Blogging for Business

Part 1:

How to Blog

A Simple Guide to Get You Blogging

Index

Introduction

What's a Blog?

Blogs are online journals or logs (*blog* is a combination of we**b log**). Blogs began as a way for people to share their lives and experiences with the world.

Bloggers often dedicate their blog to a specialist subject. By writing about a particular area, and becoming part of an online community interested in that subject, bloggers can become respected experts. Through online discussions, conducted in interconnected blogs, bloggers gain authority.

Blogging for Business – Organic Marketing

Blogs are a fantastic marketing tool. Companies, individuals and organisations can join the online discussion and gradually gain authority in their field. The kind of kudos or respect gained through blogging might be called 'organic', in the sense that it is genuine and natural rather than manufactured or bought.

Because the publicity gained through blogging is organic, it is much more trustworthy than traditional advertising, and much more valuable because of its authentic, personal feel.

Why Blog? – Seven Reasons

If you're not convinced that blogging is a good idea, here are seven very good reasons for getting involved:

1. **Blogging increases your search engine results position.**

    Google and the other major search engines (Yahoo, MSN etc) love blogs because they have regular content updates. If your content is useful, informative and well written, it will also attract quality back-links from other websites.

    Back-links are the most important factor in determining your website's page rank.

    Page rank affects how high your page features in **S**earch **E**ngine **R**esults **P**ages (SERPs).

2. **Blogging increases your site traffic.**

    Your blog gives your users something to read and a reason to visit your site. Also, because your site will appear higher in the SERPs, you will attract more visitors. Your increased traffic then increases audience adoption and advocacy.

    Advocacy means people speaking on your behalf – clearly a wonderful thing if you can get people talking about your product, service or organisation.

3. **Blogging establishes your organisation as thought-leaders in your sector.**

    Just as giving talks establishes the speaker as an expert, blogging establishes bloggers as thought-leaders in their field.

4. **Blogging provides a perfect platform for announcements.**

   If you give your readers regular, useful, conversational content they will return to your website more often. This means you can post important announcements in your blog with confidence that they will reach the right people at the right time.

5. **Blogging gives your users a space to comment.**

   When you make announcements on a blog, the ability for users to comment means you gain immediate feedback. No more shouting into the dark and never knowing what your customers are thinking.

6. **Blogging is a great platform for stakeholder communication and feedback.**

   Bloggers are deeply connected to every interested party. A blog provides a clear channel for communications between you and your stakeholders.

7. **Blogging facilitates full engagement in the on-line conversation about your cause, campaigns and projects.**

   The big on-line conversation is already happening. You can be part of it or you can stand back and watch.

How Do You Start Blogging?

Many websites offer **free** blog facilities. These include Blogger, Typepad and Wordpress. Websites like Blogger and Wordpress provide easy-to-use blogging tools. Users can quickly and simply set up a blog, without needing technical knowledge.

Blogs are generally highly-customisable, allowing users to incorporate their own logos or corporate colours. Your blog can look exactly as you want it to.

Blogosphere – The Interconnected Community of Bloggers
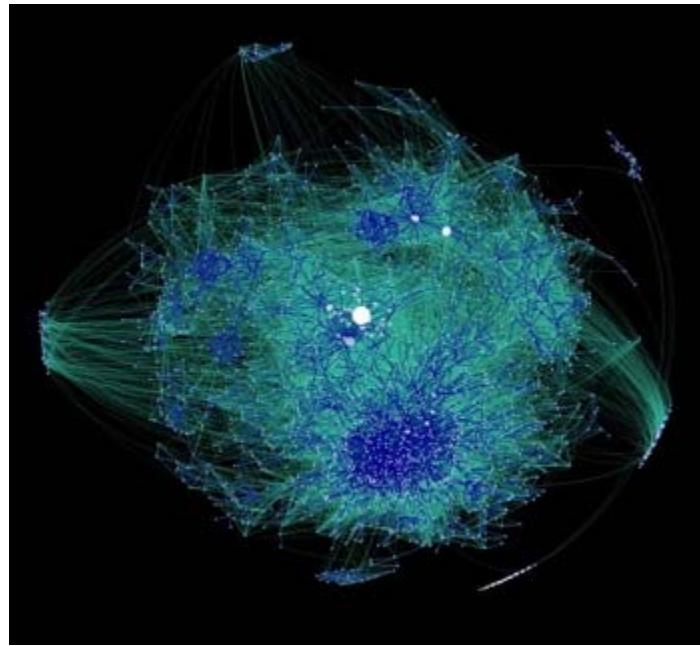
The *Blogosphere* is a term coined to describe the interconnected, worldwide mass of bloggers.

