



## GREG SCHNEIDERS

# Blogs just a reflection of overall consumer empowerment trend

**B**logs will transform PR. Blogs will democratize the marketplace. Blogs can kill your brand. Blogs will set you free. Blog... blog... blog. OK, I'm late to the blog party. Like a lot of you (you know who you are), I've spent more time talking about how important blogs are than I've spent reading them. So I decided to catch up. Here's what I found.

First, the numbers: There are about 37 million blogs out there, 10 new ones started since you began reading this column, 75,000 new ones each day, a new one each second (like dot-com IPOs in the 1990s), half of which will be inactive within three months. About 50% of blog writers are under 30, and 57% are male – a reversal of the gender balance three years ago. The largest number (37%) are in Japanese, and about 30% are in English. Only one in five US consumers has ever read a blog, and half that many have read one in the last week. But, significantly, 67% of journalists say they read blogs at least weekly, and about half of those say they get story ideas from blogs.

Next, the experience: I spent several hours romping through many of the top 100 blogs as rated by Technorati, the premier guide to the blogosphere, and here's what I learned.

First, I just wasted several hours of my life that I'll never get back. It's like reading raw FBI files... no filter, no judgment, lots of inflammatory hearsay and opinion. This is why newspapers invented editors.

Second, blogs aren't for everyone. For example, they're not for people without vast amounts of time (on average, blog readers spend 20% of their waking hours online – twice that of the non-blog reader). And they're not for people who don't think all opin-

ions were created equal and that everyone is not only entitled to one, they are entitled to post it on the Web.

Third, if you're not interested in news and politics (43% of the traffic), technology, Asian languages, or weird stuff (like pictures of cats dressed in strange costumes, [www.stuffonmycat.com](http://www.stuffonmycat.com)), there is little to interest you in the top 100 blogs.

Finally, I got some feedback from two experts in this space: Pete Snyder, CEO of New Media Strategies, and Todd Zeigler, SVP of The Bivings Group. They tell me that while blogs can hurt a brand – bloggers love to tell the story of how Jeff Jarvis' rant about Dell's customer service sent its stock price south – they present at least as much opportunity as risk.

Surprisingly, staid old GM is taking more advantage of this than most other mega-corporations (<http://fastlane.gmblogs.com/>). And, they counsel, don't confuse the medium with the message. Blogs are just the current manifestation of a much bigger and more important trend: (technologically) assisted empowerment of the consumer. The technology will continue to evolve through RSS, video blogs, podcasting, etc., but the underlying social and consumer trends will remain the same: consumers participating in virtual communities, demanding more information, better service, and more transparency from business, and a continuing seismic shift in the balance of power between seller and buyer. ■

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