



**WHO'S  
THERE?**

Seth Godin's  
**Incomplete** Guide  
to Blogs and  
the New Web





**Just**

about everything that the web was built on is disappearing. Fast.

If you're confused, join the club. The rules are different and everything is new.

Every few years, it seems, some pundit announces that this time it's different, that all the rules have changed and the big guys should watch out.

Let's see, the last time that happened was seven years ago. And we saw the music industry tank, politics change forever, JetBlue mop the floor with Delta and American, Amazon continue to give agita to retailers in the real world and, oh, yes, the TV networks destroyed.

Well, it's happening again. This time you're ready. I wrote this ebook to help you understand a few simple rules that will make it crystal-clear what's at stake and how it works.

How's that for a promise?

This is not a faq and it's not the blogging bible and it's incomplete and you may very well already realize everything that's in here. But my guess is that you and your team haven't focused all your energy and all your efforts on maximizing along some of these principles. That's why I wrote them down.

We start with three basic assumptions and then follow up with a handful of rules that seem to apply to most of what's going on online.

This is part of the Incomplete series of ebooks that tries to identify just a few important (and overlooked) ideas and sell you hard on putting them to work for you. I believe that your problem (if you have a problem) isn't that you don't have enough data. You have too much data! You don't need a longer book or more time with a talented consultant. What you need is the certainty of knowing that you ought to do something (one thing); then you need the will to do it.

I'm going to assume that you've got one of a few goals. If you don't want to accomplish any of these things, feel free to ask for a refund (and click here for some entertainment...)

1. Understand how and why the mainstream media is dying.
2. Figure out why your organization needs a fundamentally different approach to the web.
3. Embrace the fact that you can't just change your tactics... the truth of what you do and who you are has to change as well.
4. Realize that all of this is very inexpensive and very quick. The hardest part is finding the will to do it right.

No (more) wasted words. Let's get started.



### Things to read

If you click anywhere in the box, you'll be automatically transported to [sethgodin.com](http://sethgodin.com). There, you'll find links to my blog (click my head) to ebooks, many of which are free, and to my hardcover and paperback books, which are not.

## FIRST TRUTH: Clutter

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80,000 new blogs every day.

19,000,000 different beverages at Starbucks.

19 flavors of Oreos.

172 professional sports teams in the United States

On September 28, 2004, a search on “podcast” in Google turned up 24 matches.

AS I write this, the number is 17,000,000.

The amount of noise we're living with is exploding. There's an exponential increase, but we're not noticing it because it's happening a little bit at a time. If it were suddenly turned off and we were transported to a three network universe, a world with three car companies, six radio stations, two kinds of laundry detergent and two newspapers, you'd go crazy looking for something to distract you. Just because you're used to the noise, though, doesn't mean it's not there.

And it is changing everything.

When you apply for a job, so do a thousand other people.

When you see a house listing, so do a thousand other people.

When you bid on a grilled cheese sandwich on eBay, so do a thousand other

people.

And when you want people to come to your blog or your website, so do a million (ten million, a billion!) other people.

You've just read that, but you didn't really believe it. You are almost certainly living in a different world, a world where you expect that some people actually care about you. Your boss nods her head when she hears about clutter, but turns right around and builds stuff and markets stuff as if it were 1969.

No one cares about you. Almost no one even knows you exist.



## SECOND TRUTH: Quality

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It's easy to wring your hands and whine about the decline of western civilization.

Every time I pass a sign on a business that says, "Quality at It's Best," I cringe.

Every time I have to check my voice mail with the horrid interface, or throw out another Misto olive oil sprayer because it's hopelessly clogged, I shake my head in sorrow.

But the fact is that more stuff is better (and cheaper) than it ever was before. You can buy far better food, access more free content of value, call further and more often... you name it, most everything is better (or if not better, then much cheaper than it used to be).

The relentless march of quality improvement means that mistakes—from your bank to your shoes—are a lot less common. When I was a kid, a pair of sneakers that were "good enough" cost about ten times (in today's dollars) what the same pair would cost today.

