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How Readable, Credible & Useful are Pharma Blogs?

Results of the First Ever Pharma Blogosphere Survey of Readers

By **John Mack**



Pharma Marketing Blog in association with the [Pharma Blogosphere™](#) blog, hosted the First Ever Pharma Blogosphere Survey in February, 2007. Preliminary results from the survey were published

in the March issue of Pharma Marketing News (see [“Are Pharma Bloggers Biased Against the Industry?”](#)). This article focuses on survey data detailing reader ratings of readability, credibility, and usefulness. The full results of the survey will be presented at the upcoming Healthcare Blogging Summit on April 30, 2007, in Las Vegas.

The online survey was conducted from February 3, 2007 through February 28, 2007. 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 143 valid responses. Forty-three (43) of these indicated that they were employed in the pharmaceutical/biotech industry.

Frequency of Reading

Respondents were asked how often they read each blog:

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- About once per week
- Two or three times per week
- Practically every day or more often

Looking at the percent of respondents who selected the “Top 2 boxes” (ie, frequency of reading 2-3 or more times per week), Figure 1 shows the ranking for each of the blogs in the survey.

Only a minority of respondents read any blog more than 2-3 times per week. Pharma Marketing Blog, for example, is most often read, but only 35% of respondents read it more than 2-3 times per week. Some other results related to frequency of reading are:

- 52% of respondents do not read blogs any more than once a week
- 17% only read one blog more than once a week
- 30% read 2 to 9 blogs more than once a week
- 2% reads 12 or more blog more than once a week

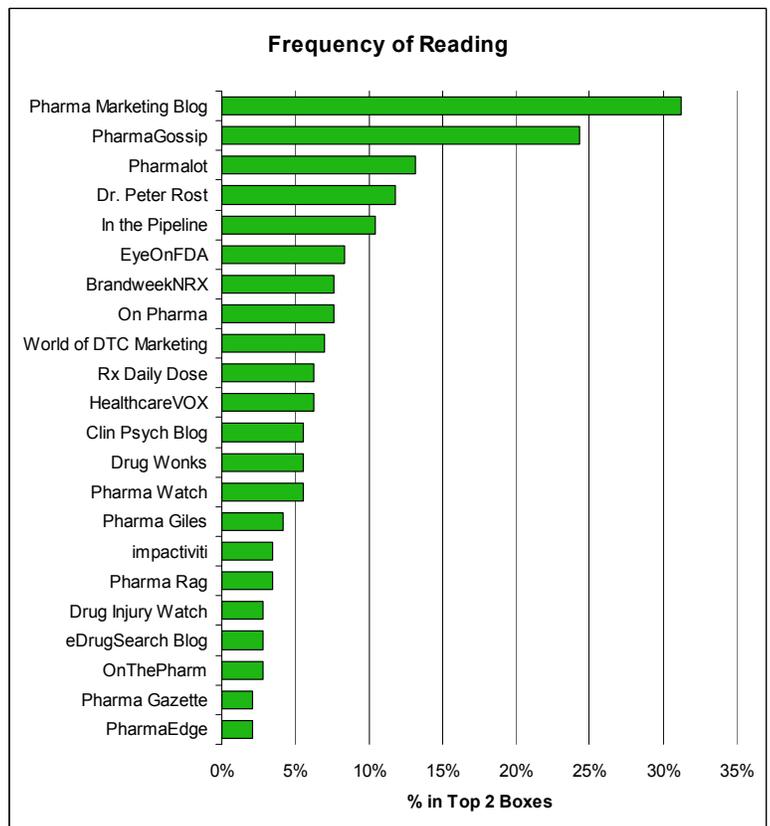


FIGURE 1: Frequency of Reading. Shows percent of responses in top 2 boxes (Two or three times per week/Practically every day or more often).

Bias: Industry Critics vs Industry Supporters

Respondents were asked to rate whether blogs were biased for or against the drug industry. Respondents could reply Very supportive, Somewhat supportive, Neutral, Somewhat critical, Very critical, or No Opinion. Overall results were reported in the [March 2007 issue of Pharma Marketing News](#) (Op Cit). Here we break down the analysis to reveal which blogs are “industry critics” and which are “industry supporters.”

This analysis includes all 143 respondents *except* for those that said they never or rarely read the blog. For each blog, the percent of responses in the top 2 “critical” boxes (Very critical/Somewhat critical) was subtracted from the percent of responses in the top 2 “supportive” boxes (Very supportive/Somewhat supportive) to yield a “Favor Rating.” If there were more responses for critical than supportive, the Favor Rating is negative and the blog is labeled an “Industry Critic.” Conversely, if the Favor Rating is positive, it means the blog is an “Industry Supporter.” The absolute value of the Favor Rating determines how critical or how supportive the blog is (see Figures 2 and 3, below).

