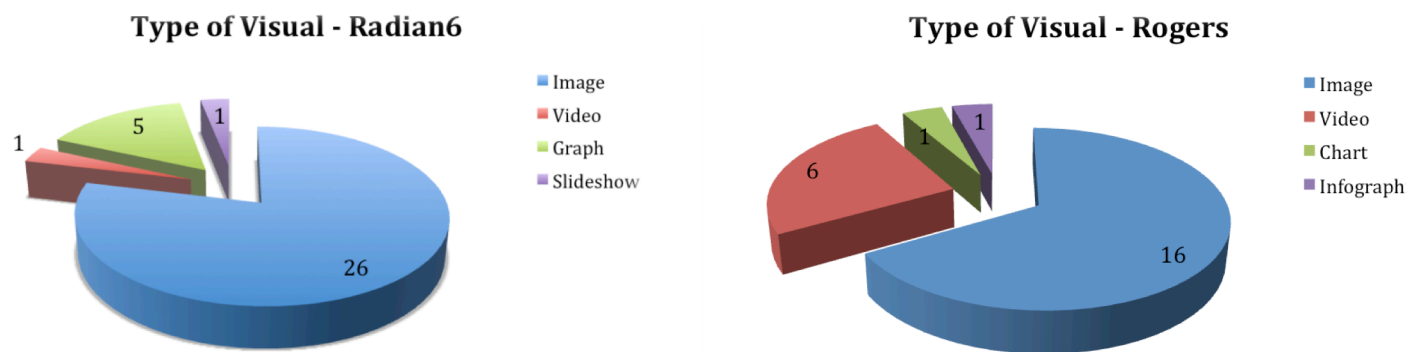
There are a lot of benefits in hyperlinking a blog post to another webpage and the potential linking of information is limitless. If a piece of information is on the Internet it can be hyperlinked and referenced within a blog post. This is a unique feature to blogging but when 95 per cent of the hyperlinks Rogers uses are inbound (meaning directed to another page the company operates), the audience might perceive it as self-centered or boastful. Radian6 hyperlinked to inbound sources only 40 per cent of the time, which is enough to include other digital sources in the conversation but also to promote their brand at the same time. Some might argue only linking to inbound sources 40 per cent of the time is not enough. They might question the practice of driving website traffic to other pages and

risking the user not coming back to their page. After all, there must be some gain from the company's corporate blogging investment.

Multimedia

The use of visuals to accompany a written message is common among almost all blogs.

Rogers and Radian6 averaged just slightly more than one image (see chart beside) per post and both used a range of multimedia including videos, graphs, charts, slideshows, and information graphics. The two graphs below highlight then total number of visuals each organization used on their blog:



Videos are a very effective method for communicating a message. Professionally produced video content and user-generated product videos are highly synergistic and drive higher levels of sales effectiveness when used in tandem ([comScore](#), 2012). The resources needed to produce an original video are much higher than a basic text-based blog post. Rogers only included a video in 20 per cent of their posts (See Appendix 1) and Radian6 in just seven

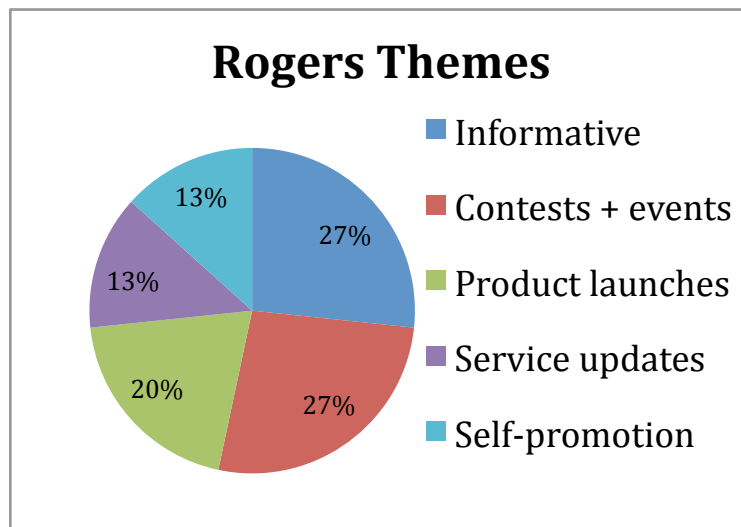
per cent (See Appendix 2). In terms of the content shared in the videos, Rogers leveraged their television department and used four videos that promoted a product sold in their stores. Radian6 included a video created by one of their customers that showcased their social media measurement tool.