Blogging is a collaborative, shared discussion. Bloggers refer to other bloggers' posts. Bloggers feed off each other, discussing one another's ideas and promoting, spreading and advancing debates.

Through commenting on other bloggers' posts and referencing other bloggers' work, you have the chance to test your own ideas and develop your thinking.

The result of this web, this network, is the Blogosphere.

Expanding Blogosphere

As you can imagine, the Blogosphere is growing daily. By joining the Blogosphere, and blogging about your chosen subject, you will soon form close virtual relationships with other bloggers. Over time, by posting regular, good-quality and thoughtful posts, you will earn the respect of other bloggers.

But, to achieve true kudos your blog needs time. Unless of course you're already famous! Most bloggers are ordinary people who have invested time in their blogs, sharing ideas with their peers and learning from the exchange.

Preparation

While some bloggers are content to use the standard or default templates provided by their blogging host (Wordpress, Blogger etc), it is worth spending some time developing your own brand.

Make your site memorable by making it personal to you. Visual impact is a useful way to get noticed. A distinctive visual style will also help people to recognise you. The internet is a crowded place so anything that makes you stand out is invaluable.
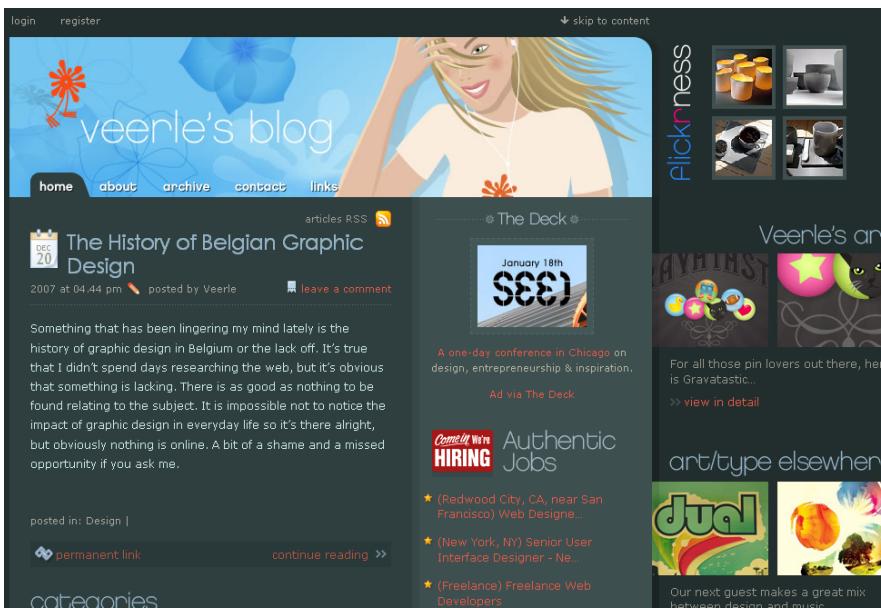
A very distinctive blog - Veerle's Blog: http://veerle.duoh.com/

Blog for Business

If you're blogging as part of a business, then make your blog look like your main website, which should look like all of your corporate branding. The blog should help direct traffic to your main site and vice versa.

Some bloggers like to keep their blog separate from their brand, as they fear readers would be put off by the corporate colours (perhaps fearing a hidden sales pitch).

In most cases, particularly if your blog is directly related to your business activity, then the blog will only help your business.

Beautiful Blogs

If you don't already have a logo or corporate style (colours, fonts etc) then it's worth getting professional help. A professional-looking blog will greatly enhance the perceived quality of your site.

Blogs are an increasingly important part of an organisation's web presence. Some websites have been completely replaced by blogs so their importance should not be underestimated. Just as you would spend time developing the graphic style of your main website, invest time and energy (and money if possible) in this part of your blog.