And nowhere is this more obvious than in the content you find online. Twenty years ago—no, even ten or five years ago—it just wasn't there. You couldn't find

it at the library for free or at the bookstore for money.

As a result, we've become astonishingly picky. Picky about what we buy and picky about what we watch and picky about what we read. In a world where there's a lot of clutter and where everything is good enough, most of the time we just pick the stuff that's close or cheap or familiar. But when it's something we care about, we go to enormous lengths to find the very best.

### **The Best Way To Find Blogs**

If you click anywhere in the box, you'll be automatically transported to technorati. When you get there, search on your name, or your organization's name, or your brands or your town or your religion. I think you'll be surprised at what you find.

## THIRD TRUTH: Selfishness

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The idealists who started the blogging trend built a few components into the idea of blogging that made the idea thrive. The first was the idea that blogs selflessly link to each other. If someone writes something that you want to respond to, you include a link to it on your blog.

They also invented the idea of a blogroll, which is a listing of a blogger's favorite bloggers. This seemingly small gesture ended up having huge importance for blogs, because Google used all the cross-linking to reward these blogs with a higher ranking. In other words, generosity paid off.

The more you linked, the more you got linked to. The more you got linked to, the higher your Google rank. Which meant more traffic. And on and on.

But, even though bloggers are **selfless**, blog readers are **selfish**. They (we) really have very little choice when you think about it. We are selfish because we only have a little bit of time and there's too much to read. So, as a result, we are very strict about what's on our shortlist. We are merciless in deleting a blog from our reader if the blogger posts too often about stuff that's not relevant to us. We are always hovering over the mouse button, ready to flee a site at a moment's notice.

Boingboing.net is one of the most popular blogs online, and for good reason. It's funny and interesting and everyone else reads it, so I do too. But when I get to my blog reader and there are 125 new posts, well, you pause for a moment and decide whether it's worth keeping up. One day, it might not be.

### **Numa Numa**

Or, as the insiders call it, Dragontea distei. An oddball Rumanian song, danced to by a frustrated New Jersey post adolescent.

I wrote a tiny piece about it on my blog a long time ago (click and you'll see) and every single day, Google sends me people in search of the song. The web has a much longer memory than I do.

## TIME OUT for a few definitions

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A **BLOG** is just a web page, but a web page with some clever formatting software behind it so that anyone (including you) can build it and update it with no technical know how.

The key elements that make a web page a blog (other than the blogging software) seem to be:

1. time-stamped snippets
2. posted in reverse chronological order

*A blog unfolds over time, with the most recent posts first.*

Blogs often, but don't always, include comments from readers, a blogroll to other blogs, a way to search the archives and past posts and a bio of the blogger. Until recently, it was unusual for a blog to be written by anyone other than a single individual. Today, though, it's not unusual to find team blogs (like the [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)) and blogs written by organizations that aren't journalists.

**RSS** is a system that allows a blog (or any web site) to alert an **RSS READER** that

a blog has been updated. That's a mouthful, and while I don't care particularly about the technology I care a lot about the implications.

RSS means that a user can subscribe to any website that supports RSS. It means that once the user has an RSS Reader (and there's one inside of MyYahoo and Firefox and Safari and soon just about everywhere) she can pick a dozen or 100 blogs and have them home delivered.

This is huge. It's huge because it completely undoes the clutter issue.

Once your *FEED* (that's what they call the RSS broadcast) is in my RSS reader, it's going to stay there until I take it out. It means that you get the benefit of the doubt. It means you've earned attention.

If there are twenty million blogs in the world and only 32 blogs in my RSS Readers, guess

### A few more

A 'ping' is a technical term that doesn't concern us, but in current times, it means reminding someone or asking someone about an idea. "I'll ping John and see what he says," or "thanks for the ping on this, I'll blog it."

A 'trackback' is an automatic link to a blog that commented on your blog. These are the cement that links one blog to another. Once you turn on trackbacks, your readers (and you) can see who else is saying what about you.

