

## Survey Highlights

# Are Pharma Bloggers Biased Against the Industry?

By John Mack

Many pharmaceutical industry executives feel that the press is biased against the industry. There are studies that are often cited to confirm this bias. One recent study entitled "Prescription for Bias" (see resources on page 19) was prepared by the conservative Business and Media Institute. One claim made in this report was that nearly 80 percent of media stories on medical breakthroughs or controversies excluded the viewpoint of the pharmaceutical industry, failing to include either a company statement or a company spokesman.

Although this supposed media bias is not news to pharmaceutical executives, many industry insiders like Rich Meyer (World of DTC Marketing) are "puzzled" about pharma's apparent strategy of retreat.

Whatever pharma's press relation strategy may be, a whole new world of hurt may be out there in the Blogosphere. Or perhaps a whole new world of support!

### The Pharma Blogosphere

The fact is there are now dozens of blogs that are focused exclusively on the pharmaceutical industry, its marketing practices, and other business practices. Several journalists, in fact, have recently started up their own blogs as well.

How supportive or critical are individual blogs in the pharma blogosphere and is there an overall bias one way or the other?

To answer that and other questions, [Pharma Marketing Blog](#) in association with [The Pharma Blogosphere Blog](#), hosted the **First Ever Pharma Blogosphere Survey**. The survey ran from 3 February 2007 through 28 February 2007.

The purpose of this survey was to provide a baseline rating of readability, credibility, usefulness, and bias of 22 blogs that focus on the pharmaceutical industry. The blogs included in the survey were:

1. BrandweekNRX
2. Clin Psych Blog
3. Dr. Peter Rost
4. Drug Injury Watch
5. Drug Wonks
6. eDrugSearch Blog
7. EyeOnFDA
8. HealthcareVOX
9. impactiviti
10. In the Pipeline
11. On Pharma
12. OnThePharm
13. Pharma Giles
14. Pharma Gazette
15. Pharma Marketing Blog
16. Pharma Rag
17. Pharma Watch
18. PharmaEdge
19. PharmaGossip
20. Pharmalot
21. Rx Daily Dose
22. World of DTC Marketing

**To find links to most of the blogs mentioned in this article, plus gossip about the bloggers themselves, weekly summaries of what's happening in the pharma blogosphere, and reviews of blogs, visit The Pharma Blogosphere.**

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The full results of the survey will be published in the April issue of *Pharma Marketing News* and released at the upcoming [Healthcare Blogging Summit](#) on April 30, 2007, in Las Vegas.

### Who Reads These Blogs and Why?

More than 150 people participated in the survey, but not all completed the survey or answered the most important questions. Some respondents also indicated that they never read ANY of

the blogs! Obviously, these responses were discarded and we were left with 144 valid responses.

Who were these respondents? The survey asked each respondent to choose a principal affiliation from among a list provided. Figure 1 on the next page shows the affiliations of respondents.

Interestingly, the largest group of respondents are affiliated with drug, biotech, or medical device

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companies. The survey did not ask respondents for other information about themselves such as job title, so we cannot say much about what functional areas within these companies are interested in blogs. Next time, we may ask for that kind of information.

The survey did ask, however, if the respondent currently published or contributed to a blog about the pharmaceutical industry. Obviously, many bloggers rated their own blogs and it was necessary to take that into account when presenting the results.

