

**How To** Reprint # 64-05

## A Primer on Pharma Employee Blogging

*It Can Be Done!*

By John Mack

There is some movement within a few pharmaceutical companies toward implementing employee blogs. J&J, for example, has taken some steps in this direction (see "[YouPharma](#)").

Marc Monseau, Director of Corporate Media, J&J, is talking up corporate blogging strategies at conferences these days, perhaps lofting ideas as trial balloons for feedback. Monseau, for example, is making a presentation at a "Blogging for Business" conference in May, 2007. The title of his presentation is "Developing A Blogging Strategy" and the topics he will cover are:

- Identify Opportunities And Risks
- Understand Your Audience
- Work With The Organization

The following primer offers some more details of how J&J and other pharmaceutical companies can launch public-facing pharma employee blogs.

### Start Internally

Whatever you do, start internally in a controlled environment. Of course, this is no guarantee that you won't be outed at CafePharma as happened to AstraZeneca in the Zubillaga Affair. But, if you follow my rules, you'll limit your risk.

Once you have experience with running your employee blog internally, you can go public. In the meantime, you will have learned which employees like writing blog posts, which ones have great stories to tell, and, yes, you will receive criticisms, which can only help you improve. You don't want to encourage a bunch of sycophants!

### Guarantee Anonymity

An internal blog can be like an old-fashioned suggestion box. But employees must be allowed to submit comments anonymously. To allow for true anonymity, you must have "public" workstations throughout your workplace (in cafeterias, lobbies, etc.). Your employees are smart—they know you can identify them by their computer workstation

address. Warn them not to submit comments from their workstation IF they wish to remain anonymous.

### Moderate Comments

Many of my blogger colleagues are free-thinking liberals who believe that any kind of control of freedom of expression is evil. I feel that way about MY FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, but not about other people's freedom of expression when they wish to express themselves via my blog (Pharma Marketing Blog), that is.

My blog is my property, my creation, which belongs to ME, not to EVERYONE! That's one reason why I don't allow comments to be published in my blog without being reviewed by me first. Over the years, there have been only a handful of comments that I have excluded and 90% of them were ads for purchasing drugs over the Internet, or from crazies promoting their own cause, etc. None of these comments advanced the discussion, so I had no qualms about rejecting them.

Therefore, I advocate that a pharma employee blog also be moderated and not allow comments to be published without prior review. You can note these comments and decide what action to take as follow-up, but you don't have to air all your dirty laundry. It would be a good idea to catalog comments and do some kind of summary report that indicates how many comments were received, how many were published, and why some comments were not published (a kind of "comment audit" that borders on transparency in an aggregate kind of way).

The policy regarding moderating comments depends on the company. Some may not allow comments at all. The ability to submit comments, however, is an important benefit of the blogging experience, and is essential to the main objective of giving employees a voice. Therefore, I recommend as liberal a policy on moderating comments as possible.

*Continues...*

## Posting Rules

The meat of the blog is the post written by the blogger author. Blogs can be set up to accept posts from a number of people and there can be an editor that accepts or rejects posts, sort of like the Huffington Post blog. An internal pharma employee blog can be set up that way too. However, rather than going the Huffington route, you can set up a more structured, safe route; eg, where one editor accepts stories from employees and submits posts with or without editorial comment. This is similar to a newsletter.

However you handle posts from employees, you need to make it as easy for them to submit a post as the Blogger web-base application makes it easy for me to submit posts to my blog. The only difference is that it goes to the editor first before it gets published. If your submission process is more formal than that, you might as well have a newsletter and not a blog.

The editor either publishes a post as is or asks the employee to make changes. The employee either accepts the changes or opts out of submitting the edited post for publication.

As with comment moderation, there should be an editorial policy that is as liberal as possible. Since the blog has a purpose, which is to provide a more positive image of the industry via the voice of the rank-and-file employee (see below for employees I believe qualify), the editorial policy should be consistent with this policy. If employees want to bitch and complain about the company, this blog is not for them. They should go through regular channels. But all "negative" statements in an otherwise positive post should not be edited out. It is important to do as little editing as possible, which may be a challenge for any company and especially for pharmaceutical companies

## Which Employees Should/Should Not Post?

The following personnel should be ENCOURAGED to contribute to employee blogs:

- Rank and file employees including secretaries, assistants, etc.
- Research and development personnel, including clinicians, lab people, etc.

Some might pooh-pooh having "insignificant" rank and file employees like secretaries, maintenance workers, interns, etc. write blogs, but not if you agree that the pharmaceutical industry needs a

"human face" to project to the public. What better face than that of people like your customers, not all of whom are executives. They are secretaries and blue collar workers too.

The following personnel should NOT be allowed to contribute to employee blogs:

- Marketing, sales, legal, or corporate communications personnel
- Managers or higher

Well let me qualify that. You don't want these people to dominate the discussion. They tend to be steeped in the traditional "circle the wagons" corporate mentality and most often do not speak in a genuine personal voice.

Always include an employee photo.

## Go Public With Caution

The main objective of the internal employee blog is to bring it public so that visitors can see the human face of the company and hopefully read authentic comments from employees to learn how they feel about working in the industry.

I notice that some pharma companies feature photos and comments from employees in the career section of their web sites (see, for example, Takeda Employee Profiles). I have no idea if the words attributed to employees in these profiles are their own words or not. That's a perception that an employee blog must overcome. And the best way to overcome that is by being transparent and laying out exactly what the blog editorial and moderation rules are.

I don't expect this to be the last word on pharma employee blogging. I know there are many challenges that pharma must overcome to initiate employee blogs. These challenges have more to do with transparency than with regulation. Both these obstacles are challenges for Pharma.

### Pharma Marketing News

#### Pharma Marketing News

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