Both organizations periodically communicated informative content through charts, graphs, and infographics containing original research. Radian6 has access to their main product, a social media measurement tool, which they often utilized by providing their audience with informative and educational graphs and charts. In one blog post they published an eight-page slideshow containing a wide array of key insights and useful information. Similarly, Rogers published an annual “Innovation Report” containing valuable information about the role of technology in relationships. Not surprisingly, this information-rich content was of all Rogers’ posts the most widely shared on social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter and Google+. These original research documents bring substantial publicity to an organization because they add new and authentic information to the general conversation on the Internet and serve as a catalyst to conversation.

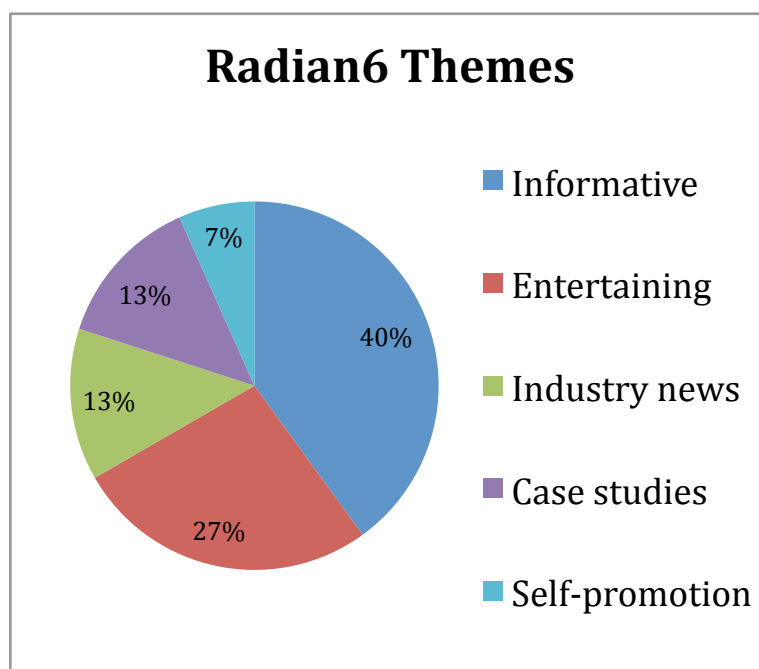
Theme of posts

The theme of the blog posts that each organization publishes highlights their very different approach to communicating through a blog. Of the 15 Radian6 blog posts, six were based on informing or educating the audience. The goal of these posts appears to be to give information to the reader and ask for very little, if anything, in return. They often included original research via charts and graphics and invited the audience to participate in the discussion by sharing a post or commenting. Four of the posts had a theme of entertaining the audience. Radian6 often wrote about interesting analogies of social media such as “20 Ways Social Media is like Your Crazy Ex.” This type of post promotes the brand because of its long shelf life and sharing potential. In addition, fun and entertaining posts do not ask anything from the audience in return, outwardly promote the company, or give the audience any reason to avoid reading that post. Radian6 had two posts that were customer case studies that served to inform the audience of how other respected companies are using their product and seeing positive results. They also had two posts that were related to industry news and events, which help to build relationships and solidify the company’s membership amongst other industry professionals. Radian6 also had one post that was entirely self-promoting other organizational content. The strategy appears to be a mixture of different themes that have the goal of maintaining the attention of a wide

audience and ensuring that they remain on the company website. Rogers published only four posts that were entirely based on informing and educating. Unlike Radian6, they published three posts that were product launches and two that were service updates.



Sometimes a post was entirely based on the announcement of extended wireless service, while other times posts focused on a new piece of



hardware that one of their providers launched, which happened to be sold in Rogers stores.