Naming Your Baby

How you name your blog will also affect your success. A clear, descriptive name will help potential readers find their way to your site, while a more creative name may lend itself to variations (like TechCrunch's CrunchGear, CrunchBoard, Crunchie Awards etc).

About You

Most blogs have an "About You" page – dedicated to you. This is an ideal place to refer the reader back to your main business, with links. For instance, a line like "to read more about the team *click here*" will help your reader find relevant information and will drive people towards your main site.

As with all content on your blog, it is only as good as you make it. Always maintain the pages of your blog, checking that all information is up-to-date and that all links are working. Visitors will be put off by broken links or other non-functioning elements.

Geeky Bits – Explained for All

You have two main choices:

1. Go to one of the free blog providers and set up an account. The blog provider will host your blog, so the website address of your blog (your URL) will be something like www.yourblog.typepad.com or www.yourblog.wordpress.com.

2. Download the blogging software from your chosen blog provider and host it on a domain you have bought. This will give you the website address (URL) of your choosing – something like www.yourblog.com .

The main advantage of option 1 is simplicity, speed and economy. Your blog can be up, running and looking slick in minutes, for no cost.

The disadvantage of option 1 is that Google and the other search engines will rate your site less highly for being part of Typepad or Wordpress. Having your own domain means that Google will treat your site with greater importance and you will appear higher in the search engine results pages (SERPs).

Finding Success

The success of your blog will depend greatly on how easily people find you. Appearing higher in the SERPs has a huge impact on the number of visitors your blog will receive. People tend to look at only the first few search results, rarely getting as far as the second page of results.

According to iProspect's "Search Engine User Behaviour Study", web marketers (that's you) should strive to get their natural results as high as possible on search return pages; **62%** of search engine users click on links returned **within the first page** of search hits. A full 90% of users click on hits within the first three pages of search results. So only 10% of searchers go as far as page of four.

If your site is languishing out in this digital no-man's land, you need to make changes.

Try searching for "search engine optimization advice" you will find a great deal of information on how to improve your site's search engine performance.

Blogging with Wordpress

If your entire website is to be developed around your blog then Wordpress may be the best solution, as there is a community of committed programmers and designers constantly adding to the basic Wordpress program.

This gives Wordpress users great flexibility and control over the appearance and function of their site and blog.

Host Yourself

Hosting your blog yourself (buying a domain and transferring your blog to it) gives you much greater control over your content.

Adding multimedia elements (music, video) and plugins (programs that add features to your blog) can be problematic when your blog is hosted by a blog provider.

URL structure

Each blog entry on your website will have its own unique URL. The recommended structure is date and name based, because search engines prefer it.

Common options:

⊙ Default
» http://www.kwiqq.com/blog/?p=123

○ Date and name based
» http://www.kwiqq.com/blog/2007/12/18/sample-post/

○ Numeric
» http://www.kwiqq.com/blog/archives/123

○ Custom, specify below

Custom structure:

Note: It's possible that your web host doesn't allow date and name based URLs. If they're not working and you're unsure why, consult a techie friend or you may have to use the default setting.

Widgets

Widgets are small programs that you can add to your blog. Widgets often draw information from other websites, providing more useful content for your visitors.

Widgets are a great way to mix up your own original content with other people's work. You get easy content and your visitors get more to look at.

Free widgets include:

Twitter Blog: Twitter is a popular website which lets you tell your friends what you're doing. You post updates to Twitter via the web or your mobile phone.

You can post questions on Twitter and ask people for answers. Twitter is a great way to connect to your audience and involve them in your blog.

TagCloud. A TagCloud appears on your page as a blob of words. The words are keywords – words you highlight in your blog posts to help people see exactly what you're blogging about.

The size of the word in the TagCloud indicates how popular that keyword is. So in the example below, we can see that this blogger has blogged about a range of IT subjects, with cfml being the most popular.

TagClouds are a fast and intuitive method of locating popular topics.

