

# BLOGS AND SMALL MAGAZINES

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Blogs challenge the traditional publishing paradigm of “we talk, you listen.” Media organizations and journalists are increasingly turning to blogs as a reliable place to find information, to develop story ideas or to take the pulse of an issue.

Personal Web logs—or blogs—were initially developed as a tool to help non-technical people publish a diary to the Web. Blogs are part of an emergent media diversity movement that is often called “citizen journalism.” Examples of the movement’s influence on the traditional media are starting to show up with more frequency. Toronto got a close look at the phenomenon earlier this year when a blog-inspired story of an altercation between a bike courier and an angry driver became front-page news and sparked debate on several Web sites.

Journalists and reporters in traditional media organizations are increasingly turning to blogs as a reliable place to find information, to develop story ideas or to take the pulse of an issue. And, as journalists turn their attention toward these new information sources, the views, voices and ideas that they find there inevitably influence the pages of those publications. In turn, bloggers have become ad hoc media critics and have evolved into the fastest fact-checking mechanism that has ever existed, keeping traditional media on its toes and helping to bring a more balanced view to many issues.

## Better Listings on Google

Technically speaking, search engines love blogs. The frequency of updates is one factor that search engines take into account, and many blogs are updated several times a day. Another factor is “link popularity:” the number of hyperlinks pointing toward a website. Many blogging tools come with these technical advantages right out of the box in the form of Trackbacks (interlinked conversations on blogs) and Blogrolls (a listing of other related blogs).

*THIS* magazine’s experiment in multi-author blogging demonstrates how these technical advantages can reach out to new audiences. By providing instant commentary and a space for reader feedback, *THIS* magazine’s blog quickly started attracting more traffic than their magazine website.

## The Social Implications of Blogging

Blogs also challenge the traditional publishing paradigm of “we talk, you listen.” Successful blogs blend authenticity with a personal voice many are transparent about their bias and are often closer to opinion journalism than objective reporting. The honesty of this approach invites readers inside the tent, and pro-

vides an opportunity for them to become part of the dialogue. This dialogue, in turn, creates innovative forms of content attractive to new audiences.

One example of this is the Spacing Wire—*Spacing* magazine’s online journal of public space issues and commentary. *Spacing*’s blog demonstrates the “hyper local” media market that is starting to mature thanks to free and easy-to-use blogging tools and audiences that want more coverage of local issues.

## Why Blog?

Print magazines are in a unique position to leverage a blog as part of their editorial and publishing mix. A blog can provide a space to deepen analysis of an issue or to continue the analysis past the display-until date. A blog can help to build greater reader loyalty by continuing a conversation in the space between a weekly, monthly or quarterly publishing schedule. And, for independent magazines, blogs are an opportunity to give a voice to the unheard and to provide alternative perspectives.

Many Canadian magazines have started experimenting with these tools and investigating how they fit into the long-term picture; hopefully, you will be inspired to do the same. When you’re ready to get started, keep these simple recommendations in mind:

1. Blogging, like fundraising, should be linked with a strategy and business targets. If you can afford it, get professional advice.
2. Learning as you go can be a great way to work through the tougher questions around how your editorial policy extends to a blog and to develop policy.
3. Think about the code of conduct for people commenting on your blog before you turn on that feature. Display your guidelines prominently, close to your comment form.
4. Blogging can be a unique and rewarding experience when staff and regular readers are able to engage in a conversation. Encourage your editorial staff to get involved.

Finally, to be truly successful, your blog initiative should blend authenticity, your publication’s personality, a sense of diplomacy and commitment to transparency. Good luck and happy blogging.

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