'IRC' is a wide-open sort of chat room. You can easily set one up and make it easy for your blog readers to talk among themselves... and to you.

which ones get read first?

*PODCASTING* may not be what you think it is. It has nothing in particular to do with iPods, for example. A podcast is a sound file with an RSS feed.

Why is the feed part important?

There have been sound files on the web forever (first example, I think, was the Ben & Jerry's website a million years ago. They had a cow that mooed. But I digress.

The sound files just sat there, because they're impossible to browse. It's too hard to find the file you want. Takes too long.

When Dave Winer came up with the idea of adding RSS to sound files, he did something brilliant. He allowed any websurfer with an RSS reader to subscribe to audio!

This changed sound publishing the way home delivery changed the newspaper business.

Now, instead of having to run out and find listeners for every recorded dialogue or radio-type show you put together, your podcast automatically notifies every one

of your subscribers. And, if any of those subscribers are using iTunes, they can have your podcast show up in their iPod the next time they charge their batteries and sync it up.

Now, it's easy to set up your RSS stream in iTunes so that every single morning on the way to work, you can hear what you want to instead of what Imus wants you to hear.

Radio is officially dead, especially when wireless internet access comes to your car.

Imagine how powerful a podcaster becomes when she has three million people listening to her every single day on their computers at work or on their Rio mp3 players in the gym.



## THREE KINDS OF BLOGS

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Yes, I know there are two kinds of people in the world—those that believe that there are two kinds of people and those that don't. But there really and truly are three kinds of blogs.

**CAT BLOGS** are blogs for and by and about the person blogging. A cat blog is about your cat and your dating travails and your boss and whatever you feel like sharing in your public diary. The vast majority of people with a cat blog don't need or want strangers to read it.

If you've got a cat blog, you should embrace that fact and stop wondering where all your traffic is. Alas, this ebook is almost completely useless to you. You already have what you want!

**BOSS BLOGS** are blogs used to communicate to a defined circle of people. A boss blog is a fantastic communications tool. I used one when I produced the fourth-grade musical. It made it easy for me to keep the parents who cared about our project up to date... and it gave them an easy-to-follow archive of what had already happened.

If you don't have a boss blog for most of your projects and activities, I think you should think about giving it a try. Boss bloggers don't need this ebook either,

because you already know who should be reading your blog and you have the means to contact and motivate this audience to join you.

The third kind of blog is the kind most people imagine when they talk about blogs. These are blogs like [instapundit](#) and [Scobleizer](#) and [Joi Ito's](#). Some of these blogs are for individuals (call them citizen journalists or op-ed pages) and others are for organizations trying to share their ideas and agendas. These are the blogs that are changing the face of marketing, journalism and the spread of ideas. I want to call these **VIRAL BLOGS**.

They're viral blogs because the goal of the blog is to spread ideas. The blogger is investing time and energy in order to get her ideas out there. Why? Lots of reasons—to get consulting work, to change the outcome of an election, to find new customers for a business or to make it easier for existing customers to feel good about staying.

The math behind viral blogs is astonishing. One person, \$20 a month and an audience of several hundred thousand people! Even better, a viral blog stuffed with good ideas is going to influence millions of people who never even read the original. For example, [Chris Anderson](#) posted his “Long Tail” idea on a blog. There are now 1,040,000 Google matches for the expression he invented.

This is an ebook for viral bloggers. It's about how to make your ideas spread far

and wide and with more impact.

If you're writing for strangers, that means you're building a viral blog. The first principle is to make your entries shorter.

Use images and tone and design and interface to make your point. Teach people gradually.

On the other hand, if you're writing for colleagues, you've got a boss blog. That means you can make your entries more robust.

Be specific. Be clear. Be intellectually rigorous and leave no wiggle room.

**Takeaway:** the stuff you're putting on your marketing site or in your blog or even in your brochures or in your business letters is too long. Too much inside baseball. Too many unasked questions getting answered too soon.