Industry and Topic Specific Widgets

There are several widgets available that are perfect for particular subjects. For example, weather and investment widgets are ideal for foreign real estate blogs.
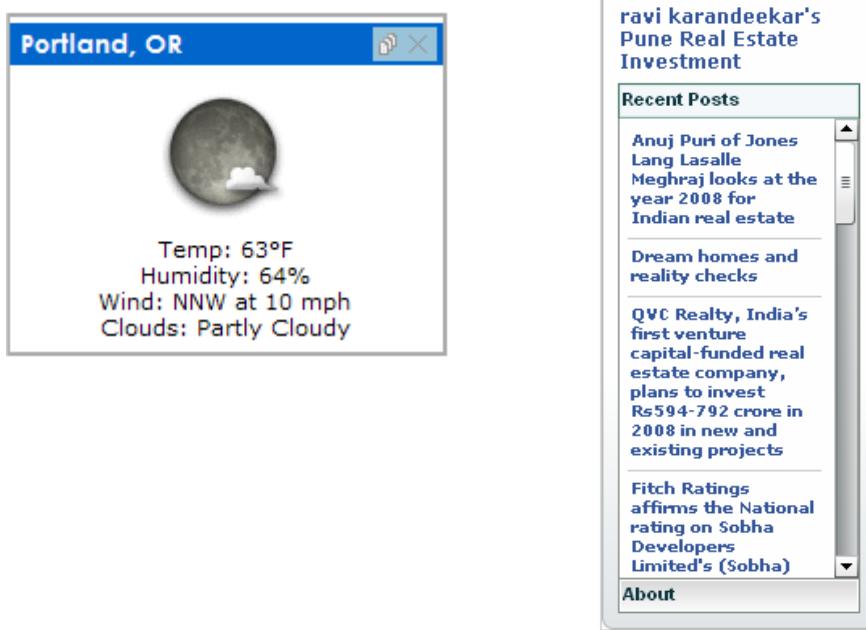
Social Bookmarks

Social bookmarks are a way for Internet users to store, organize, share and search web content. Bookmarking tools often appear on web pages as clickable buttons.

Various sites offer bookmark facilities, such as StumbleUpon, Reddit and Digg.

Vote for me!

Every click is counted as an indication of popularity. So if two thousand people click the "Digg" button on your page, your article will soar to the top of the Digg home page. Getting to the top of Digg (or any of the social bookmarking sites) will dramatically increase traffic to your blog.

Social bookmarks are a very useful way of getting links back to your website. It also helps get your blog in front of new users – people who wouldn't ordinarily search for your site.

Take a look at one of the social bookmarking sites and see for yourself – you will soon be reading weird and wonderful articles from all over the Blogosphere.

Track Your Success

Any marketing campaign needs a method to measure its success. Free tools are available on the internet to help measure your success. Here we will look at three of the most useful:

- **Google Analytics** is a website tracking tool which gives you important information about your users through graphs and figures.

  Google Analytics will tell you where your users are coming from: referring site, search engine etc. It also tells you who has blogged about you and what blog content would improve your search engine keyword rank.

  Google Analytics is free – you just have to enter a small chunk of programming code in your blog to make this work. Don't worry if you're not familiar with programming or using code – just find a nice geek to help you.

At first glance Google Analytics may look overwhelming, but a little time spent reading the graphs and figures will soon pay off. In no time at all you will be expertly interpreting the results.

The better you understand your readers, the better you can cater to their needs and the more popular you will become.

- **Feedburner:** is a site designed to analyse blogs.

    Feedburner allows you to track all the subscribers to your blog, something Google Analytics is not designed for.

