

5-2017

Blogging in Publishing: Best Practices for Establishing and Marketing Brands

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**Blogging in Publishing:
Best Practices for Establishing and Marketing Brands**

by
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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
St. Cloud State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in English Studies

May 2017

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the world of blogging and how it can be used to market and establish a publisher's brand to the specific audience of current and potential authors and readers. While blogging has been a frequent topic in publishing circles, it has only recently emerged as a crucial marketing strategy that companies utilize to promote, strengthen, and progress their brands in various fields. All through this thesis, I will discuss the issues related to any social media advertising agent, analyze how communities are formed online and the advantage of doing so, the many ways blogging is used by publishers, and the best practices to ensure their blogs are not only sustainable but safe and successful in improving their brand and reputation.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee for their insights and encouragement during this academic year. Their patience during the most critical and grueling moments has helped make this process comfortable and all the more rewarding.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my unconditional family—for their love and care. They have supported and fortified my academic endeavors, even when I was unsure of my abilities. And for their reassurance, I am truly grateful. I feel honored to graduate from St. Cloud State University and share this thesis with you all.

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Introduction: Blogging in Publishing

Online blogging's popularity has blossomed in recent years. This increase is due to the connectivity that blogging allows for its users. When one has a blog of their own, they are able to share their interests freely and connect and follow other bloggers that might have similar interests as them. Psychologists, Laura J. Gurak and Smiljana Antonijevic, describe blogs as imperative and essential in demonstrating important elements of human desire. These elements allow bloggers using the blog format to express their individuality, create communities where bloggers can connect with others similar to them, and fully solidify technological advances of twentieth century digital communication (60). And in the following four chapters, we will explore the world of blogging and establish how it can be used to market and grow a publisher's brand to audiences including authors and readers. While blogging has been a frequent topic in the publishing field, it has only recently emerged as a crucial marketing strategy that companies utilize to promote, strengthen, and progress their brands in various fields.

All through this thesis, I will discuss the dawn of private and public worlds merging online, analyze how communities are formed online and the advantages of doing so, the many topics blogging publishers may use to appeal to their audiences, and the best practices to ensure their blogs are not only sustainable but safe and successful in improving business brand and reputation

Blogging has been around longer than Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and all the rest. Blogger was the first blogging engine launched on August 23, 1999 by San Francisco startup Pyra Labs (Wibbels). And it can be said that all other social media sites branched from blogging because when we look at Facebook posts, Pinterest pins, Tumblr posts, and so on, we notice that they are microblogs; they may certainly be in different writing forms,

but they serve similar purposes and provide an audience with information. The information presented on blog posts is exceptionally unique from other social media outlets in the opportunities that they provide users. For example, bloggers are expected to treat their sites like online diaries (Wibbels). Of course, the purpose of a diary or journal is to be candid without fear of judgment, and unlike other social media sites, blogger Jane Friedman relays,

Meaningful blogging requires patience and persistence, as well as a willingness to learn what comprises good, compelling online-driven or online-only writing. It's not the same as writing for formal publication or in other genres/mediums—or even for websites other than your own.

Friedman's notes demonstrate the potential that blogging has for companies. While Facebook or any other social media platform can be used without much effort or thought (because comprising a Facebook or Twitter post takes a couple minutes), a blog post is lengthy. When written successfully (for the company's online purpose), they must fully comprehend the medium of blogging and the implications if blogs becomes fruitless. Notwithstanding, a successful blog can elevate businesses and increase brand presence online and in the virtual communities around them.

Bloggers have an audience and while bloggers may receive pleasure and enjoyment from writing their perspective, there is also an audience of likeminded people that want to engage in the blogger's topic with comments and dialogue. Clearly, blogging can be applied to any business model too, but its success is completely different and dependent on the effort behind the blogger.

Publishers should have blogs because they need a site for their businesses where they can frequently update and add information, and a blog format is the easiest platform to do so. Marketing blogger, Corey Wainwright explains, "Blog content keeps your social media presence going." So using any blogging site will offer a publisher and their audience more ease than a

website. For instance, blogging is made up of posts, each post having its own title. These posts can be short or lengthy entries separate from all other posts, and may be tagged into different categories of interest. Doing so is convenient for audience members and also offers the element of immediacy (Fang).

Audiences also have the opportunity to subscribe. Subscribing is important in social media marketing, because when an individual subscribes to a blog, every time the author publishes a post, the subs (i.e. subscribers) will receive an email notifying them of the company's new post, and the email will include a link that brings them to the direct post. And while they are reading that new post, they may also navigate through the rest of the posts and explore the chronological post archive. Though hosting this traffic is important in developing a following, blogging also allows further *engagement*, manifesting in commenting. This commenting capability may address publishers or other audience members in attempts to voice concerns and build a community of authors and readers centered on the business. These are important aspects in developing and supporting a customer base (Hyder).

This thesis aims to take the following journey: I will use an ethnographic approach supplied with personal experiences to examine how blogging may be used in publishing; I will move to demonstrate how social media is double dipping into not only our personal and public lives, but also our private lives and how that is exhibited online in virtual communities. These communities created online may be done in any social media setting and while I examine the traditional and spatial features of communities, that similar mindset will be applied to a blogging community to prove that individuals can identify online and form connections helping them engage. This engagement has two outcomes, respectfully—the ability to form a collective intelligence model between authors and readers and expand publishers' brands. These goals will

be supplemented with suggestions for how to successfully run a blog in terms of using appropriate platforms, promoting civic discussions, and being weary of Internet trolls. The rest of this thesis will illustrate how to successfully maneuver a blog and grow a company into a leading name in the publishing field.

Blogging seems to be the most authentic style of writing on social media because bloggers aim to develop a following. If bloggers are too blunt and personal, they may not build that following and if they are too professional and bland, they may seem boring to their readers. So striking a balance between relatability and social decorum is imperative because readers want to feel they can relate to the reader, and the most effective way to do this is through *authenticity* and encapsulating the essence of a company's spirit in the tone of posts.

Sabine Trepte and Leonard Reinecke, authors of *Privacy Online: Perspectives on Privacy and Self-disclosure in the Social Web*, describe being truly authentic online as,

There is still a divide between being truly authentic and still remaining private because although like in daily conversations, we can withhold information, we can have difficulty also doing this online. (61)

Despite what most might think, Trepte and Reinecke are indicating in this passage that authenticity is more possible online. This concept goes well with the notion that privacy has the ability to facilitate self-evaluation and surprisingly, this can be done online. Even online, people can feel safe and secure to reflect on feelings and identity in secure spaces such as close communities and even blogging communities.

