



Advertising in the
Digital Age, Part 3

Blogs: a direct connection to customers — especially women



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by Douglas Knorr and Phil Callighan

Social media enables communicating directly with current and future customers, and blogs are an important connection, especially to women shoppers. Studies show that women believe in blogs so it's not an activity to assign to an intern or a part-time young person who may seem more comfortable online but probably won't have the experience and expertise to make it a PR win for your store. Top management and department heads should be the ones who handle the communication.

A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order so you can see the most recent at the top of a web page.

Currently, 27.9 million U.S. Internet users have a blog they update at least once per month, and they represent 14 percent of the Internet population. By 2013, it is estimated that 37.6 million users will update their blogs at least monthly.

Although men may have more blogs, it is said that women drive the blogging phenomenon.

A BlogHer/Compass Partners Social Media Study in 2008 reported that 36 million women participate in the blogosphere weekly: 15 million publish at least once a week and 21 million read/post comments weekly.

a **blog** about a *mattress*

Retailers using social media have a leg up on the competition with tech-savvy customers.

Consider this scenario:

A young married woman in Fort Worth, Texas, wakes up one morning after a restless night in bed. She believes her 14-year old queen-size mattress is to blame. She wants a new one, but wants it to be reliable and not too expensive.

She goes online and types, "I need a queen-size mattress today. I have \$650 to spend. Help!" into Twitter, which in turn feeds automatically into her Facebook status.

She immediately begins to receive replies in both channels from friends with advice on retail outlets, mattress brands and the differences between inner-spring mattresses, memory foam and air-chamber mattresses. She also sees an "@ reply" on Twitter from a retailer letting her know their Fort Worth location has new mattresses in stock, as well as a link to the section of its website that shows queen mattresses for under \$700.

This is the new "search" experience online — where the separation between search and social media is virtually non-existent.

50 percent of women believe blogs are reliable sources for information.

Many of the top 25 rated blogs are all about bloggers, news, politics and technology. However, as reported on August 5, 2009, there are several that appeal primarily to women. Among these are:

- **PerezHilton.com** – celebrity gossip (2,147,461 Complete Monthly Visitors)
- **Consumerist.com** – informing and entertaining visitors about the top consumer issues of the day. Lots of information about consumer rip-offs, etc. (1,225,481 Complete Monthly Visitors)
- **ICanHaveCheeseBurger.com** – funny pictures/videos of cats (1,089,331 – Complete Monthly Visitors)

Twitter is sort of a hybrid – categorized in both social media and blogging camps as a Micro-Blog. That's because Twitter asks a single question, "What are you doing?"


Answers must be under 140 characters in length and can be sent via mobile texting, instant message, or the web. All the messages are called "tweets" and the process is called

"tweeting." The value in Twitter for businesses comes from making information, requests and problems public.

Aside from answering customer service and delivery questions, companies use Twitter to list product announcements, special discount codes, and involve consumers with their brand.

Today's consumer wants to be part of the branding process, suggesting ideas or venturing opinions about what appeals, what works and what doesn't. We are now seeing what Alvin Toffler referred to back in the 1980's as "Pro-sumers."

By building a network of credible sources using social media, people are able to narrow their "searches" to a select group of people they trust.

Make sure you and your brand are in that group. 

(For more information on connecting to customers through social networks see "Search, socialize and connect" in the January 2010 issue of Home Furnishings Retailer.) Coming up: E-mail strategies to reduce advertising costs and increase relevant communications with your customers.