    You can subscribe to blogs using a piece of software called a newsreader. This means you are informed of the latest articles on a blog without ever having to visit the website itself. Feedburner allows you to track how many people are subscribing to your blog.
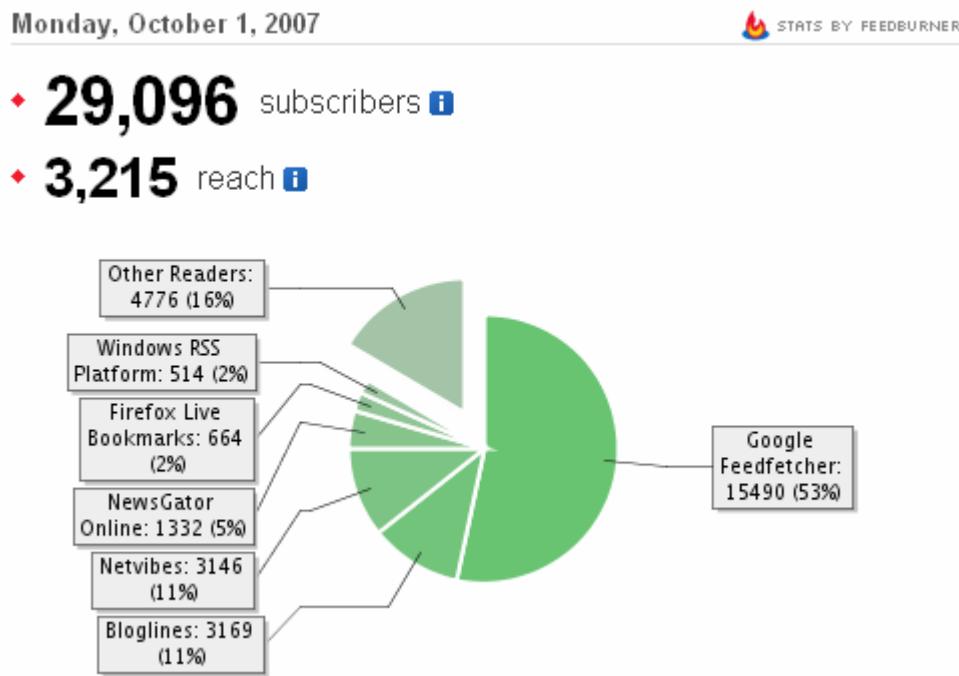
Feedburner also allows users to keep in touch with your blog through email updates.

- **MyBlogLog** is more of a widget than a stats counter. MyBlogLog allows you to see who visited your site, with an avatar of the user appearing on your blog. This is a nice visual way to keep your site fresh.
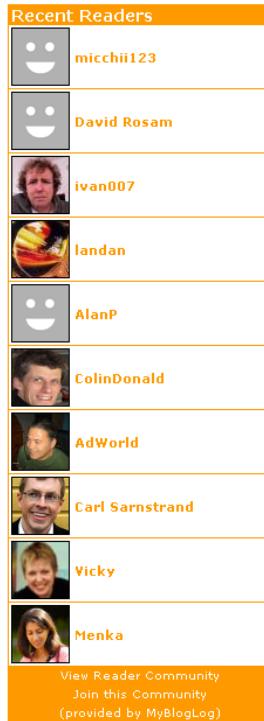
Let's Write!

Whatever the subject of your blog, you will probably find an existing community of people blogging about that subject. Of course, that doesn't mean you shouldn't join in: but you should read the other blogs in your field. These other bloggers can be a source of inspiration.

Bloggers often blog about the same subjects. Particularly those blogs that follow current events. Bloggers avoid repetition by covering issues in their own personal way.

Many bloggers frequently quote their colleagues, using their blog to discuss an interesting post in another blog.

Interconnected, Planetary

Referencing other bloggers and their work increases your chances of catching their attention, and getting featured in their blog. Linking and referencing back and forth between blogs is not only good for developing your reputation as an authoritative blogger, it also finds favour with search engines who notice this activity and reward you by pushing your blog higher up the SERPs.

Rock and Blogroll

Many blogs have a Blogroll – a list of other blogs that the blogger likes, recommends or has a relationship with. All blogs featured on a Blogroll gain a permanent link to their site – another valuable marketing tool.

As you develop your own inter-blog relationships, look out for opportunities to swap Blogroll links with your new blog buddies.

Writing Style

Now we have covered a great deal of the how and why of blogging, it is time to discuss the most important element – the words you write.

Writing Made Easy

You don't have to be a professional writer to have a great, popular blog. Here are a few tips to improve your writing:

1. **Check your spelling and punctuation**

    Write your blog posts in a traditional word processor (like Microsoft Word) and then import the text into your blog. Word has a better spelling and grammar checker than most blog providers. Use this. It won't prevent all mistakes, but it will weed out most.

    Read your posts and check that they make sense. Ask a friend to proofread it and give you feedback. If you happen to know a writer, ask them for feedback too. It all helps.