Merging Spheres

In order to come to the place of authenticity in blogging, the lines of professionalism have blurred with privacy and thus, our private and public lives have merged. In his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois*

Society, Habermas delves into the idea of privacy in society. He conveys that there is a tension between state and society, but that it is considered a *public sphere* (141). Inside of this *public sphere*, Habermas indicates that a *private sphere* persists and works to be a sphere “of private autonomy only to the degree to which it became emancipated from the mercantilist regulation” (141). This passage relays the issue of original *private spheres*; they initially were obscured and could only be private to a point until they pushed against society’s authority figures and laws. We might adapt this *private sphere* as a safe place, and this safe place as a small alcove where individuals can express themselves. Individuals could use these private realms to escape from authority and be free to share their opinions that otherwise, would not be accepted in society.

Habermas continues to explain the switch of *public spheres* in the market to *private*. He specifies the emergence of liberalism and its control over *public* and *private spheres*. He notes, “As long as the state was liberal...social labors remain realms of private autonomy” (145). Considering liberalism has highly influenced our markets up until today, this act of liberalism has inadvertently affected the *private sphere* and Habermas solidifies this idea with his theory about private versus public lives. He hints at the suggestion that in public lives, people are more professional and adhere to specific rules and regulations of conduct largely accepted in society. In a public life, lives are incessantly under scrutiny.

A private life allows for absolute verbal freedom. Not only does a private life grant individuals the liberty to articulate their thoughts but also to maintain time away from the constant eye of society and its expectations. In terms of blogging, it is evident that we no longer have a *private sphere* today (Barton). Individuals are using social media as their free-writing outlets and while Habermas’s intention of diary writing in the 17th century was meant to develop

subjectivity and attain clarity, it can be inferred that this is also what blogging provides bloggers and readers today (Barton).

Publishing's Blogging

This thesis will not only focus on blogging as a marketing tool for companies, but will concentrate on blogging's *effectiveness* for publishers. I have felt drawn to the style of blog writing because it requires a personal yet professional mindset and similar to diaries and journal writing, asks for authenticity. And this is a good middle ground because I have not felt that I fit into the professional writing style or the personal (not holding anything back) type of writing that so many people enjoy, usually using Facebook and other social media outlets. There is also the interconnectivity of hyperlinking that can be beneficial for linking to different areas of a blog post as well as useful sites for audiences to use.

Unlike local advertising on billboards, posters, etc., blogging can take a company's marketing global. And unlike traditional modes of advertising for individuals to read a blog, it is best and most effective to stay strictly online, because most companies use other social media outlets too; and while each outlet serves its purpose, companies can cross promote their blogs, Twitter accounts, Facebook pages, and so on. And since blogs can be updated frequently with fresh content, they are essential in times of crisis, to put out information quickly. Basically, if a company needs to tell authors information, a blog is the quickest and more effective way to get in touch with all of them, because they will most likely be subscribed and will receive an email alerting them to a new post.

Chapter One: Virtual Communities

When thinking of communities, a locational community of people is what pops into my mind. I am inclined to think about my hometown community in southwestern Wisconsin. But a community can be even smaller than that; there are communities of people that meet at church, assemble for card games, cook together, or gather to go fishing. There is literally a community for any interest anyone might have. And the same is true for groups online. There is a lot of debate on whether online communities are as effective and sustainable as those that congregate spatially. Conversely, two things are true about online communities: those in their niche communities are generally more secure and feel freer to express themselves. For publishers, this security creates a sense of independence for their audiences online.

Author, Felicia Wu Song, describes the benefits of virtual communities as, “The paradoxes of the virtual community are, in fact, the very sources of its appeal. On the Internet, people have the potential to experience the benefits of communal life with none of the burdens” (1). This passage encapsulates the pull that virtual communities have for people; in a community online, people can put in and take out exactly what they desire from their community. If they want to exist in the community a little or a lot, they will not be socially punished for their presence or lack thereof. These communities are fully accessible for users 24/7, which gives users the feeling that they are not alone because in physical communities, it is impossible to be in contact with the whole community 24/7 without using some form of technology, and just by using Facebook messenger for a group chat, that physical community goes into virtual. So the use of these communities is dependent on the user, “It’s different for each person, for some, community is a ‘lifestyle enclave’ or a ‘pseudo-community’” (Song 26). Essentially, an online

community can serve whichever purpose those participating in it have and can accommodate traditional and conventional notions of communities,

Technologically mediated communities-cyber community or virtual community-are bringing about new kinds of social groups, which are polymorphous, highly personalized and often expressive, but they can also take more traditional forms, reconstituting families and rural areas and even political movements. In these communities, which are often acted out in the global context, belonging has been reshaped radically, leading many to question the very possibility of belonging as it disappears into the flow of communication outside of which they have no reality. (Delanty 168)

This passage is taken from Gerard Delanty's book, *Community*, where this transition of the traditional community is paired with the emerging social media outlets that are changing our preconceived notions of what a community of people looks like and what one can be. What is especially worth noting in this passage is Delanty's concept that virtual communities can extend from traditional to fully expressive and connected. Examples of these traditional communities include groups using dialogue such as Facebook pages for political or collective movements (e.g. Pantsuit Nation [a Hillary Clinton stemmed Facebook group that attempts to uplift excluded voices through storytelling]) or a family group chat, to more connected communities including networking on Flickr or subscribers to a yoga and mindfulness blog. So what this proves is that communities online are versatile without limitations in regards to people in the *global village*.

While our public spheres and personas are already conveying some of our private lives, virtual communities can supply users a destination for belonging in the insecure conditions of modernity (Delanty) and comfort. Communities can go beyond having similar interests and may appear online in social interactions. Anthony Cohen, author of *The Symbolic Structure of Community*, and Benedict Anderson, author of *Imaginary Communities*, disputed the idea of community and classified it as a symbolic structure with the *imagination* that these communities exist. However, Marshall McLuhan coined the belief of the *global village* and declared that

technology connects people; while McLuhan's intention in the early 60's was different than how our digital society has evolved, his idea is clear and working today on all of us.