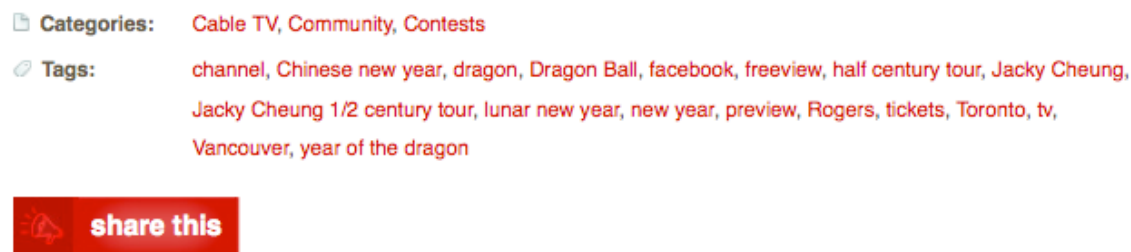
Rogers had four posts that were entirely focused on community events or contests. This is a great way to engage an audience, give back to their audience and subtly promote the brand.

The remaining two posts were entirely self-promotional.

The difference between each organization was the ratio between giving and taking. Sixty-six per cent of posts by Radian6 gave the audience either informative or entertaining content while only 27 per cent of Rogers' posts did; however, Radian6 did not host any contests, while Rogers had four. The most noticeable difference between the themes of each organization's blog posts was the use of product launches and service upgrades. Given the size of Rogers Communication and the two-way capabilities the blog affords, it is not surprising that the blog was used to announce product launches and service upgrades on the platform. It allows the consumer to provide a response or concern to the company that will likely receive an answer. However, it appears that Rogers is using the blog as an extension of their main website and repurposing press releases. This can be viewed as an advantage of the platform or a disadvantage. It is advantageous because it gives the brand's loyal followers the information they need and would like to know.

Search Engine Optimization, Tags & Categories

Proper page labeling clearly indicates the subject and topic covered in a particular post and helps readers and search engines discover, categorize, and index particular posts. The better search engines can discover and categorize a website, the higher it ranks on search engines. Both companies labeled their posts very differently using the tag and category features on their blogs. Here is an example of the bottom of a Rogers' blog post:



And here is an example of the tags at the bottom of a Radian6 post:

Tags: Analytics, banking, Brand, compliance, Financial Services, insurance, Marketing

For corporate blogging to be an effective means of strategic communication, posts must be optimized so that search engines, and thus Internet users, can find them. The more pages



that are properly labeled the higher it will be ranked amongst similar pages on the Internet. Companies that blog have 434 per cent more indexed pages, and companies with more indexed pages get far more leads (Hubspot,

the most important locations. One should be able to look at a word cloud (seen above) and clearly determine the organization's specialties. Based on the size of the 'social', 'media' and 'strategy', it is reasonable to believe that is their niche. However that same analysis is not abundantly clear when reviewing Rogers Communication's cloud.

Key Takeaways

From a distance, it appears that both Radian6 and Rogers communicate in very similar ways. Compared to ordinary face-to-face situations, bloggers have a greater ability to strategically develop and edit self-presentation, enabling a selective and optimized presentation of themselves to others (Chen, 2010 p. 29). Both companies use about 400 words per post, one form of multimedia, and several hyperlinks to craft a message. They categorize each post, tag it with keywords that will allow search engines to find the content, index it and rank it amongst similar content. Every post has the option to be shared on various social networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+ and each company invites the audience to leave a comment, concern or question underneath the post—something traditional, one-way communication doesn't afford.

As the data illustrates, both organizations use the corporate blog to communicate very differently. Each post has an underlying motive that brings some form of gain to the organization. Radian6 provides informative and useful content and asks very little in

return. Their goal is to keep users browsing their blog or website as long as possible. They are deemed knowledgeable and trustworthy and have a large digital following that promotes the brand throughout their networks as a result. Rogers publishes new posts much less often but outwardly promotes certain products and services. Their brand gains in product awareness in each and every post. However, because their posts are shared much less on social networking websites that could be viewed as missing out on an opportunity to reach new audiences.

Brands are held responsible for what they portray in online marketing materials. In one case, Motorola was launching a new phone and Rogers published a blog post with videos of the phone being shot through a canon and penetrating various forms of food and drinks. One commenter then raised the question about Rogers honouring water damage on phones. The company quickly responded and later added a disclaimer to the post (see Appendix 4). Communicating through a corporate blog can be very beneficial but it also exposes the brand to potentially detrimental conversations. While companies don't always have the solution to the customer's problem, they are offering a place for customers to voice their opinion and possibly a public display of displeasure, which should improve the customer's experience with the organization. This brings the audience one step closer to the answer to their comment or concern.