Readability, Credibility, and Usefulness

The survey asked respondents to rate the following on a scale of 1 to 7 (1=Superior, 2=Excellent, 3=Good, 4=Average, 5=Below Average, 6=Poor, 7=very Bad):

- **Readability:** layout, ease of reading and finding information
- **Credibility:** accuracy of information
- **Usefulness:** for keeping you aware of the issues

Figure 4 (next page) summarizes the overall honors and shows blogs ranked by Credibility. To prepare this chart and eliminate bias, only data from blogs that received more than 14 responses (10% of the total) were included in the analysis. With less responses, the results could be skewed in favor of the blog because at least one response was from the blogger. The data also excludes readers who never or rarely read the particular blog. For example, there were 7 people who never read Pharma Gazette, but who decided to rate it! In other words, some people may have rated a blog just on the basis of the name! These were thrown out of the analysis and that’s why Pharma Gazette and other blogs are not included in this chart.

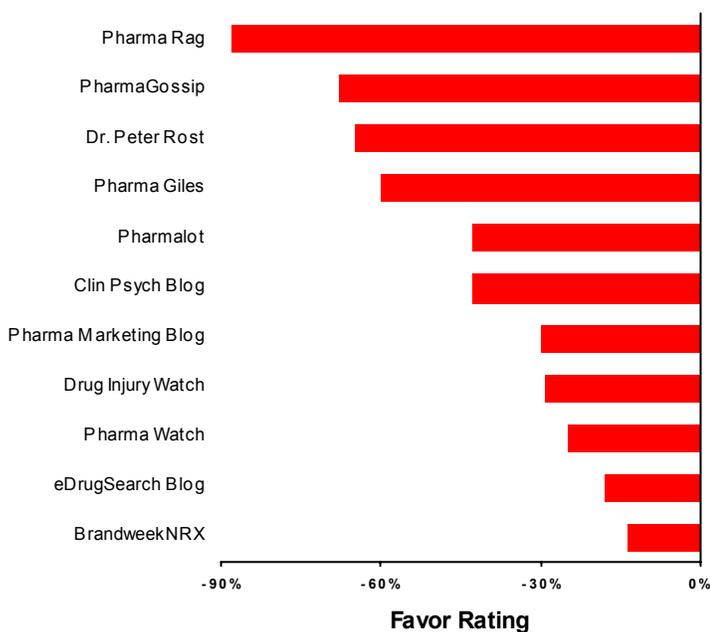


FIGURE 2: “Industry Critics”. The greater the absolute value of the Favor Rating, the more critical the blog is of the pharmaceutical industry

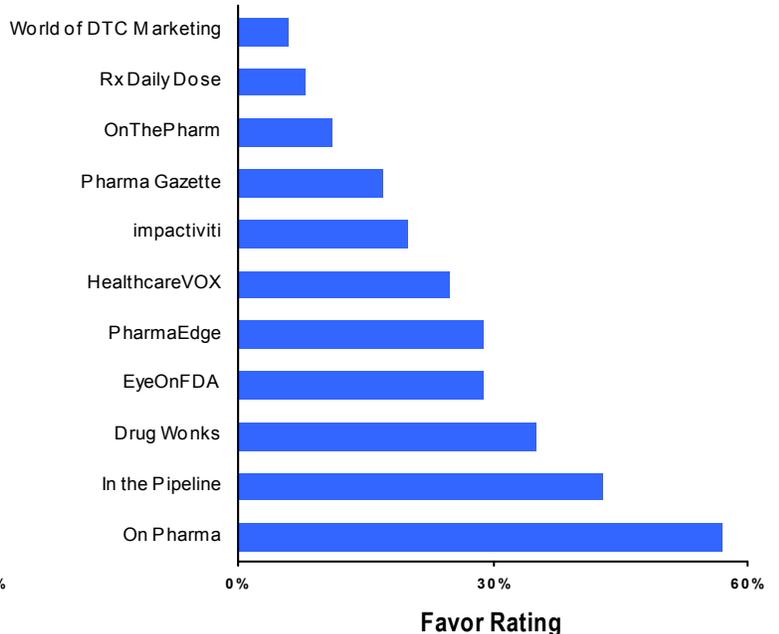


FIGURE 3: “Industry Supporters.” The greater the absolute value of the Favor Rating, the more supportive the blog is of the pharmaceutical industry