On the Internet, physical distance is not an issue because as previously mentioned, users can meet at any time, but the same cannot be said for groups of physical communities. It can be deduced that social online spheres have widened largely by the vastness of the web to accommodate communities and unify them stronger through the opportunities of technology. Most importantly, we have to remember that we are in the digital age and can communicate and develop relationships through video messaging and chat rooms all across the world. Then why should developing niche communities on the Internet seem so surreal?

Identification Online

To better understand how these communities are formed online, it is helpful to note the driving force behind our desire to identify and develop connections with those in virtual communities. Literary theorist, Kenneth Burke, describes this sensation as *identification* in his essay, "Language as Symbolic Action." In his essay, Burke mentions the motives behind rhetoric. Rhetoric can be many things; it can have an ulterior purpose—one that is negative or it can exist to reveal in the delight it makes. Burke calls the latter the *pure* form of rhetoric (1325). This *pure* form of rhetoric exists in the formation of online communities—the ones that are created in social media, in particular, blogging to gather groups of compatible people for amusement. What comes to mind in regards to negative or manipulative rhetoric includes rhetoric that is sinister and permeates the masses to control and force people into acts, not of their choosing. Blogging, however, persuades its users to contribute to specialized communities to entertain and welcome new perspectives using identification.

Burke describes identification as, “A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interest are not joined, if he assumes they are, or is persuaded so” (1329). What Burke is pointing out in this passage is the perception that are all of us are divided, but identification brings us and our ideas together using an activity or act of some sort. As humans, we are inclined to connect with other people because this social stimulation is part of what keeps us going.

Blogging is the specialized activity that Burke is implying and this “larger unit of action” reminds me of McLuhan’s concept of the global village. By participating in an “activity” online, we are sharing parts of ourselves with people that may be in other parts of the world. They may be on the opposite side of the global village, but the medium of the Internet and activity of blogging contributes to our unique communities. This inclination to identify with those sharing similar passions enables participation in the technology making a global village possible and has led our digital society further into *hot* media.

Collective Intelligence

Identifying with individuals in corners of the internet is only the beginning of a journey offering insight into how communities can be formed online. The outcome of assembling these communities through blogging and really, any social media site is to have a space for *collective intelligence* to emerge. Wikis (i.e. collaborative sites) such as Wikipedia or the *Oxford English Dictionary* are successful examples of the collective intelligence model because their development depends on the contributions from volunteers, of all writing and expertise levels (Fang). For publishers, this idea of collective intelligence can be applied to the process of brainstorming ideas and events in the publishing community such as topics for marketing events,

crowdfunding (which will be discussed in a later chapter), and how authors may come to conclusions (i.e. a new direction for books) with suggestions from other audience members.

Howard Rheingold, author of *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*, provides an ingenious definition for this concept,

Collective intelligence is a an aggregation of skills, understanding, and knowledge; skills, like literacies, unlock individual access, which must be actively used to acquire individual knowledge from the great collective pool amassed through literate culture; and understanding requires communication, discussion, debate, and direct experience. (160)

While Pierre Levy coined the term, *collective intelligence* in 1994, Rheingold has formed his unmistakable understandings of how such a ubiquitous term as *intelligence* can be formed collectively. In the above passage, Rheingold illustrates how collective intelligence goes beyond simply acquiring knowledge in a community setting and notes the combination of skills *and* understanding present within an online community.

This “understanding” concerns a comprehension of ideas represented in these communities and goes hand in hand with “skills.” These “skills” are critical thinking skills. Critical thinking helps individuals make well-rounded decisions on any topic because it asks us to question our initial assumptions and look at different perspectives and thoughts we may not have recognized originally. This act pushes us out of our natural default settings (Wallace), allowing the assessment of ideas with objectivity. This is imperative in an online collective intelligence community because everyone in the global village has various viewpoints; we have all had diverse experiences and influences on our lives. This critical thinking helps foster our awareness of these differences—to fully comprehend and find an understanding that fits the rest of the community’s expectations.

Rheingold recommends users be literate and able to participate in communication, discussion and the stream of collective critical thinking that allows a group to arrive at the three qualities of collective intelligence: knowledge, skills, and understanding. Rheingold continues, “The participatory skill of curation and some of the collaborative skills of virtual community are fundamental to collective intelligence” (161). These requirements fit the blogging theme, especially a publishing company’s blog because communication is key in the development and content of a blog. With a blog, communities leave responses in the form of comments after every post. This is where collective intelligence begins because viewers or subscribers can discuss posts' content and play around with ideas together. Of course, the degree and effectiveness of this communication depends on the community and posts published.

Chapter Two: Blogging for Brands

With the previous ideas mentioned concerning the benefits of forming virtual communities and the advantages of collective intelligences within these communities, it is now appropriate to bridge the connection between these ideas and how using blogs and this online form of brand growth will affect publishing companies.

Social Media Marketing

Perhaps the most significant thing to remember about blogging for brands is that it is an affordable alternative to traditional marketing but with high returns (Weinberg). McLuhan's idea of the global village tells us that technology binds us together, and especially now that almost everything we do (i.e., communicate, shop, watch television and videos, read, play games, and so on) are done online. It is logical that our marketing tactics would also persist online too. And while signing up for different social media outlets requires people to check that little box giving companies such as Amazon, Facebook and Twitter, amongst all of the rest, access to our searches and interests, they can sell this information to third parties to also advertise on their sites (Trepte and Reinecke).

There have been many instances where this has happened to me and are continuing in my Internet life. A few weeks ago, I was scouring Amazon for a mini backpack to take on an upcoming trip and after searching for only a few minutes, I logged out and switched my attention to Facebook. There, I found the right side of my page painted with numerous advertisements of the backpacks I sought out only a few minutes before. This occurred on YouTube as well. I was looking at canned apple pie fillings (as dull as that sounds) for a recipe on google and after signing into my YouTube account, there, also on the right side of the screen was the can of apples I contemplated purchasing earlier.

I never raised an eyebrow to see these advertisements months and even years before, but it seems after reading about privacy online for this thesis, I have become more aware of the startling issue we all face online; we do not have control over our privacy if we want to enjoy the social media sites available to us. If we do not check that little box, we do not gain access to these sites, and who does *not* check the little box?