**Takeaway:** the stuff you're sending out in your email and your memos is too vague.

Figure out which category before you put finger to keyboard!

## **FIRST LAW: It's not who you are, it's what you say.**

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Remember Dan Rather? Tom Brokaw? Remember the *LA Times* and even Procter & Gamble?

It used to matter a lot where an idea came from. When an idea came from a mainstream media company (MSM) or from a Fortune 500 company, it was a lot more likely to spread. That's because media companies had free airwaves or paid-for newsprint, while big corporations had the money to buy interruptions.

Big companies and MSM were able to sell us stuff like SUVs and wars overseas. They created panics about Alar on apples and got us excited about MP3 players. There was a word for someone outside the mainstream with an idea: a crackpot.

Today, all printing presses are created equal. And everyone owns one. Which means that a good idea on a little blog has a very good chance of spreading. In fact, an idea from outside the mainstream might have an even better chance of spreading.

Now, few people treat ideas from outside the mainstream as immediately suspect. In fact, there are many people who give these ideas *more* credence, not less. Bloggers are no longer outsiders.

A hundred years ago, the FCC created the broadcast media monopolies of TV and radio. When there were only a few channels, the people with a channel had a lot of influence.

But there are *millions* of blogs. Which means that having a blog does not automatically mean you are powerful.

Nobody, it seems, reads a lousy blog for very long. Even lousy posts don't get read. Take a look at the comment count on some very popular blogs. They can vary by 300% to 10,000%. That's because the good ideas spread and the not-so-good just sit there.

*[aside: good doesn't have anything to do with quality or ethics or even profitability. In this case, I just mean attractive. Good ideas, by my definition, are the ones that spread. At least in this section of the ebook!]*

## **SECOND LAW: Actually, it doesn't matter what you say, it matters who you are**

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What I just said in the first law? That's not really true. It used to be, of course, but not any more. At the beginning, it didn't matter who you were, because blogs didn't have subscribers or people who believed in them or trusted them or were committed to them. Now, though, things are different.

So bear with me for a moment, while I retrench and retract.

When [Doc Searls](#) or [Corey Doctorow](#) or [Joshuah Micah Marshall](#) say something, of course it matters who said it. They are the Dan Rathers of our age. For a while.

The bloggers with a following get both the benefit of the doubt and a far bigger megaphone. Because they reach more people, they're likely to have their words echoed more quickly. And one thing we've learned from the blogosphere (yes, it's really called that) is that ideas that echo, get echoed. In other words, a meme (that's webtalk for an idea that spreads) will get picked up merely because everyone else is talking about it.

And so the bloggers who have earned the asset of a following are more likely to spread spreadable ideas, which of course further reinforces their position at the top of the pyramid.

For a while.

Because if those bloggers get lazy or stupid or selfish, their audience will flee.

They will flee far faster than they fled CBS. It won't take years. Sometimes it only takes a month or two. A blogger discovers that many of her readers have taken her off their RSS readers—because she posts too often and it is too hard to keep up with her. Or because she's getting selfish and self-promotional. Boom. They're gone and they don't come back.

The traditional MSM powers are watching their audiences shrink daily. But these are lifetime viewing habits, so the shrinkage is slow. Losing your blog audience happens much faster.

So, yes, it matters who says it. Powerful bloggers are louder.

And, yes, the first two laws conflict. But no, they don't. Because the stickiness and the power are different than they used to be.

People come to me all the time, believing that if I would just link to them, just highlight them, they'd be unstoppable. Alas, this isn't true. What's true is that if you write something great, and do it over and over and over again, then you'll be unstoppable. Whether or not someone helps you.

Hugh Macleod is a great example of this. [His gapingvoid.com](http://gapingvoid.com) blog gets far more traffic than my blog, but he started from scratch just over a year ago. No magazine column, no books, no help from the MSM. He just wrote and wrote and agitated enough that people noticed we he had to say.