Overall Honors

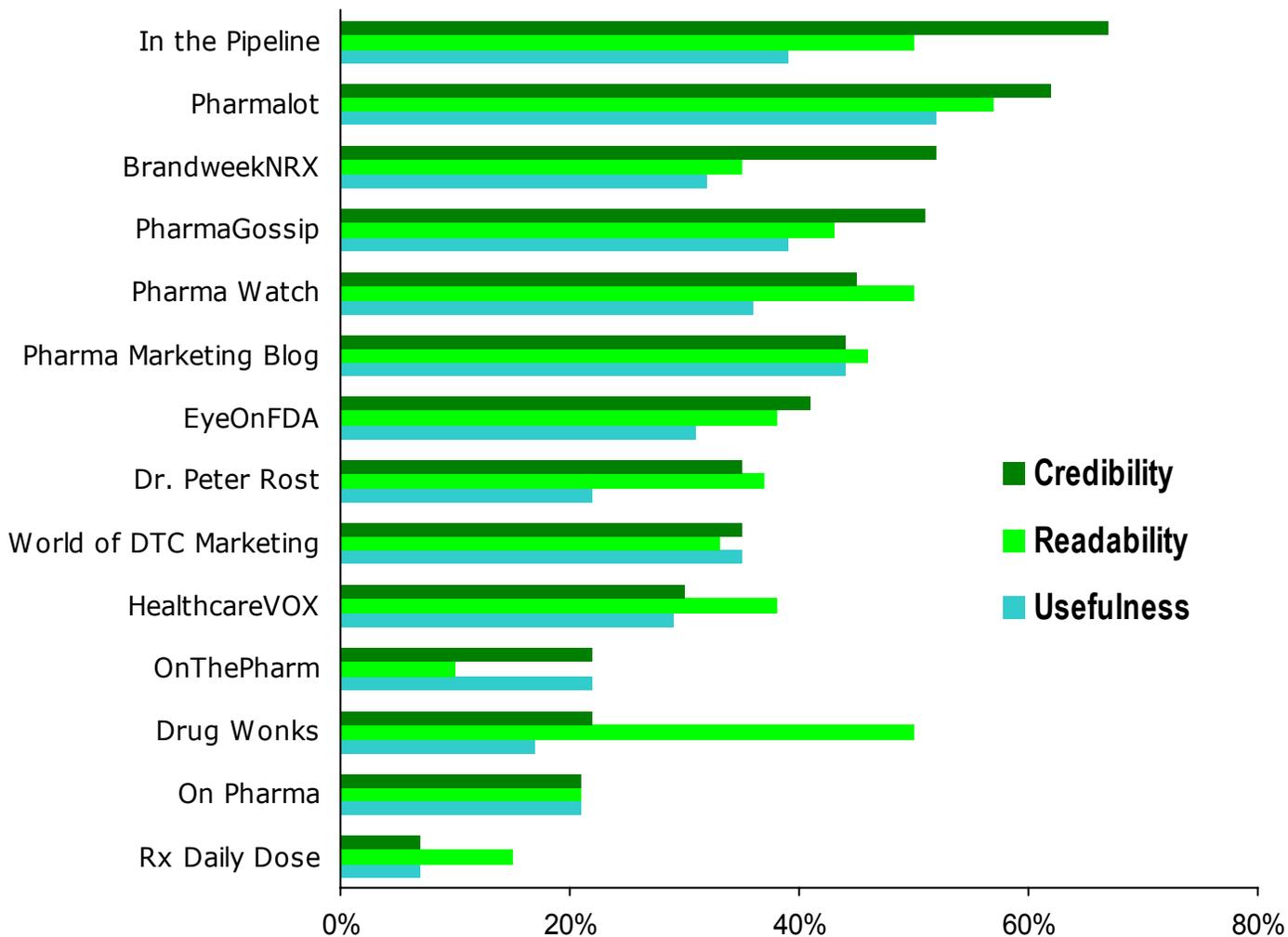


FIGURE 4: **Overall Honors**, ranked by credibility among all 143 readers, not including readers who Never or Rarely read the blog. Also, only blogs with 14 or more responses were included in the analysis in order to eliminate bias. The chart shows the percentage of responses in the “Top 2 boxes” (Superior/Excellent).

There is not necessarily any correlation between readability, credibility, and usefulness. For example, the most readable blogs are not necessarily the most credible. Drug Wonks is an example; it was rated very readable but not very credible. It could be that a majority of respondents are critical of the industry and therefore more likely to say that Drug Wonks, which supports the drug industry, is not credible.

The TOP FIVE Overall Honors

Tables 1A, B, and C present the top five blogs in each rating category. In this analysis, the same “rules of thumb” were applied as in the creation of Figure 2, except that one additional rule was included: Pharma Watch was eliminated from the analysis because it is no longer a public blog. That is, it is viewable by invitation only and there are no instructions for how to get an invitation. Since the Pharma Blogosphere Survey is designed to help people locate the best Pharma-related blogs, it would not have been fair to the other, publicly accessible blogs, to include Pharma Watch in the TOP FIVE analysis.