This marketing tactic is called *informational privacy* and as Sabine Trepte and Leonard Reinecke describe it, granting permission to companies such as Amazon, Facebook, online retailers, and so on also gives way to online privacy. Our personal information can be sold to third-parties to advertise for more exposure to the same or similar products we enjoy and search online. The ethics behind selling personal information to third parties to use on websites is something those considering starting a blog for their publishing companies should be aware of.

Even so, this idea of informational privacy, although extreme in this case, shows that we can do almost all of our marketing online. We no longer need to put flyers on bulletin boards, create television commercials, place slogans on benches, or plaster billboards with company names and services. These forms of advertising cost money and do not appeal to most target audiences. Most people today have cellphones with Internet capabilities and spend most of their free time surfing the web. Marketing with the Internet is the optimal way to advertise in today's digital society.

Despite Habermas's one size fits all approach, a bourgeois society in the seventeenth century required different needs than our technological society today does; we have to follow the channels of the masses in the time we live in because the model of private and public spheres are now all public—meaning that the *private* electronic devices we use are subject to marketing; traditional forms of advertising are nearly obsolete.

Thinking about social media marketing from a publishing perspective, Tamar Weinberg, author of *The New Community Rules: Marketing on the Social Web* believes,

Social media marketing is a process that empowers individuals to promote their website, products, or services through online social channels and to communicate with a tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional advertising channels. (3)

This passage is paramount in understanding the gains of social media marketing because Weinberg touches on several key components; social media marketing is taken on by the individual or company that chooses to use it for further communicating their company's services, yet the next layer of this type of marketing depends on the interconnectivity of the web.

With companies advertising their services on social media, those in the audience are able to share this information with whomever they choose with a simple tap; this requires little risk and effort on the behalf of the sharer, and is why our media is so easily spreadable. Social media gives the audience permission to recommend links, websites, and products to peers (Weinberg). This phenomenon is called *spreadable media*, coined by Henry Jenkins. This sort of media is relevant to multiple audiences, produces a steady stream of material, and can be accessed from any electronic device (Jenkins).

Examples of this sensation are literally anywhere we open our phones, computers, tablets, and iPads. Simply opening a search engine displays shared articles, hot topics, and videos that have been spread across the web like hot butter on toast. Notable examples include viral videos (e.g., animal videos, pranks, proposals, commercials, mishaps, music videos, odd news reports), a news article, quizzes one can take (e.g., What career should you have?, Which political party should you belong to?, What grade are you getting in life?), postings about sales (e.g. black Friday, garage or rummage sales), new products (e.g. Starbucks's new Unicorn Frappe) and much more. We have all contributed to this spreadability at some point in our social media lives.

So what makes these chunks of content spreadable? How did Psy's horse-galloping trademark and song, "Gangnam Style," manage to accumulate almost 3 billion views on YouTube, or how did a small nonprofit group calling for the internment of the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony become abundant online? Jonah Berger, author of *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, has some answers to these questions and I will be using three of the ideas he offers to support this contagious content sensation.

When it comes to how online content catches on, Berger explains that positive content is more viral than negative content, content evoking high emotions (positive or negative) is more spreadable than non-emotional content, and any useful content can spread quickly. Although this spreadable media deals with media as a whole, the same can be true within virtual communities. It is possible for a publishing blog to attain all three of Berger's viral goals, but the ladder in his list is going to be the most prominent because as a publisher, it is safe to say that audiences will be present and future authors and readers. They will be looking for information to support their interests and that is what publishers will provide for them.

Rebecca Blood, author of *The Weblog Handbook*, clarifies, "Individuals whose weblogs focus on a particular topic become known as experts in their field...sharing information is one of the best ways to gain respect in any field" (32). Blood illuminates that the publisher's audience will regard them as the authority on everything relating to editing, authorship, and the publishing process. This mindset can be paralleled to Paulo Freire's "banking" concept of education where the individual with knowledge in a specific subject is viewed as supreme. And while traditionally this conventional perception of education still occurs in the classroom, it is also one that can be applied to any format where someone has more control over others on niche topics such as writing and the publishing process. In the end, if publishers demonstrate knowledge of the

publishing field through sharing blog posts, the audience's respect and reputation as a company will flourish, as well as the relationships held with authors and readers.

Interestingly, blog posts can be pushed further into other virtual communities by creating content that falls into one, two, or three of Berger's categories to establish content that audience members want to share with one another. In this sense, audiences will start sharing blog posts through the blogging site publisher's use, share (i.e. cross advertise) it on other social media sites, or email it to their friends. In doing so, it is the audience that does the distribution of content. Publishers solely create the content, keeping in mind how they want the information to be presented to their audiences, and let the sharing begin. This involvement is known as *participant framework*. There are two types of blogging participants—ratified and unratified participants. Brooke Bolander, author of *Language and Power in Blogs: Interaction, Disagreements and Agreements* delineates the power of these terms,

A 'participant framework' is made up of all the people in a gathering, both ratified and unratified participants. Ratified participants include the speaker, the addressee and any other official participants who are participants, and may thus become speakers and addressees in the course of the interaction. (23)

Bolander's definition of ratified participants includes the publisher, staff, and audience members participating through comments and sharing. Unratified participants include those individuals acting as bystanders and eavesdroppers—those participants that merely observe on a consistent basis, frequently, or are passing through. Unratified participants are often frequenting social media sites to enjoy perusing the content (e.g., selfies, posts, shares) of people that interest them. Most of us on social media have been an unratified participant at one point. But if individuals are not engaging within the community, does that mean that those individuals cannot be members of virtual communities?

According to the collective intelligence model, discussion and dialogue are vital in contributing to a community's collective intelligence, and it can be inferred that this engagement is also necessary to be a part of a virtual community, so as a publisher creating a blog for the first time, second time, or merely tweaking a current blog, remembering audience and creating content that falls into Berger's three categories, will aid in easily spreading brands.

Blogging and Publisher

I held an internship at a publishing company last summer in Minneapolis, MN, and in retrospect, there are many publishing companies clumped in the twin cities; it is a competitive market there, but they are all in contact with one another and attend the same events. There are companies that have been in operation for decades and some, like the one I interned at, are only a few years old. Moreover, no matter the standing of the company, social media marketing can change the status of any company, and many companies specialize in solely counseling companies on how they can utilize their social media sites to boost their brands.