Companies have blogging policies and are sometimes restricted from making certain unwarranted claims on a blog (see Appendix 5). One must not be blinded by the ease of use and easy accessibility to people within the organization; they are not always allowed to provide certain answers because of strict rules and guidelines. For the most part, Rogers and Radian6 are open about what they can and cannot disclose over the blog. Both brands are actively engaged in dialogue with comments. Rogers had a reply rate of 28 per cent, meaning they provided a personalized response to 28 per cent of comments on their blog. Radian6 had a response rate of 40 per cent. Generally, the higher the response rate the more a visitor feels valued and engaged in two-way dialogue.

Giving | Sharing

There appears to be a correlation between the number of informative sentences a blog post contains and the amount of times it is shared throughout the various social networking websites. Informative sentences teach, educate, or instruct the audience on a particular concept or action. Radian6 averaged eight informative sentences per post and 275 social networking shares on websites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+. Rogers only averaged four and a half informative sentences and 33 social shares per post. To take this even further, one might consider the fact that 27 per cent of Radian6 posts had an overarching theme of 'fun and entertaining', which might have also contributed to the

amount of social shares that result from a blog post. The theme of giving humanizes a brand because people increasingly distrust big companies (Israel & Scoble, 2006). A blog is a great way to build trust and make a person feel connected to the organization in a way that a marketing brochure cannot (Wright, 2006 p. 28). If one combines all of the posts that are deemed 'giving' to the audience, meaning without a noticeable self-promotion element, then 67 per cent of Radian6 posts were giving something to the audience.

The opposite, then, would be 'taking' or 'receiving' from the audience, which is not uncommon in corporate blogging. After all, the organization must find ways to promote their product or service and receive some benefit from their blogging initiative. But 46 per cent of Rogers' blog posts would be considered 'receiving' from the audience through self-promotional posts and product updates. It is safe to say that there is a correlation between informative posts and a high rate of social networking shares. This is not to suggest that a high number of social networking shares is indicative of a successful blog. If the goal of the blog is to promote an organization's products or services then social networking shares are not as important. This research was unable to gain access to the strategy and preparation that outlines how each organization defines success.

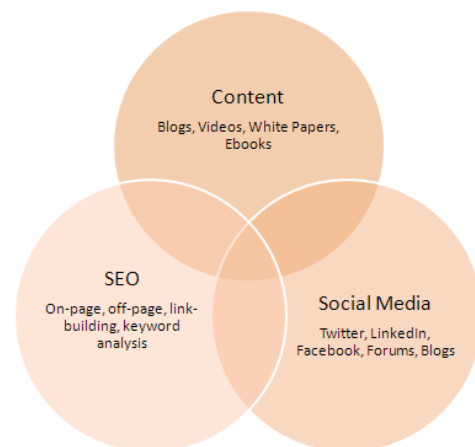
Quantity Vs. Quality

The quantity of posts mentioned in the results section shows a clear difference in the blogging strategies used by each company. Rogers published only 22 posts in two months while Radian6 published 136 in the same period of time. Rogers seemed to publish only when something very important needed to be communicated to their audience, while Radian6 appeared to have regular contributors that published on particular days of the week. Rogers used the blog as a megaphone or extension of their website, press releases, and other marketing channels, while Radian6 leveraged their blog as a much larger piece of their marketing strategy. Their strategy is based on the notion of inbound marketing, which means they are marketing the content they are creating with the goal of driving audience traffic inbound to their website.

Push vs. Pull Marketing

As a result of digital, two-way communication channels empowering the consumer, organizations have started to find a more cost effective alternative to traditional push marketing. The blog is one channel that is contributing to

Components of Inbound Marketing



the rise of 'pull marketing', which consists of creating strategic content (blog posts, videos, contests, infographics, whitepapers, case studies, etc.) to *pull* prospective customers to their website. The goal, then, is to craft strategic content that entices the user to visit a company's website. According to Hubspot, a leading industry specialist in inbound marketing, this form of marketing costs roughly 60 per cent less than traditional outbound, paid marketing (Hubspot, 2011). Instead of pushing information at the audience through television commercials, Internet pop-ups, or junk mail, pull marketing attempts to draw the user into the company website like a magnet. It creates useful, informative and entertaining content that benefits the consumer and promotes the blog posts using the social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. Both organizations appear to be implementing an inbound marketing strategy. They both write very similar style posts, they optimize them for search, they present readers with the opportunities to share each post, and they use the platform to bring new traffic 'inbound'. There are three key components to inbound marketing: content, the core of any inbound marketing campaign; SEO, or how a piece of content is organically compiled with search terms and phrases; and social media, the promotional megaphone of the strategy. While both organizations write posts very differently, it is clear that each of them is leveraging the communications medium in the same fashion.