Readability	Top 2 Boxes
Pharmalot	57%
In the Pipeline	50%
Drug Wonks	50%
Pharma Marketing Blog	46%
PharmaGossip	43%

TABLE 1A: TOP FIVE **Readable** blogs, based on the percentage of Superior/Excellent responses. N=143 respondents (not Never/Rarely); n>14. Excludes Pharma Watch (see text). “Industry Critics” are red, “Industry Supporters” are blue.

Credibility	Top 2 Boxes
In the Pipeline	67%
Pharmalot	62%
BrandweekNRX	52%
PharmaGossip	51%
Pharma Marketing Blog	44%

TABLE 1B: TOP FIVE **Credible** blogs.

Usefulness	Top 2 Boxes
Pharmalot	52%
Pharma Marketing Blog	44%
In the Pipeline	39%
PharmaGossip	39%
World of DTC Marketing	35%

TABLE 1C: TOP FIVE **Useful** blogs.

Four blogs—In the Pipeline, Pharmalot, Pharma Marketing Blog, and PharmaGossip—were in the TOP FIVE in all three rating categories.

Industry vs. Non-Industry Readers

Some bloggers in the Pharma Blogosphere™ seem to be writing for industry insiders and some for the non-industry public. It is important, therefore, that we look at the TOP FIVE blogs in each of these categories to contrast and compare how well the blogs are serving their particular audiences. The results are presented in TABLES 2A, B, and C (pg. 5).

Blogs and Readers of a Feather Flock Together

It seems that industry readers flock in favor of “Supportive” blogs, whereas non-industry readers flock in favor of “Critical” blogs.

For example, four of the TOP FIVE readable blogs as rated by industry respondents are “Industry Supporters”, whereas three of the TOP FIVE rated by non-industry respondents are “Industry Critics”. See TABLE 2A.

Industry readers find “Supportive” blogs more useful than “Critical Blogs” and vice versa for non-industry readers who find “Critical” blogs more useful than “Supportive” blogs. Three the TOP FIVE useful blogs as rated by industry respondents are “Industry Supporters”, whereas four of the TOP FIVE rated by non-industry respondents are “Industry Critics”. See TABLE 2C.

The exception to the flocking rule is credibility. Four of the TOP FIVE credible blogs as rated by industry and non-industry respondents alike are “Industry Critics”. Only one, In the Pipeline, is an “Industry Supporter”. See TABLE 2B.

See tables on the next page...

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Readability (Industry)	Top 2 Boxes	Readability (Non-Industry)	Top 2 Boxes
Drug Wonks	63%	Pharmalot	71%
In the Pipeline	46%	PharmaGossip	54%
EyeOnFDA	41%	In the Pipeline	53%
Pharma Marketing Blog	37%	Pharma Marketing Blog	50%
World of DTC Marketing	33%	HealthcareVOX	50%

TABLE 2A: TOP FIVE **Readable** blogs, industry respondents (left 2 columns) vs. non-industry respondents (right 2 columns), based on the percentage of responses in the “Top 2 boxes” (Superior/Excellent). N (industry)=43 (not Never/Rarely); n>5; N (non-industry)=100 (not Never/Rarely); n>10. Excludes Pharma Watch. “Industry Critics” are red, “Industry Supporters” are blue.

Credibility (Industry)	Top 2 Boxes	Credibility (Non-Industry)	Top 2 Boxes
In the Pipeline	69%	Pharmalot	71%
Pharmalot	43%	In the Pipeline	64%
Pharma Marketing Blog	42%	PharmaGossip	60%
BrandweekNRX	38%	BrandweekNRX	60%
PharmaGossip	38%	Dr. Peter Rost	48%

TABLE 2B: TOP FIVE **Credible** blogs, industry respondents (left 2 columns) vs. non-industry respondents (right 2 columns), based on the percentage of responses in the “Top 2 boxes” (Superior/Excellent). N (industry)=43 (not Never/Rarely); n>5; N (non-industry)=100 (not Never/Rarely); n>10. Excludes Pharma Watch. “Industry Critics” are red, “Industry Supporters” are blue.

Usefulness (Industry)	Top 2 Boxes	Usefulness (Non-Industry)	Top 2 Boxes
In the Pipeline	54%	Pharmalot	71%
World of DTC Marketing	50%	PharmaGossip	48%
Pharma Marketing Blog	41%	Pharma Marketing Blog	46%
EyeOnFDA	35%	HealthcareVOX	36%
BrandweekNRX	33%	Dr. Peter Rost	32%

TABLE 2A: TOP FIVE **Useful** blogs, industry respondents (left 2 columns) vs. non-industry respondents (right 2 columns), based on the percentage of responses in the “Top 2 boxes” (Superior/Excellent). N (industry)=43 (not Never/Rarely); n>5; N (non-industry)=100 (not Never/Rarely); n>10. Excludes Pharma Watch. “Industry Critics” are red, “Industry Supporters” are blue.

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