I wrote social media posts for this company, my favorite being blog posts. I enjoyed blogging for this company, not only because personal and informal writing reminds me of my creative writing interests but also because I was responsible for creating content. In the beginning stages, I did a lot of research to see what other publishing companies in the area were including in their blog posts and the information they considered important enough to include on their social media sites.

Much of the content paralleled previous content at my company's blog, illustrating monumental themes in publishing; I kept these themes in mind while deciding topics for posts. Still, every publishing company is uncommon in how they operate and what they publish; it is

discernable that the more intriguing and spreadable the content is the more relevant and successful they are in the publishing community—spatially and virtually.

Before, during, and after creating content for a company's blog, it is essential to keep the marketing purpose at the forefront. Anything that is published reflects on the company; this can be wonderful or devastating, especially depending on who is assigned to write content. But being aware of the ultimate goal and purpose of blogs will keep content fresh and current for readers.

Part of a blog's purpose includes establishing who is in the audience. Some publishers target authors, some authors and readers, and some potential clients. Casting a wide net is important because the Internet can be disguised with unratified participants, and this complicates the clarity of who the audience *should* be. Yet if the publisher's goal is to fully market their brand and grow, marketing to current and potential authors and readers is essential. The most effective way to help current and potential authors and establish and maintain relationships with readers is to vary content. This may be done by alternating content through the four categories of audience members (i.e., current authors, potential authors, current readers, and potential readers).

Essentially, the first two categories go hand in hand and the last two do too, so posting twice each week, each post dedicated toward aiming at authors and readers will help begin the initial steps into forming a virtual community. In the following sections, recommendations for content will be made to assist in brainstorming.

Blogging and Author

It is evident that blogging is used as a vessel through which to create and sustain powerful online communities and this can be done through firstly recognizing topics for writing inspiration. Authors have to spend money to get their books published (even self-publishing) and

not all of them will have the capital to finance their ideas. Some authors may take out loans, or borrow from family and friends, but some authors may not wish to do so.

Crowdfunding is an alternative for these authors that helps publish their books; crowdfunding is a form of fundraising that funds a project or venture, whether it is a book, restaurant, YouTuber, or inventive product, by raising fiscal donations from a large number of people online; and these contributions can range from one penny to thousands of dollars, depending on the interest of the contributors (*The Wise Ink Blog*). Publishizer, Kickstarter, Inkshares, GoFundMe, Patreon, Indiegogo, and a plethora more are popular crowdfunding platforms with fees for using their services.

Of course, some authors (especially if they are new to the publishing process and the services to help authors) will not be aware of these services, so it is a publisher's job to delineate these services to them. And while this may seem unnecessary, writing a post about crowdfunding may be the difference between not having a client and having a *new* and *successful* client.

Sometimes, all an author needs from blog posts are writing tips, prompts, or inspiration. Writers block happens to even the most skilled and creative writers and offering writing prompts to invigorate a writer's mind to add more depth to a scene, humor, or add depth to a character that is unrealistic. These prompts are a quick and reliable fix for writers' weary and can be of a publisher's own creation; my favorite writing prompts include asking writers to write a scene (of their choosing) using only one of the five senses. This prompt can be translated into five prompts (i.e. one prompt for each sense) and can prove to be interesting additions in anyone's writing. Asking a question such as, "Why did you do that?" and finishing the scene, or describing the aftermath of an explosion/burglary can prove stirring for writers stuck in a rut. For a glut of prompts, Pinterest can offer a cornucopia of writing ideas and other helpful blogging sites

because most authors use Pinterest or personal blogs to market their personal brands and seek motivation from the endless pins available.

As far as inspiring blog posts go, famous quotes, or even images of beautiful scenes can spark imaginations. Offering an array of these materials to authors can not only dig them out of a writer's hole but also aid them during the grueling writing process. And a blog does not have to be geared toward the writing process; a publisher can also offer reading suggestions and interesting finds a company notices on social media. Blogging is a playful approach to the formal newsletter where a company's personality and mission can shine through, so offering recommendations for good reads, and offering authors outside posts can give authors guidance without spending time together; this creates less work for publishers, editing and consulting wise by still giving authors materials while brainstorming, outlining, and writing their books.

Blogging and Reader

Appealing to the readers that frequent a blog can be two-fold because authors can also be readers. But readers are important to focus on because books would not be profitable without them and some readers may not be authors, but may follow a publisher's blog for information on the literary community such as literary events, book release parties and dates, book clubs, and new books the company is publishing. And as we all know, the most effective way for the popularity of a book to spread is by word of mouth, so appealing to these readers is crucial in order to aid in the spreading of content and the materials (books) publishing companies are publishing.

Chapter Three: Best Practices for Publishers

It is said that “a blog can help publishers build and maintain relationships, improve image, and gain feedback” (Bly 144). These are the three overall goals of using a blog for business purposes. However, in attaining the ability to establish and sustain relationships with authors and readers, advance a company’s reputation, and receive comments, it is vital to develop the best practices for a blog. These best practices will not only help the blog succeed marketing-wise but will also sustain company presences online.

Best Blogging Platforms

There are many worthy blogging platforms that can provide what a company needs to form a presence online, but some are better than others. Some blogging sites are free for users, some offer upgrades at a monthly charge, and some require payment for their services. Out of all the blogging platforms used today, Blogger and WordPress are two strong blog generators that can be used for professional reasons. I have used each of these platforms (WordPress thrice and Blogger once) and appreciate them, but they are also different in numerous ways.

Blogger and WordPress each have templates and themes, archives, publishing capabilities, security measures, and multiple author management (Bausch). These features are central to blogging as well as to these two sites in promoting safe and multifaceted blogging for its users. Blogger was the first blogging platform created and launched on August 23, 1999 by San Francisco startup Pyra Labs (Bausch). Although Blogger pioneered the establishment and emergence of blogging platforms, WordPress is also considered one of the leading blogging sites, launched on May 27, 2003, by its founders, Matt Mullenweg and Mike Little. Many conversations infer Blogger is outdated and limited while sites like WordPress, although newer,

have taken Blogger's characteristics and used them as a springboard for improvements to the blogging concept as a whole.

When thinking of ownership, it is clear that Blogger is owned by Google; Google controls Blogger in the sense that they can shut it down and shut down access to it at any time (although Blogger has not done so, yet). WordPress, however, is owned by the user because when one creates a WordPress account, they are using a WordPress hosting provider; this allows them to control their information and how it is or is not given to third parties. This feature is nice because in this sense, users have control over their privacy and information; unlike other social media sites we have discussed that sell user information to third parties in exchange for checking a little box.