## THIRD LAW: WITH and FOR, not AT or TO

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Social media, blogging especially, is social. Not antiseptic or anonymous or corporate.

This means that the writing skills you and your organization have honed aren't going to help you very much. When you write *at* your audience, or even *to* your audience, you've made it really clear that you think that they are the *other*, and you think that they are yours.

It is not *your* audience, of course. The audience belongs to itself. And if you talk as if they are not like you, then it's awfully difficult to keep up your position of power. The subterfuge of omniscience is way easier to do on television, where you have makeup and the editing room. It's easy to do on radio, because you have an FCC license and they don't. But it's hard to do on a blog, because your audience ("they") has one too!

So we're talking about dramatically changing the relationship between writer and reader. This isn't a chat room. It's not dialogue between two people of equal authority. Instead, the blogger is at the center of the hub. He has the power to set the agenda of the blog and to have the last word if he chooses (on *his* blog anyway). The means that a blogger is still the author/publisher/journalist. What's

different is that his power to control the conversation is dramatically decreased by the ability of the audience to talk back on their own blogs, and by their ability to ignore him.

The best blogs walk a very fine line between civility and anarchy, between passion and privacy. We've all visited blogs where the writer lets her hair down just a little too much. Okay, a lot too much. I don't want or need to know about your cat's operation, thank you very much.

The best blogs start conversations, they don't control them.

Nobody gets to be Dan Rather, ever again. But the audience desperately wants you to be a leader, to stand for something, to speak up, to insert new ideas and challenging thoughts into their conversations.

This isn't for everyone. Not everyone wants to engage in emotional discourse about your topic, But the days of media for everyone are long gone. We miss you, Walter Cronkite.

Remember the most important rule of all: **I'm busy**. So if you weird me out or confuse me or disrespect me, I'm out of here.



**please click the cow. Thank you.**

## FOURTH LAW: On the Internet, Everybody Knows You're a Dog

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The famous *New Yorker* cartoon is actually wrong. Even though the cues online are far more subtle than they are in almost any other medium, because we're hyper-alert to distinguish the good from the bad and the real from the fake, every little hint matters.

You may believe that all blogs are the same, and you may believe that as a blogger you are anonymous. I'm not buying it.

Surfers notice which service your blog is hosted on. We notice your Skype handle and the font you use on your blog or your home page. We notice everything when we need to.

The newspaper was sitting on the floor of my living room, at least 30 feet away. Not only could I tell it was the *New York Times*, I could even tell it was the bottom half of the Wednesday restaurant review section, just from the layout.

How many times have you left a web page before you even bothered to read a sentence? You wouldn't let a doctor with a pierced tongue do heart surgery on

you, and you're not going to believe what you read on a blog that looks like a cat threw up on it.

In the IM world, teens are extraordinarily good at figuring out who's authentic and who's not. They can't even tell you how they know—maybe it's the speed the person is typing, or the word choices—whatever the clues, they know. So do you.

This means that faking it online is actually more difficult than doing it in the real world.

Hire a great interior decorator and your store looks great for years. But if your online presence isn't consistent and authentic and honest over time, people are going to do notice. And they'll flee.

## The Five Components of a Great Blog

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The CEO blog. It's apparently the newest thing. I just got off the phone with one CEO who's itching to start, and a few minutes later read an email from another who just did.

Here's the problem. Blogs work when they are based on:

1. Candor
2. Urgency
3. Timeliness
4. Pithiness and
5. Controversy

*(maybe Utility if you want six).*

Does this sound like the CEOs you know?

The problem is that the very things big companies, public companies, stable companies and established companies are good at are the things that make a blog boring.

Short and sweet: If you can't be at least four of the five things listed above, please

don't bother. People have a choice (4.5 million choices, in fact) and nobody is going to read your blog, link to your blog or quote your blog unless there's something in it for them.

Save the fluff for the annual report.

## What about comments?

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It's an act of faith that blogs ought to have comments. After all, as the [Cluetrain](#) guys said, Markets are Conversations.

