

Getting Linked: A guide to finding, courting and making lasting relationships with the bloggers of your dreams.

Over the last several years, the rules of media and PR have changed. User-created content dominates online media and with increasingly cheap web hosting, a new movement of personal expression has arisen allowing everyone and anyone to become a blogger. The rise of blogging has been greeted eagerly by media hungry readers.

If you're like most everybody else trying to get the attention of the public, you're probably hoping to have a miraculous breakthrough "on the blogs." And you probably have no idea how to take the first step. Here's the secret: **Bloggers will give you the attention you deserve if you take the time to develop meaningful and mutually benefiting relationships with them.** It's all about online courtship bloggy style.

Why you need bloggers and why bloggers need you

Like any marketing expert will tell you: "focus on your target audience." In order to promote your organization (or video or campaign), you need to reach out to your audiences in a targeted and genuine way. With so many blogs out there, there are bound to be bloggers actively writing about issues that your audiences align themselves with. Blogs are trusted sources where your target audiences (and potential audiences) get information and form ideas. Working with bloggers offers you an opportunity to reach your target audiences where they already hang out.

To be successful, bloggers must publish regularly, updating their sites with fresh content. As a result, bloggers are constantly seeking out new subjects to discuss. Their source of inspiration can come from many places including a news article, a photograph, a film, an event, etc. Bloggers are looking for inspiration for your target audiences; you're creating inspiring stories and trying to reach your target audiences. It's a match made in heaven.

Meet the bloggers that are right for you

1. Scope the Scene

Your goal is to find bloggers that are already heavily interested and blogging about issues relevant to your organization, campaign or video. When researching blogs, try these tips:

- » Use both traditional search engines (google.com) as well as blog search engines (technorati.com).
- » Try a variety of issue related key words in your search.
- » Take advantage of blog directories where dozens or more blogs are listed (example: www.blogcatalog.com)
- » Use Blogrolls to your advantage: Many blogs have a feature along the right or left side called a blogroll. This is a list of other blogs that the blogger posts because they admire or connect to in some way. This is an excellent way to discover new blogs that may be relevant to your cause.

2. Make Sure There's Chemistry

As you find blogs, read through them and get a sense of their style, personality, online atmosphere and readership. There are no right or wrong answers, but you'll need a way of assessing whether this would be the right type of Blog to connect with. When on their site, ask yourself these questions:

- » **Are they posting weekly? Bi-Weekly? Daily?** The amount that a blog publishes is a good indicator of how much new content they need and how often their readers tune in.
- » **Does a single person maintain the blog? Several colleagues? A team of writers?** This will help determine who you should form relationships with. Sometime there will be several writers on your subject and other times the tone and content of the blog is set by one person.

What is a blog?

Shortened from the term "Web Logs," blogs are simple, regularly updated websites that display or "post" entries in reverse chronological order. Blogs provide a minimalist solution for lay web users to create content on the web while also providing an easily navigable experience for readers. Bloggers can range from passionate novices with a penchant to vent to full time professional journalists.

Because blogs are so easy to use and require little technical know-how, they have dramatically lowered the barrier for publishing to the web. Thousands of blogs pop up everyday and as of this writing, technorati has a count of 71 million and growing*.

More than just cathartic expression, blogging has become a distribution means of knowledge and information, moving the locus of communications power from large media corporations to decentralized masses. True blogs allow readers to comment on blog posts, fostering two-way online conversation blurring the boundaries between content creator and content consumers.

* <http://technorati.com>

- » **Are readers posting many comments to articles?** Understanding how readers react to blog postings can give you a good sense of the blog audience and what type of content elicits reactions (both good and bad). If you want to start a fierce debate about your issue, find a blog where a lot of people are commenting.

» **Is the tone informal and friendly? Formal and technical?**

The tone of the blog should be consistent with the tone of your outreach. Addressing a casual, young, hip blogger with business formalities will turn them off. Make sure to get a read on their personality from the blog's tone and writing style.

» **Is the blog popular?** For large blogs, try an Alexa.com traffic-ranking search to see what kind of views the site gets. A Technorati.com search will allow you to judge the size of a blog by how many other blogs link to it as well as user reviews of the blog. Choosing popular blogs will help increase your reach but it also may be harder to get your content recognized and posted.