Blogger is also limited in regards to the specific features it offers, but WordPress is open source software so people can easily extend its features; this is best for long term professional purposes; this characteristic enables users the option to extend their technical expertise, by holding responsibility for security and updates of their blogs. Blogger is also limited in the amount of templates available (colors and layouts can be changed with built-in-tools), but WordPress offers thousands of themes for professional-looking websites. In that same vein, it is imperative to note that while WordPress offers a larger range of features and themes, Blogger is an easily maneuverable platform for beginner bloggers or for individuals and companies looking for a simple blogging site that will help them publish their content being as straightforward as possible (Bausch). Of course, every company must decide for themselves which blogging platform suits their purpose the best.

One major benefit to Blogger is that it has a secure platform. Because Blogger is a part of Google, the security is strong. But with WordPress, users are secure if they issue their own

backups (with plugins WordPress supplies). Another important criteria to consider is blog support. The blogging support on Blogger is limited compared to WordPress, because Blogger offers forums and basic documentation for users to consider. But WordPress offers documentation, community forums, and IRC chatrooms with help from skilled users and developers. WordPress's forums and chatrooms connect users having issues with their accounts to individuals that can help them. These forums seem to help users with the problems they experience—WordPress being of more assistance than Blogger.

Engagement with Audience

As a publishing blog, authors and readers are the audience, but keeping the idea of *audience* in mind while writing, editing, publishing a post, and responding to comments can help find an ideal blogging community and further a company's online presence.

In order to make the most of a blog, Robert Bly, author of *Blog, Schmog!*, suggests that bloggers “use your voice, use someone qualified, update your blog frequently, hyperlink, read comments, track users and numbers, and be particular on what private info you include” (147-148). Bly's passage touches on one of the most significant points to remember; blogs are only successful if we use them seriously as a marketing tool and keep our audience in mind. Many bloggers and social media users use their sites by posting on inconsistent dates, using changeable word counts, *not* cross-promoting on all social media sites, and exhibiting an indifference of the outcomes (i.e., creating a following, popularity, reputation). But when using a blog to promote a business, keeping audience at the frontline with specific strategies will appeal to their interests and solidify a following.

There is a profusion of ways to be successful in the fashion that publishers conduct their blogs. Firstly, creating an “About” section is helpful for potential readers and authors, because

this page gives them background on who works for the publishing company and offers information about the business and individual bios for each member of the company, to give the audience insight into who the company employs and the potential to develop a personal connection with writers. Recognizing writers begins the process of issuing authors and readers into virtual communities because they are distinguishable, and audience members may feel more comfortable reading content from writers they initially knew superficially.

The universal tone of blogging is professional yet informal because while blog writing is more laid-back, it is also presented online, and anyone can see it. So being personal (i.e. relatable) and professional (i.e. focusing on content) will give audience members a simple middle-ground to actually enjoy the content presented to them. What this looks like is using personality and style to convey professional content about the writing process of books. Of course, one must be careful when including crude words and controversial topics. But that all depends on the business and what is appropriate for *their* online image. The guidelines for each blog should be included on the site or in a FAQ tab to weed out any unwanted visitor comments.

Blogs are intended to be humanizing, enjoyable, popular, and valuable, and this is unique to each blog; no two blogs are the same (Bly). But being as authentic as possible perpetuates the feeling of belonging and community online, because while blogging is an opposite platform from spatial communities, the appeal of online communities (as discussed earlier) is that individuals can engage in them to feel connected and comfortable in their interests.

The blogging structure depends on how blogs are conducted, and I suggest writing at least two posts each week with at least 500 words for each post (Bausch). Consistency is fundamental when posting, so posting on the same days and times each week will create a consistent flow of content for viewers. When posting, subscribers will receive an email alerting

them to new posts, but creating a routine of posting on Wednesdays and Fridays (for instance) gives the audience a concrete idea of when to expect new posts. Maintaining this routine will also keep writers on track when publishing content because the most ineffective way to run a blog is to be absent on the site for over a week and then explode the blog with multiple posts at once. Little pieces and posts of information keep authors and readers updated without overwhelming them, or the publisher.

When I look at a blog that is primarily text, I feel a sense of dread. Chopping up information with related images will also help the audience visualize the content described in posts as well as make reading the content breezy. If someone is blogging using WordPress, they can also create “tags.” These tags are created by them when they are in the process of editing a post, so they can create categories that a specific post falls under. Case in point, if a blogger is writing a post about grammar tips, they will want to create tags such as “writing,” “writing process,” “grammar,” “writing tips,” and so on that their posts can fall under. Using these tags makes it easy for audience members to find information on particular topics of interest to them. So if authors or readers are looking for posts on a specific subject, they can maneuver through tags rather than scroll through the whole archive, which may be a tedious process if a blog is updated at least twice each week (Bausch).

Hyperlinking is an excellent tool allowing bloggers to link to outside sources; this may be done to give credit to sources from which they attained information, or perhaps users would like to display interesting sites to develop authors’ knowledge of publishing, or to give background on content without having to give an explanation in posts. Similar to hyperlinking, cross-advertising posts on company social media sites will drive extra traffic to blogs by informing those that may not be aware of blogs.

And while a publisher can use any blogging site to promote their brand, Blogger and WordPress have an added safety measure that ensures bloggers, the blog, and communities are safe from any attackers, also known as Internet trolls. Considering blogging is healthy for individuals to express themselves, similar to all social media sites, this exposure and interactivity on the internet inadvertently promotes vulnerability for bloggers. This vulnerability may appear insignificant, but it can cause security issues for bloggers from any background. Individuals called *internet trolls* can damage the self-esteem and reputation of bloggers because they are indistinguishable; they have the capability to infiltrate online communities and create chaos—not only breaking up these communities, but also traumatizing individuals regularly using social media as their creative outlets (Lewis).