Exactly. Markets. Not Marketing.

Marketing is not a conversation. Marketing is an act that starts a conversation, but it doesn't have to include one, at least not at the start. Marketing, like publishing, is ultimately about one person or one entity sharing a point of view. If they get it right, that idea spreads.

Hosting the conversation on your blog is a totally valid strategy. It makes it easier for you to see what people are saying, and to then modify your ideas to give those ideas more power going forward. It also is a service to your readers, because it locates the conversation right next to the idea itself.

My blog doesn't have comments, though. There are two reasons for this. The first, which is childish, is that I hate reading angry rants about my ideas, and having comments on my blog made it harder and harder for me to post, because I lived in fear of trolls (the angry little men living under the

### This kangaroo walks into a bar

A call center is not a blog. Most people assume it's a place to cost reduce, to get people off the phone, to improve productivity.

Wrong.

I wrote a white paper for Avaya about this very topic...

[http://www.avaya-apac.com/downloads/contactcenters/avaya\\_whitepaper\\_0525](http://www.avaya-apac.com/downloads/contactcenters/avaya_whitepaper_0525).



bridge). The other reason, more practical, is that we now live in a world where many people have blogs. So if you've got something you want to say about one of my ideas, go ahead and trackback it and put it on *your* blog. Your non-anonymous blog. Your blog where your comment is now in context with all your other comments.

Comments are thus more thoughtful. Trackbacks lead to greater credibility for the person commenting (and a higher pagerank) and also introduce my blog to readers of your blog.

There are some who will read this and worry that I'm telling you to ignore the conversation. I'm not. Take a quick look at <http://www.buzzmachine.com/index.php/2005/08/29/dell-calling/> and you'll see how Dell totally blew it. In public.

A blogger (an influential one) was calmly, but loudly, pointing out where Dell went wrong on one order. Using easy and cheap technology, Dell ought to be tracking each and every blogger that has something to say about Dell. And then they ought to reach out to the unhappy and mollify/fix/reward them, while reaching out to the happy and amplifying them. They ought to learn from those that are willing to take the time to post, and use that learning to make their products (and their ideas) better.

Imagine customer support that works like that. Instead of calling a number and waiting forever, you just post your problem on your blog. As specifically

as you possibly can. Then the company uses a blogreader/RSS tracker to search all 20 bazillion blogs. They do this all the time. Within minutes, they see your post and then contact you directly—or post their answer right there in the comments section of your blog.

If the comment/fix they posted worked, and it was quick, you would likely post your satisfaction right there on your blog. The interaction is performed in public, the satisfaction is evident. This process helps the company get new customers.

By bringing the interaction from the company side to your side, the game changes, doesn't it?

## Blogs are like movies

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Blogs work best when people read them over time. One frame of a movie isn't enough to win an Academy Award, and one post on a blog isn't enough to make a huge difference.

My friend Jerry calls this drip marketing. Like an ancient water torture, one drop a time, building until it has an impact. A blog is a chance to talk to people who want to listen, to aggregate an audience that wants to listen to you, to spread your ideas and to talk back to you.

Because of RSS, a blog allows you to be patient and kind and to not worry so much about a first impression. You're already in a relationship with your readers—as long as you understand that the minute you break your promise, the relationship is over.

What sort of promise? Well, there's a popular blog in which the blogger decided to cook every single recipe in the Joy of Cooking. She has thousands of readers. The moment, though, she decides to use the blog to start relentlessly selling a brand of coffee, they'll leave. Because that's not the deal.

It's quite possible to have a blog that's all about you. About your company or your cat or your boyfriends. Who knows what people will read (they watch who knows

what on TV...). The thing is, the expectations have to be clear from the beginning.

A friend sent me over to Adobe's new blog. It's one developer after another writing about the stuff they're working on, little minutia about new products. I lasted about a minute. There should be a warning that says, "Not for everyone!"