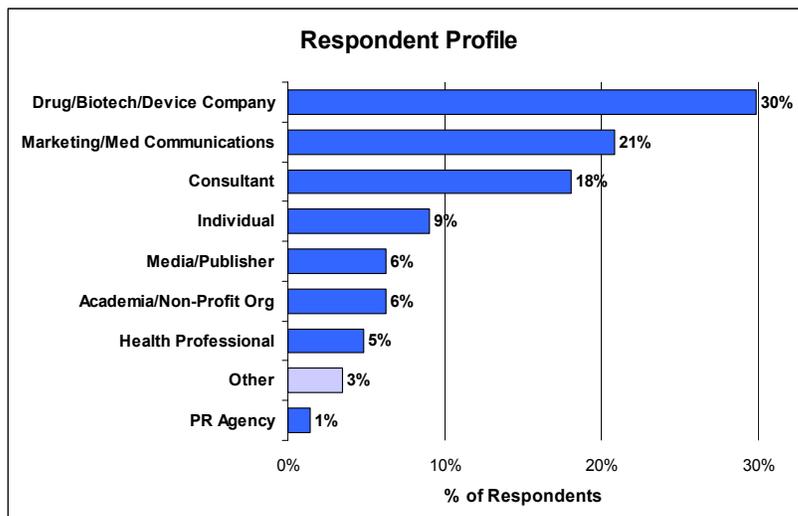


Figure 1: Respondent Affiliations

Not surprising was that fact that 18% of respondents answered "Yes" and provided the URLs of the blogs they were associated with. Some of these blogs are included in the survey:

- BrandweekNRX
- Clinical Psychology & Psychiatry: A Closer Look
- eDrugSearch Blog
- impactiviti
- Peter Rost
- Pharma Gazette
- Pharma Marketing Blog
- PharmaEdge
- PharmaGossip
- World of DTC Marketing

These were the people honest enough to indicate their blog affiliations. I suspect a few other bloggers were not so honest. But that's life!

Other respondents were affiliated with blogs or Web sites that were not included in the survey, such as:

- Cafe Pharma
- Clinical Trials Today
- CME Linkages
- hazipatika.hu
- Healthy Skepticism
- Honest Medicine: My Dream for the Future
- IgniteBLOG
  - InnerCityMedicine Networks
  - Pharm House
  - Pharma Jobs Help
  - Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare
  - Pharma's Cutting Edge
  - Ryan TrueHealth
  - Trusted.MD Network

Some of these are not true blogs (eg, Cafe Pharma), some are not focused on the pharmaceutical industry exclusively (eg, Trusted.MD Network), and some are corporate blogs or web site (eg, Ryan TrueHealth).

#### Why Do We Read Blogs?

The survey asked respondents to check off the reasons why they read blogs about the pharmaceutical industry. The choices were:

1. To see what bloggers may be saying about MY company or blog
2. To be entertained
3. To learn more about industry business practices, regulations, etc.
4. To keep up to date with industry news and gossip
5. Other

Respondents could check more than one answer. The results are presented in Figure 2 on the next page.

"Other" reasons included:

- Documenting Big Pharma's excesses
- Don't know why
- Follow competition
- For patient safety info
- I am interested in eDetail online programmes

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- Looking for specifics
- Peter Rost posts some hot chicks!
- To contribute to the conversation
- To find story leads and comments
- To join discussion, push debate forward
- To learn broadly about the industry
- To see who is influencing whom
- Want to help demistify their dark side and change it if we can to the better

**Bias For or Against Industry**

Question #7 of the survey asked: "Please rate the following pharma-related blogs in terms of their industry bias." Respondents could answer Very supportive, Somewhat supportive, Neutral, Somewhat critical, Very critical, or No Opinion.

The results are shown in Figure 3.

This chart was prepared by Chris Pounds who works at Myriad Pharmaceuticals where he is responsible for marketing research, forecasting,

competitive intelligence, financial modeling, and decision analysis.

According to Pounds, the graph in Figure 3 "looks at Favorable (to industry) top 2 boxes (Very supportive and somewhat supportive) minus the Unfavorable to industry (bottom 2 boxes). If a blog were considered "completely balanced" then this would be zero. If everyone said the blog was pro-industry to some degree (and not neutral) this would be 100% positive."

I note that my blog, [Pharma Marketing Blog](#) (orange bar), is on the "Unfavorable" side of the graph, but I think it's within the meaty "critical but helpful" to "supportive and helpful" range (boxed area in Figure 3). That is, if you are too critical, who's going to listen to you and get ideas for improving? Yet, if you are too supportive, who's going to learn anything they already don't know? So the short range to the left and right of namby-pamby neutral is where you want to be, IMHO.