YouTube is an excellent example of trolling behavior, because on YouTube, users are able to hide behind their usernames (usually random and far from their true names) and harass YouTubers. YouTubers have some power, however; they can disable these comments, but this act also prevents benevolent comments from being posted. So it is not uncommon to see popular YouTubers delete their accounts or "take a break" to recuperate from their constant bullying. Such popular YouTubers include comedic YouTuber, Lucas Cruikshank, ASMR-creator, Springbok, viral sensation, Jessi Slaughter, and many more. The issue remains that no matter how strong a virtual community is, how many benefits it provides, the sense of belonging it may bring, or the connections and relationships that grow between individuals, trolls can effortlessly impede and shatter the strong barriers created by these communities. Picking up the pieces is not always possible.

A *troll* is internet slang and described by *Urban Dictionary* as, "the art of deliberately, cleverly, and secretly pissing people off... using dialogue"; and this can be done on blogs,

chatrooms, forums, and any social media site (Lewis). A troll can be a friend, a family member, or a stranger. The latter is almost always what we witness online.

Trolls are no longer just for storybooks; they are now online and emotionally destructive. They are autonomous and indistinguishable; this serves as the ideal playground for trolls to prey on other internet users. Physical, mythological trolls can cause physical pain and prevent passage across bridges; they are aggressors in these cases, but these instances in old storybooks do not compare to the psychological brutality inflicted by trolls online.

Autonomy is the currency of the web, and while it can be beneficial and harmless in virtual communities and with users with compassionate intentions, it can also be detrimental when speech takes the form of a troll (Cross). Frighteningly, trolls are estimated to have narcissistic, psychopathic, and sadistic personality traits (Lewis). These features are discouraging, considering the satisfaction that trolls experience posting crude comments on social media. Trolls usually work alone and are difficult to pick out and identify amongst other internet users. In an online format, a troll can blend into the site like camouflage and post comments that can cause hurt feelings and disrupt comfortable atmospheres. Online communities permit users the chance to role-play, adopt new identities, and hide behind masks (Cross). These qualities can be good but also can be bad when interrupted by various types of trolls. According to Andrea Weckerle, author of *Civility in the Digital Age: How Companies and People Can Triumph over Haters, Trolls, Bullies, and Other Jerks*, there is not one type of troll.

A troll may be broken down into five distinct categories. The first type of troll includes the spamming troll; this troll inserts links and unnecessary information into their comments that usually do not correspond to the community's discussion. Kook trolls are regular members that drop comments with no basis, a flamer troll works to make inflammatory comments, a hit-and-

runner troll will make a couple posts and move on (typically to harass another virtual community), and psycho trolls feel good by making others feel bad (Weckerle). So with these five trolls in mind, a publishing company can create their blogs, steering away from the possibility of one or more of the five trolls listed above intersecting their spaces.

What makes this multifaceted trolling possible is the absence of physicality. Christopher Hopkinson states in his article, “Trolling in Online Discussions: From Provocation to Community-Building,” that the “physical distance between participants may potentially have a dehumanizing effect. When involved in antagonistic interactions, it is easier to see opponents not as real human beings but as mere characters in a form of game” (6). In this passage, Hopkinson is remarking on a connection between an irregular online interaction with someone and its possibility that if people are not visual, just textual, they are not truly people. As Hopkinson relays, this creates an inhumane effect on internet users, and internet trolls, already antagonistic, begin to view other internet users as fictional. This distance makes it possible for trolls to desecrate the online communities and emotional well-being of individuals with a,

Delight in insulting, shocking, upsetting, and provoking others. They can write attacking and inflammatory content, bring irrelevant and extraneous information to online exchanges to throw discussions off course, or post offensive and shocking images, often doctored to serve their purposes. (Weckerle 87)

No topic is off limits for them, and with physicality stripped from internet users, a troll will not have remorse, because they have the notion that we are only truly alive when we are seen, and when we are not, it is easy for trolls to leave hateful comments. Of course, these trolls would not comment so hatefully if they were physically in front of the people they are mocking. Then, they would be confronted with the idea that the person they are physically hearing and speaking to is alive and well. The troll would then see reactions of their enemy’s actions by the physical motions and facial expressions that the non-troll makes. This idea from Hopkinson exemplifies

the importance of physicality in interactions, and how without it, internet users are missing key aspects of themselves. This absence leaves users vulnerable and easy targets for trolls.

While acting with trolling tendencies may not seem virtually punishable, there can be consequences for their actions in personal and professional lives. When the identity of popular trolls is revealed, these individuals are socially ostracized and alienated by the important people in their lives. For example, on July 20, 2007, the CEO of Whole Foods, John Mackey, was revealed by *The Wall Street Journal* as a troll under the username "Rahodeb," a scramble of his wife's name, Deborah. For an eight-year period, Mackey used Yahoo!'s finance forum to undermine Whole Foods's main competitor, Wild Oats Market (Weckerle). While Mackey claimed that his chatter was harmless and not meant to come back to him, his posts released information about Whole Foods's merger with Wild Oats Market while simultaneously undercutting the sales and successfulness of the grocery brand competitor. These actions could be labeled as psycho or kook troll tendencies. And on December 24, 2009, Mackey resigned as chairman of Whole Foods with his reputation hanging in the balance (Weckerle).

So with the risk of tarnishing one's reputation, it is baffling as to why trolls do what they do. Why are trolls openly aggressive? They do not use trickery; they are not noble; they are not deceptive (Sautman). And as stated earlier by Hopkinson, trolls tend to have psychological dispositions that cause them to terrorize others, the main issue being narcissism. Envy is a trait that everyone possesses, but the degrees to which fits of jealousy manifest vary with each person, and with the autonomy of the internet, it becomes much easier for trolls to spew comments of hate and anger, bringing down the confidence of internet users and boosting the egocentrism of trolls. Mackey's trolling of Wild Oats Market was fueled by this envy and progressed as far as it did because the internet allowed Mackey autonomy and while he is one of the most influential

advocates of the organic food movement, he is a perfect example of how the identity of trolls can be unexpected, and even leaders in strong movements.

Civic Discourse

Internet trolls are worth noting in this thesis, due to their prevalence in blogs and the possibility of a troll appearing in a publishing blog; especially because almost all virtual communities believe that protecting the health, safety, and experience in their specific communities require rules and boundaries, agreed upon by the creator(s) of the blog and audience (Song). Without an agreement of rules or policies on every blog, trolls can appear and even though trolls are a nuisance, their damage can go further than harming the mental health of Internet users.