3. The Little Black Book. Keep One

Create a database of the blogs that you will be contacting and keep track of their characteristics. Make sure to include: contact names and information, type of blog, Alexa and Technorati ratings and any qualitative notes regarding personality, blogging frequency, types of readers, etc.

4. Make the First Move

Once you find blogs that you are interested in, you'll need to contact the blogger. Look for "contact information" or a "contact" button near the top or bottom of the information column along the side of the blog. If one is not available, check the blogger's profile (if available.) If you can't find any contact info displayed on the site, try leaving a message in the form of a comment to a posting. Nothing will excite a blogger more than an active and engaged fan that reads their work, contacting with a compelling offer.

When making your first contact try these tips:

- » Personalize the email as much as possible. Prove to bloggers that you have read their blog and are genuinely interested in working with them.
- » Introduce yourself and your organization. Show the blogger what you do and make the relevance clear to the blogger's content. Get the blogger excited about you!

» Be clear and direct. Let bloggers know you are interested in their content and are looking to form a mutually beneficial partnership.

» Include a synopsis of your campaign and include any hooks you've got.

» Include links to videos or supplemental footage (photographs, music, MySpace pages, etc).

» Avoid attachments if you can. Attachments are a red flag for virus and spam filters.

» Let the blogger know you have more information and media that you're eager to send if they are interested in hearing more.

WARNING:

Don't Make Bloggers Feel Used

Instead of telling a blogger how to post about your campaign, defer to them. Bloggers know their audience better than you do so allow them to determine the best approach to getting the word out to their readers. The bloggers may have a strategy more subtle and effective than a basic posting. But mostly, you are allowing the blogger to make your campaign issues their own. The blogger now gets to take stock and invested interest in your cause. Developing committed allies who care is the most valuable asset you can find in the web 2.0 world.

5. Foster Intimacy

Give Bloggers "the Inside" Scoop: A great strategy for getting a blogger excited about your work is to give the blogger special content, or a sneak peak at your work before it is launched to the public. Don't just send them a link to the campaign URL that is already up, or a YouTube

link for your film and ask them to post it. Try enticing the blogger with some of these ideas:

- » Send bloggers mixed media, background info, and extra details about the campaign.
- » A full digital press kit is not necessary, but the more you can give to the bloggers so that they are knowledgeable about your campaign, the more enthusiasm they are going to relay back into their posts to their readers.
- » Send bloggers information early whenever possible. This gives bloggers the opportunity to seed the topic of your campaign to their readers before the campaign hits.

WARNING:**Don't Look Desperate**

So how early is too early to contact a blogger? It depends on the blogger. Some like to plan their posts far in advance, some post the same day that inspiration strikes. Two to three weeks tends to be a good rule of thumb though. As you speak to them and build relationships, ask your blogger what the best way to maintain contact with them is. They'll appreciate your effort to adjust to their style.

6. Show Some Respect

Dealing with bloggers is all about respect. These are individuals with free wills and free agendas. Although they may benefit from the information you have to offer, they are doing you the favor first. We think of bloggers not as short-term PR placements, but as long-term relationships that will build over time. We don't ask a blogger to post about an issue for us once. We connect with bloggers, discuss and unite over common goals and interests, then offer to form a partnership together in an effort to spread the word about our campaigns.

7. Taking the Plunge Commit!

Before you go out contacting every blog you find, keep in mind the upkeep involved in maintaining relationships. Just as you will be calling on bloggers for help in your endeavors, bloggers may be calling on you for help too. You are by no means obligated to help bloggers if you are unable to, but it may be difficult to continue to ask of your blogger friends without returning the favor at some point.

Just like offline relationships, online relationships take effort and upkeep to stay strong and effective. Make sure that you will be able to maintain the proper communication with your blogger friends on an ongoing basis, not just when it is convenient for you.

WARNING:**Don't Be Clingy**

Though it is important to maintain ongoing contact with your blogger friends, don't contact them unless you really have something to say or offer them. Bloggers have a lot on their plate and just returning e-mails can make a blogger feel overwhelmed. Make your correspondence meaningful by avoiding unnecessary and excessive contact.

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