That's okay as long as the expectations are set properly. I can't imagine Adobe's blog is going to get them one new customer. There won't be one person who sees this insider dope and decides to buy Illustrator. I can't even imagine someone will choose to surf over and check this blog out instead of, say, [amihotornot.com](http://amihotornot.com). But that's okay. As long as Adobe doesn't over-invest, as long as they understand that this is going to be a slow, low-return process on building communication and ultimately loyalty, it's a great idea.

### So what?

So every post on a "viral blog" should be designed to get you another RSS subscription.

Every blog post should be designed to be important enough to get another blog to eagerly post a link or quote you or reprint the whole thing.

Every blog post will be read because I want to, not because you want me to.

If you're not doing this, you don't really get my point yet.

The Adobe blog is a boss blog. It's a blog for a company that wants to have more direct communication with its most important customers.

A blog is a terrific platform for this, and it's hard to imagine why any company in a similar situation would hesitate to do have one. Quark lost millions of dollars in sales over a decade in which they did everything they could *not* to communicate with passionate customers. Verizon bends over backward, it seems, to alienate their most profitable customers.

A boss blog—where you end up telling the truth—is a terrific way to reinforce good feelings among a core constituency. But don't confuse it with a viral blog. A boss blog filled with the inside information isn't going to get you new customers tomorrow.

## A small bonus

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Here's my most popular blog post ever. Thought you might enjoy it:

Big used to matter. Big meant economies of scale. (You never hear about “economies of tiny” do you?) People, usually guys, often ex-Marines, wanted to be CEO of a big company. The Fortune 500 is where people went to make... a fortune.

There was a good reason for this. Value was added in ways that big organizations were good at. Value was added with efficient manufacturing, widespread distribution and very large R&D staffs. Value came from hundreds of operators standing by and from nine-figure TV ad budgets. Value came from a huge sales force.

Of course, it's not just big organizations that added value. Big planes were better than small ones, because they were faster and more efficient. Big buildings were better than small ones because they facilitated communications and used downtown land quite efficiently. Bigger computers could handle more simultaneous users, as well.

Get Big Fast was the motto for startups, because big companies can go public and get more access to capital and use that capital to get even bigger. Big accounting firms were the place to go to get audited if you were a big company, because a big accounting firm could be trusted. Big law firms were the place to find the right

lawyer, because big law firms were a one-stop shop.

And then small happened.

Enron (big) got audited by Andersen (big) and failed (big.) The World Trade Center was a target. TV advertising is collapsing so fast you can hear it. American Airlines (big) is getting creamed by Jet Blue (think small). BoingBoing (four people) has a readership growing a hundred times faster than the New Yorker (hundreds of people).

Big computers are silly. They use lots of power and are not nearly as efficient as properly networked Dell boxes (at least that's the way it works at Yahoo and Google). Big boom boxes are replaced by tiny ipod shuffles. (Yeah, I know big-screen tvs are the big thing. Can't be right all the time).

I'm writing this on a laptop at a skateboard park... that added wifi for parents. Because they wanted to. It took them a few minutes and \$50. No big meetings, corporate policies or feasibility studies. They just did it.

Today, little companies often make more money than big companies. Little churches grow faster than worldwide ones. Little jets are way faster (door to door) than big ones.

Today, Craigslist (18 employees) is the fourth most visited site according to some measures. They are partly owned by eBay (more than 4,000 employees) which

hopes to stay in the same league, traffic-wise. They're certainly not growing nearly as fast.

Small means the founder makes a far greater percentage of the customer interactions. Small means the founder is close to the decisions that matter and can make them, quickly.

Small is the new big because small gives you the flexibility to change the business model when your competition changes theirs.

Small means you can tell the truth on your blog.

Small means that you can answer email from your customers.

Small means that you will outsource the boring, low-impact stuff like manufacturing and shipping and billing and packing to others, while you keep the power because you invent the remarkable and tell stories to people who want to hear them.

A small law firm or accounting firm or ad agency is succeeding because they're good, not because they're big. So smart small companies are happy to hire them.

A small restaurant has an owner who greets you by name.