Trolls can also have an effect on several aspects of a publishing company including,

A lower employee morale, reduction in work quality, lower productivity, absenteeism, loss of employee loyalty, employee retaliation, higher employee turnover, costs associated with recruitment and training of new employees, loss of customers and clients, reputational damage, a lowering of company valuation, and legal problems. (Weckerle 6)

With all of these potential issues weighing over a blog, the most practical action is to note a blogging policy that authors and readers can adhere to while commenting. And while WordPress and Blogger allow the author approval over comments before they are posted, a policy will (hopefully) save them the time they would have spent sifting through comments that may not reach the blog's mission, by outlaying respectful and civic discourse, procedures when the policies are not met, and how privacy will be protected (Song).

Not only will a blog policy warn commenters what speech will not be tolerated, and what will be deleted, but it also opens the door to authenticity (Trepte). With the trolls' antics safely bordered away from the community, bloggers can be truly authentic and comfortable in their

settings. This, of course, furthers a closeness of virtual blogging communities and their inevitable collective intelligence that virtual communities strive for. With these policies and with the help of WordPress and Blogger's commenting approval safety measure, bloggers do not have to worry about engaging in negative commenting with trolls.

The common phrase, "Do not feed the trolls" is echoed through social media platforms as users attempt to fight the losing battle with trolls (Blood). Why trolls should not be "fed," so to speak, is because they thrive off of the attention. While simply leaving jarring and uncomfortable content on various platforms feeds into their self-indulgences, having the user comment back to them, gives the troll even more power and fuels future tirades. It can be infuriating to sit back and watch a troll's escapades, but instilling policies on blogs and using a safe blogging platform will insure the safety of any publishing company looking to strengthen their online presence; trolls no longer have the power when they are silenced with barriers.

Including a commenting policy on blogs sets the expectations for not only the audience but also the employees in the company, because posts will surely be a joint effort and being proactive online is *playing smart* (Hyder). This safety net protects publishing companies and their employees from trolls, but also from any legal trouble because,

Inappropriate commentary can do many things: get the company in legal trouble with the US and other government agencies, companies, customers, or the public, diminish the company's brand name and reputation from negative publicity, damage the reputation with releasing private information, cost the company the ability to get patents or undermine its competitive advantage, or cost some jobs. (Hyder 180)

Even though a blog policy can delineate the guidelines of blogs, they are not intended to dictate a company's image. But responsible interactions and conversations on blogs are what will produce a publishing company's image (Hyder).

The first step in creating an effective policy is to be aware of where the blog stands. In other words, what is the purpose of the blog? Is a company's blog meant to cater to authors and readers, or is it targeting a general audience? Next, clarify who owns what. Guarantee any information included in a blog and the comments must be hyperlinked, to give credit to authors. Third, keeping confidential information private assures that the company can be trusted with private information. Also, deciding who is responsible for writing posts and answering or approving comments gives identity to the blog as well as dictates the rules of engagement. It is crucial to address taboo topics in the policy too, to explain which can be discussed in posts and potential comments, have a system for monitoring the social sphere, make training available, and finally, have a crisis plan (Hyder).

Writing a policy on WordPress or Blogger limits the autonomy on these sites, *and* guarantees that contact information is provided (i.e. email address) in case the policy is ignored by commenters. And when users are distinguishable, it limits the likelihood that a blogger will troll a blog site, because the appeal to trolling is being autonomous and swiftly moving through sites without identification. Trolls are opposite of a blog's purpose because while bloggers are appealing to their audience to arrange a community and create a sense of connectedness through dialogue and collective thoughts, trolls attempt to break apart these communities and evoke chaos.

If a fellow blogger wishes to provide a comment on one or numerous posts, an email will be sent to the email associated with the user's blog account asking for the creator's approval of the comment, to which they may review the comment and approve or delete it. This feature keeps authority in the hands of the blog creator, certifying that the comments on their post reside

within their virtual publishing community. This measure is paramount in maintaining connections between publishing companies and their potential and current authors and readers.

Without safety in virtual communities, an audience will feel vulnerable and may distance themselves. Distancing could include audience members being unratified members and not fully contributing to the community to which they belong. With that said, it is central to remember how to devise policies on appropriate civic discourse and keep in mind policies while assessing pending comments, by measuring if they meet the blog's standards.

Conclusion

Blogging was the first social media platform created in the digital age and while it may get less attention than Facebook and Twitter, it has sparked the social media phenomenon that we witness each time we use an electronic device. Not only do we use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and many more to communicate and stay connected, but they can also be used professionally, to market brands.

Publishing companies may want to market their brands with multiple social media outlets (it is highly recommended to do so), but contributing at least twice each week to a blog with information concerning current and potential authors and readers such as writing tips, book release dates, and interesting facts from the literature world, one's company can keep their audience updated with frequent posts and grow their online presence.

Blogging has multiple purposes, not only to use posts to share important information with authors and readers but also to create a virtual community surrounding the online publishing world. While physical communities have their benefits, they also have several setbacks. Spatial communities limit one's autonomy and are not accessible all day. These communities are also often times not created based on personal choice. Such communities can include neighborhoods, coffee houses, colleges, and much more. But online communities are communities that users elect to be a part of; they are communities with limited pressure and perpetual accessibility. And unlike spatial communities, they offer extra layers of advantages such as identifying and connecting with individuals with similar interests and contributing to and being inside a collective intelligence—a space where ideas and discussions birth varying ideas and knowledge on issues and topics in writing and publishing.

It is vital to proceed with a blog, keeping in mind not only the previously mentioned gains, but also the risks, and how they can be overcome. One of the benefits of cultivating these online communities around publishing blogs is the indistinguishability—the ability to engage in blog dialogue and content to the comfort level of the user. But this asset can also work against these communities if the creators of blogs are not cautious of predators called *trolls*.

A troll can impede and soil the communication and connections made by community members if boundaries are not instilled by blog creators. This means, no identification between like individuals and no journey toward collective intelligence can be initiated—ultimately leading toward incapacity to further brands and use social media to guide individuals during the publishing process. This can result in many problematic situations—the major ones being tarnished brand reputations, legal troubles, and the failure of building a community online for a publishing audience.

To combat these trolls, choosing the appropriate blogging platform (such as WordPress or Blogger) with security measures such as having the power to approve and disapprove comments and tabs to create policies that community members can use while writing comments. Using these best blogging practices ensures companies can safely and with purpose, use social media to make their brands and appeal to publishing audiences efficiently in the technology age.

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