2. **Be concise**

What do you want to say? Work out what you want to say, then write something. After writing anything, read it back and make sure it says what you intended. Don't repeat yourself.

3. **Remember that practice will make you better**

   If you find writing difficult to begin with, remember that with time you will get better, and writing will become easier. Writing is like a muscle that you might not have flexed for a while.

4. **Don't insist on perfection but try to head in that general direction**

   Winston Churchill said that perfection is spelt "paralysis". The point being that perfection is impossible. Try your best but accept that your best is just fine. Blogging is an ongoing process. Your first blog post will look nothing like your last.

5. **Fun + Blogging = Flogging?**

   Try to relax. You may be blogging molecular physics, but it's okay to blog about your daughter's first word. Your readers will appreciate the occasional off-topic post. The best bloggers are able to lighten the mood while still being relevant.

6. **101100000110**

   Remember that you are not a robot. You are not your computer, and people are not visiting your blog hoping to hear from your computer. Inject yourself into your blog. Your personality will shine through and encourage your readers to read on.

7. **Colourful Blogs Go Far**

   Remember to give your visitors a more thoroughly entertaining experience by peppering your posts with multimedia – that means pictures, screenshots, diagrams and even videos.

   The text of your blog will be the main attraction, but that's no reason to make it dull.

8. **Frequency**

   Readers love regular updates. The more regularly you post, the better. Once a day is great. Two or three times a day is better.

   If you are regularly and consistently blogging about a subject your blog will soon become stuffed with the relevant keywords. This will help send your blog up the SERPs.

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Live and Direct

Blogging can get rather competitive, with some subjects (particularly politics and technology) well covered by numerous bloggers.

One way to beat the pack, particularly when covering live events, is to blog remotely. Remote posting can be done via PDAs, mobile phones and other handheld email devices (like Blackberry).

Writing by e-mail

To post to WordPress by e-mail you must set up a secret e-mail account with POP3 access. Any mail received at this address will be posted, so it's a good idea to keep this address very secret. Here are three random strings you could use: e5f76, 8f8bb, 99710.

Mail server: mail.example.com   Port: 110

Login name: login@example.com

Password: password

Default post by mail category: Web World

If you want to blog through emails, it's recommended to keep posts short and add pictures. This will make the posts easier for you to manage.

Bullet-points are a great way to present information in a simple way that is easy to type when you're on the go. A bulleted list can always be expanded once you're back in the office.

Moderation

User interaction is crucial to the success of your blog. Encourage your visitors to get involved by directly asking them questions and receiving their answers in your comments section.

Unfortunately blogs are frequently the target of spam. Most blog providers also provide anti-spam software

Akismet Spam Filter

Wordpress provide a spam filter called Akismet. Although Akismet will catch most of the spam, it won't always. Sometimes you may find your blog overwhelmed with spam, particularly as your popularity grows.

As you get more popular, it's worth considering adding a barrier defence to prevent spam from reaching your comments section. There are two main types – the Captcha and login systems.

Login System: Requires each user to register and log in before commenting.

**Captcha**: Captcha is a challenge-response system where the user is asked to enter text shown as twisted or obscured images. These images are not readable by computers, so Captcha prevents spamming programs from posting comments.
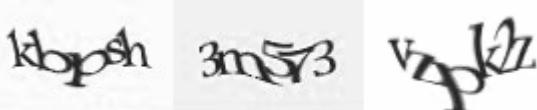
Both methods can stifle the number of comments you might receive, as they slow users down. Many people will be put off by anything that takes up their time.

Because of the deterrent effect on legitimate commentators, neither methods are commonly used on popular blogs.

Captcha is probably preferable because users do not need to register – they simply enter the randomly generated text they see and are free to comment. Registration often takes longer and requires users to remember a username and password.

Next step in Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is the term coined to describe today's internet. The modern internet experience draws users in, and makes their content and input just as valuable and important as that provided by institutions like universities, governments and businesses. People interact with sites much more now than when the web began.

Blogging, like social networking sites, is a key part of the Web 2.0 experience.

Software for Web 2.0

If you are interested in getting connected with web 2.0, you may find a new browser, designed especially to help people manage all of their accounts (Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc) useful.