A small venture fund doesn't have to fund big bad ideas in order to get capital



doing work. They can make small investments in tiny companies with good (big) ideas.

A small church has a minister with the time to visit you in the hospital when you're sick.

Is it better to be the head of Craigslist or the head of UPS?

Small is the new big only when the person running the small thinks big.

Don't wait. Get small. Think big.

[It's pretty clear to me that once RSS and the blogosphere breaks the world into little tiny connected pieces, there's not a lot of benefit to being big or overstaffed or deep in resources... not when it comes to your blog. The best blog efforts are genuine and interesting and swift and worth reading. And that has nothing at all to being big or being the CEO or getting approval from your boss's boss.]

## Talking and Listening

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*This is where it all leads...*

It turns out that marketing is really about two things. Talking and listening.

For a long time, though, marketing was about just one thing—talking.

Talking **at** people with radio ads or TV ads or posters on the street. Talking at people with product design or features or pricing.

For someone who wants to be in show business, marketing was seductive. You got to put on a show every day.

Then, a few decades ago, the *listening* started to show up. Focus groups starting running the show, with high-paid marketers running about listening to small, self-selected groups in darkened rooms in shopping malls.

Companies *said* they were listening, but they were really using the focus groups to justify the things they wanted to do in the first place. A few decades ago, for example, the market told Detroit they wanted high-quality, full-efficient cars. Detroit wanted to ignore that message, so they stacked their focus groups so that they could hear what they wanted to hear.

That's not going to fly any more. The feedback loops are too fast, and you while you can ignore the market, you can't do it for long. The net is busy changing things all over. Here's a recap of how talking and listening have changed.

**TALKING:**

Old one-way talking is being killed by clutter.

TV is down

Radio is down

Newspapers and magazines are down and almost out

Customers are ignoring you all the time.

BUT, it turns out that enabling your best customers to tell their friends is up, way up. Making remarkable stuff that is worth talking about is up.

The most important talking is storytelling. Not top-down dictation, but stories that resonate, stories that are authentic, stories that spread.

**LISTENING:**

Skewed focus groups are down.

Unfiltered, non-anonymous blog feedback is up.

Listening at your call center is up.

Rapid product cycles that involve users in product design are up.

So is open source, in which the users are the designers.

Talking directly to your publicly unhappy customers is up too.

**PLATFORMS** are the next big thing because they enable you to build tools that make it easy for your clients/customers to talk and listen—to each other. So, eBay is different from Brooks Brothers, because eBay enables users to listen, and to talk. MySpace is different from MTV because MySpace allows users to listen... and to talk.

**BLOGGING**, then, is a platform that enables your organization to talk to people who want to hear you. RSS makes the publication of your ideas crisp and focused. And the blogs of your clients and your users and your customers are the way they talk back to you. The question is whether you're willing to listen and to take action.

## And What Now?

If your organization isn't watching what's being said about you in the blogosphere,

### What's Next?

At the end of September, I'm going to post the third (and possibly last) ebook in this series. If you want to be sure you don't miss it, make sure you add my RSS feed to your MyYahoo or Bloglines reader. [Click here](#) to find out how and why to do that.

you're in big trouble. Instead of learning, you're clueless. Instead of being able to fix problems before they snowball, you're waiting for the avalanche. And instead of amplifying the good news, you're allowing it to fade to black.

If you care about your personal brand and career and impact, you need a blog. And you should start the cycle of getting better at blogging.

Being better has nothing to do with following conventions. It's not about how standardized your blogroll is, or how frequently you post or how well you maintain comment and trackback hygiene. These are all distractions on the way to building what you actually need.

What you need is a committed group of subscribers, a substantial and influential RSS audience that will stick with you as you tell your story. Measure yourself on what gets linked to and commented on and spreads. Measure yourself on what leads to more (and better) subscribers.

Then, over time, take your readers on a journey. Teach them what you'd like them to know, and the rest will take care of itself.

Hutch.

Guzundheit.