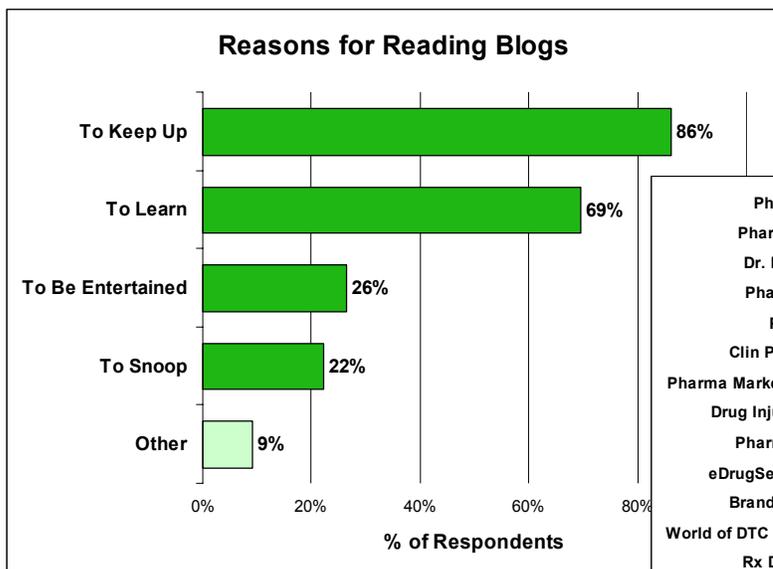


Figure 2: Reasons for Reading Pharma Blogs

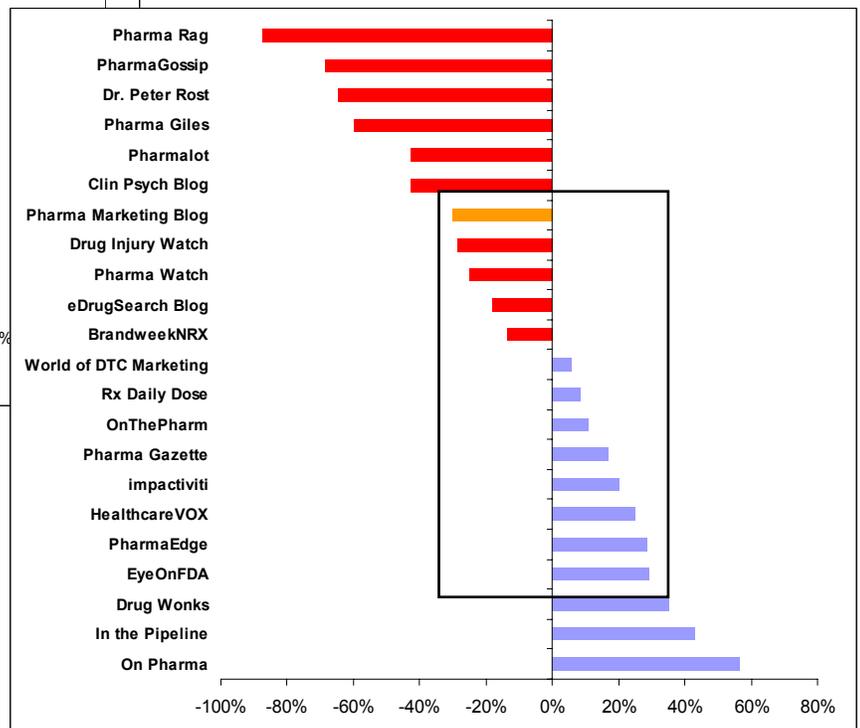


Figure 3: Industry Bias in the Pharma Blogosphere. Negative %: Anti-industry Bias; Positive %: Pro-industry Bias