Engaging | Commenting

Unlike Radian6, Rogers has no difficulty in getting their audience to comment on blog posts because the few posts they have usually involve some form of announcement. They average 28 comments on each blog post, while Radian6 averages seven. People are presumably visiting the Rogers Redboard blog to find out information on the company, which is a form of strategic communication that gives their audience a chance to engage in dialogue with the brand.

Nature of the Business | Use of the Blog

One of the most important factors to consider in this analysis is the make-up of each organization and the images they are attempting to present of themselves. Visitors to the Radian6 Social Strategy blog are presumably going to the website to learn something new or be entertained. As a result, those visitors typically share the post with their networks of family, friends, and industry colleagues. Each company strategically crafts blog posts to communicate to their audience certain key messages about their brand. Rogers is a service-based business with a lot of customers that rely on the functionality of their products to get television, Internet, and telephone service. They present an image of stability and rely on more one-way, asynchronous forms of communication to market their brand, but use the blog to offer the chance of dialogue with their audience. In fact, in one Rogers' blog post, the

comment section was closed off. This contradicts the benefits of using a blog but illustrates the control factor Rogers wants to have. Radian6 is a much younger company that is still in the phase of educating people about the benefits of implementing social media into the workplace as a promotional tool. They present themselves as fun and engaging, but very knowledgeable about the best way to apply metrics and analysis to social media usage. Both strategies communicate very differently, both receive different results from each post, and each strategy has many advantages and disadvantages.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research demonstrates that there are many strategies for communicating through a corporate blog. Some of the common objectives include informing, educating, entertaining, updating consumers on new product features, hosting contests, and promoting the brand. If done correctly, corporate blogging should enhance the reputation and promote the brand, but the term “correctly” should be used loosely, as there are so many factors that determine what exactly that is. Charles Catalano’s (2007) position sums up the blog’s position amongst other forms of communication. He posits that regardless of what blogging proponents assert, blogs will not render traditional tools of communication obsolete nor will they usher in a new era of corporate communications (2007, p. 258). However, just like websites became a permanent, fully integrated and vital part of the media landscape, so will blogs. “The fact that traditional forms of communication still exist reinforces the importance of the content or message as opposed to the technology or medium,” (Catalano, 2007 p. 258). Social media marketing will, for the foreseeable future, exist alongside traditional marketing and the established media models it supports – sometimes as a challenge to it, but often as a complement to it, and no complete analysis can ignore this interplay (Anderson, 2010, p. 8). In this case, the blog is one tool that extends the reach of communication between organizations and their audience. It offers a

place for organizations to inform their audience and construct relationships with them. But it also enables them to position strategic messaging within blog posts that serve to promote the brand and position themselves as industry thought-leaders. As a consequence, when the consumer eventually has intentions of purchasing whatever product or service it is that the company sells, it is reasonable to expect that they are the obvious choice. Why? Simply because they have demonstrated their expertise, they have developed a relationship, and they have presented a humanized image of the brand.

Radian6 enhanced their reputation by informing their audience in an entertaining and friendly manner. Rogers presented an image of stability with a hint of generosity through contests and giveaways. Radian6 made it clear they specialize in social media measurement while Rogers portrayed an image of experience in television, Internet and telephone service. The success of a corporate blog depends on the nature of the company, the audience they are targeting, and the strategy they implement. Content marketing is an elaborate strategy that Radian6 implements to ensure their brand name is ever-present in the minds of prospects. They are a younger company that targets a global audience. Rogers is a very established brand in one country, so success is linked to managing that reputation. Nevertheless, both organizations used the same communications platform in very different

ways, to target very different audiences. They were both successful and achieved very different results.

While this study did yield some key insights into the strategies of corporate blogging, I must acknowledge that the findings are only preliminary and further study is needed to make any definite claims. One limitation of this study was that this research was unable to consider the backstage or preparation aspects of each organization's blogging strategy. Significant insights would have been gained if this study could have had access to bloggers to understand the organizational strategy and the inner workings of the blogging team. Given more time, I would expand the research to look into companies that vary in size and in different industries. How companies present themselves online will vary dramatically based on their revenue streams. For example, a large company like Rogers would communicate differently than a publically - funded company or a non-profit.