Flock can cut down the amount of time you spend transferring images, files and comments between your various sites. The easier your blogging is, the more fun it will be.

Flock is completely free and is based on the same platform as Mozilla's Firefox browser, so it's reliable.
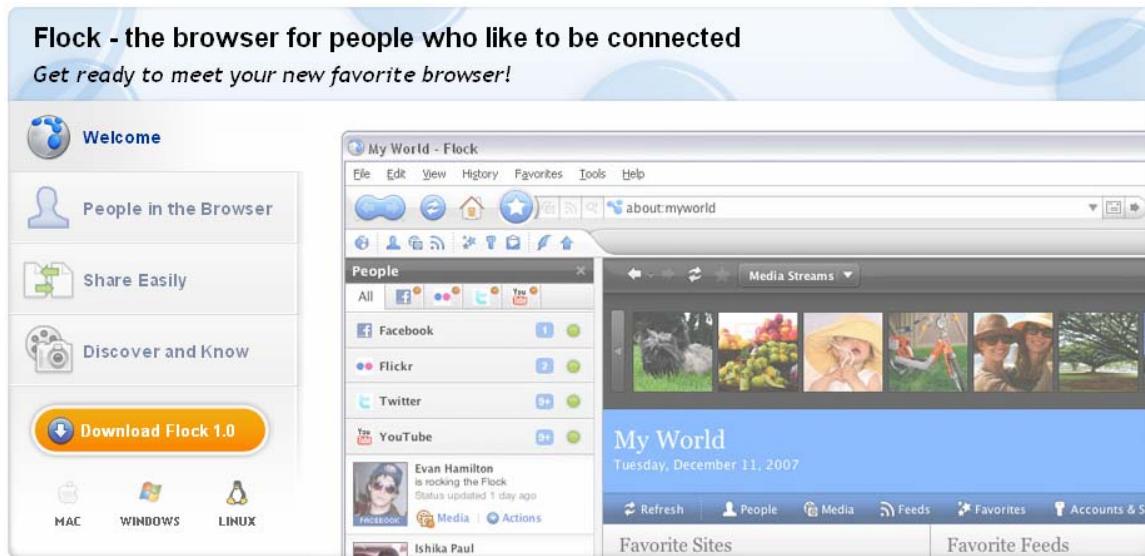
About Us

The writing of this white paper has been a collaborative effort, much like the blogs we have been looking at.

Raj Anand of Kwiqq wrote the first draft. Leif Kendall of Kendall Copywriting added additional text and edited the second draft, with additional information (the "**Why Blog – 7 Reasons** section) provided by Madhava Bailey of Dharmafly.

Kwiqq is a social networking system designed for rapid deployment, simple setup and easy extensibility. Kwiqq is supplying the software to Blue Chip clients like First Choice, SEEDA, Highams PLC and others internationally.

Our code is based on the Symfony framework is enterprise ready, completely scalable and has multi-lingual features. Within each site, each member can build a multi-page portfolio with a flexible layout without any knowledge of HTML. Users can choose a range of tools with which to populate their website. Kwiqq is usable on PDAs, mobiles and is W3C compliant.

Kendall Copywriting

Kendall Copywriting offer freelance writing and editing. Professional, business-minded copy for websites, advertising and blogs. Specialising in search engine optimization (SEO) and slick web copy, also offers speech writing and film treatment editing.

Dharmafly specialise in using and creating social media websites, tools and marketing strategy to help organisations compete in the global 'new media' marketplace.

Raj Anand

Raj Anand, technical director at Kwiqq.com. Raj is the winner of Europe's Young Entrepreneur 2007 by BusinessWeek and was one of the Top 6 Entrepreneurs in the UK at Cranfield University's Upstart Programme.

Previously Raj worked for the European Union, in Shell STEP internships, and developed software projects for Dazdaq Limited (a hi-tech medical firm), local firms like Daniel Sullivan Racing, Desi-Soundz Radio Station and at Sussex University research labs (Informatics). Raj has also won many national awards for his projects in computer science, leadership skills and his entrepreneurial ambitions; for example the Millennium Volunteer award from the Home Secretary, Charles Clarke for helping local charities with Web projects, President of the best Society at Sussex University Union and runner up at South East Shell STEP awards.