Appendix

1. Rogers Communication: the use of video in a post

The launch of the Motorola RAZR...literally

By: RogersMiranda
January 3rd, 2012 at 1:30pm

Recently, we released a series of videos featuring the **Motorola RAZR**, available exclusively at Rogers. These videos were not your typical demo video or unboxing – quite the opposite (and a little more entertaining if you ask me!)

We shot the Motorola RAZR - with its **heavy-duty Kevlar fiber coating** and tough Coming Gorilla Glass – out of an air cannon through things like popcorn, pop, paint, canvas, an egg and a cake.

The Motorola RAZR video series were entertaining and not like other mobile demo videos. Don't take my word for it. See for yourself in the series of videos below:

Motorola RAZR vs. The Baker's Dozen:



The Motorola RAZR vs. The Movies:



Search

Welcome

The official blog of Rogers Communications. TheBlog@Rogers is a place to discuss news and ideas as well as industry issues and trends. Join the conversation. For our comments policy, click here (updated March, 2012).

Connect

- @RogersBlog
- @RogersCareers
- Connected Rogers Magazine
- Rogers Channel
- @RogersHelps
- @Anyplace_TV
- Rogers
- Radiant Biz
- @RogersLife

GET SOCIAL@ROGERS

Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and our other social communities at Social@Rogers.

Get Social

Featured Fan Page

Rogers on Facebook

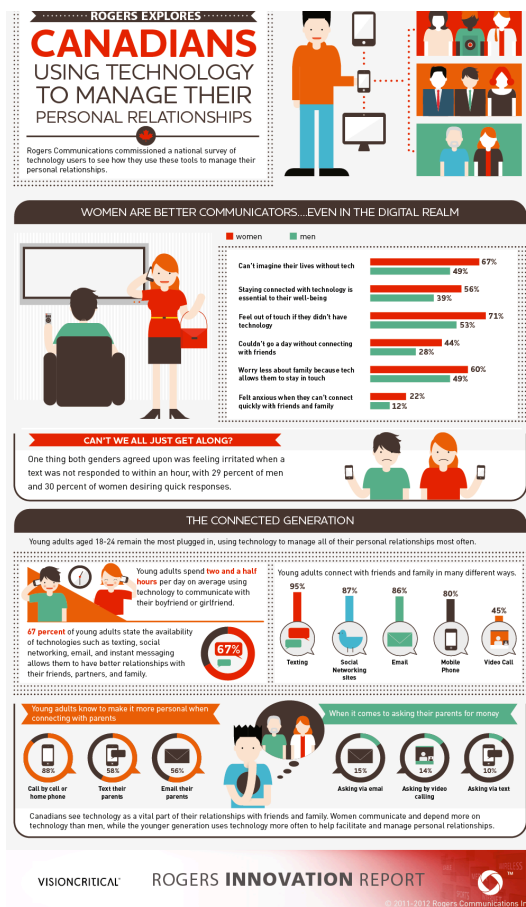
Like

340,418 people like Rogers.

2. Radian6: the use of video in a post



3. Rogers Communication: the use of original research in an infographic



4. Rogers Communication: a 28% response-rate to comments



Ray Nicolini / @TorontoWireless says:

January 5th, 2012 a 1:30pm

so will rogers still warrant the razor for water damage




RogersNicolas says:

January 5th, 2012 a 2:42pm

Hi Ray, the same warranty conditions will apply for the RAZR. Now that you say it, we should have probably put a disclaimer in the videos :)

[edit] There's actually a disclaimer – even if we never actually expected anyone to try throwing a RAZR through a cake. "Do not attempt this at home. This video does not reflect normal usage of device shown"

5. Rogers Communication: a 28% response-rate to comments




Fresh says: February 2nd, 2012 a 9:57pm

Nicholas stays quiet about pricing. He's told to.




RogersNicolas says: February 3rd, 2012 a 9:52am

It's our policy: we don't comment the details of a release, such as pricing, before it launches.



Fresh says: February 3rd, 2012 a 11:04am

I'm only messing with you. But I suspect Rogers will be competitive in regards to pricing with the other major carriers?



RogersNicolas says: February 3rd, 2012 a 11:38am

We don't comment competition but that's a fair assumption as we're always trying to offer the best devices at the best rates.

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