

**Spannerworks White Paper**  
**May 2006**

## Blogging for Search:

Should you include blogging as part of  
your search engine optimisation strategy?

**Contents**

- 1. Introduction ..... 3
- 2. What is a blog?..... 3
- 3. What are the benefits of blogs for search? ..... 3
- 4. Where should your blog sit? ..... 4
- 5. What to put in your blog? ..... 5
- 6. Is it OK to include press releases in your blog? ..... 6
- 7. Why and how should you optimise your blog?..... 6
- 8. Linking out to other blogs and websites ..... 6
- 9. Linking to other parts of your website..... 6
- 10. Why and how to archive your blog ..... 7
- 11. Choosing a template for your blog ..... 7
- 12. How regularly do you need to update your blog?..... 7
- 13. How to integrate your blog into your existing site..... 8
- 14. Conclusion ..... 8
- 15. About the author ..... 9
- 16. About Spannerworks..... 9
- 17. Contact Spannerworks..... 9
- 18. Appendix ..... 10

## 1. Introduction

This White Paper, by Nilhan Jayasinghe, Head of Search at Spannerworks, explores the issues surrounding blogging on business websites. It discusses the benefits of adding a blog to an existing website and provides instructions on integrating, maintaining and syndicating a blog to increase direct traffic and search engine visibility.

In July 2005, Converseon's study of the top 20 search engine listings for Business Week's top 100 brands in the US, found that no less than 39% of the results were derived from consumer-generated media such as blogs. The question is, could you use a blog on your business website in order to improve your website's visibility, and if so, how should you go about it?

## 2. What is a blog?

A blog, (short for web-log), is a regularly updated collection of content, like a diary or comment page; think of it as the online equivalent of a newspaper column, with the newest information presented first. Unlike newspaper columns, blogs are two-way communications that allow readers to post comments and interact with the opinions being presented.

Traditionally, blogs have been created by the public, offering opinions on anything from politics, to why they love their new Playstation. But from a business point of view, blogging offers many benefits, both in terms of search engine optimisation (that we are primarily concerned with here) and in terms of engaging with consumers, customers, partners and employees. Having an open dialogue with the people who affect the profitability and success of your business is a huge potential benefit in its own right.

## 3. What are the benefits of blogs for search?

### **Fresh content attracts more attention from search engines**

Search engines have limited resources for regularly crawling websites. While most search engines will attempt to index all web pages found on a frequent basis, daily visits have to be limited to those that are more popular and more importantly, those offering frequently changing content. Hence news sites like BBC Online will attract hourly visits from the major crawlers.

Getting search engines to regularly crawl a company site, where content changes infrequently can be difficult. For some finance sectors like insurance and mortgages, the same content can be in place for years; legal restraints governing the product/service related copy and buying mechanisms seldom need to change. In most cases, a blog can offer an easy means of introducing fresh content on a regular basis and therefore attract the major crawlers more frequently and attract traffic for terms related to current issues. Fresh content can also help a site to be seen as a greater authority on a topic.

### **Increased Link Equity – Community Building**

Link equity (measure of relevant links from other sites) is possibly the biggest factor used by modern search algorithms for evaluating relevance. Blogs by their nature, create online communities quickly and efficiently. They offer a simple way to link to other blogs and encourage commentary and feedback. The Trackback protocol common to most blogging platforms which enable readers to trace commentary between bloggers, create interlinked blogging communities around specific topics.

For company websites, a blog offering original insight and opinion can be an invaluable way to attract links from other blogs and websites in your market, improving visibility in general, while raising your profile in a relevant community.

### **RSS – helping to get your content syndicated**

Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is a powerful means of distributing your Blog commentary around the web and directly to your audience. RSS is a web feed specified in an XML format, which can be published easily by other sites and blogs. It is common for a blog to provide a headline summary, with links to the full post via RSS. When the feed is published on other sites, links will automatically be generated to the posts on your site, which will allow readers to access the full post, while increasing the link equity of the publishing site.

It will also provide additional traffic through specific blog search engines like Google Blog Search (blogsearch.google.com/), Technorait and Feedstar. As well as generate direct traffic through the increased use of RSS readers. RSS readers are small applications installed on PCs, which enable people to simultaneously monitor one or more RSS feeds of interest, without the need to check every site individually for the latest comment. Online RSS readers offered by the main search engines like Google personalised has also helped spread the use of remote RSS monitoring.

## **4. Where should your blog sit?**

Most personal blogs are created on special sites like Blogger, which offer all the tools to create and maintain a blog, without the need to register your own domain and pay for hosting.

For companies, integrating the blog into the main company site is recommended for the following reasons:

- The additional attention from search engines will benefit the company site, and not just the blog
- Any link equity generated to the blog will propagate through the entire site, increasing visibility for the website as a whole, not just the blog
- A blog can provide a rich user experience making it easier to convert to a customer
- Attaching the blog to the branded website will make it seem more credible

While a blog integrated within the company site offers all the benefits mentioned above, it's worth considering the alternative:

#### Separate blog space

- ✎ Can be seen to be more independent from the business
- ✎ A genuine voice has more chance of connecting with a community (Links from the blogging community)
- ✎ Greater freedom to express opinion
- ✎ Freedom to link to external sources without the risk of losing visitors from the main business site

#### Keeping it on the main domain

- ✎ If the corporate site has good visibility, the blog will enjoy the link equity for the main site and will have greater visibility
- ✎ Any links to the blog section will propagate to the main site and will help the entire site to rank better
- ✎ Blogs generate fresh content, which will attract more search engine spidering for the entire site
- ✎ If the blog is providing a counter argument to consumer gossip, this may be more trusted (depending on the issue)
- ✎ Easier to convert blog traffic to customers, where appropriate
- ✎ Allows the site to attract customers through popular current issues

## 5. What to put in your blog?

A successful blog must offer original content and insight to its audience. A blog devised simply to reiterate the company line will fail to engage the community and links. It will also fail to spread its message to other websites through syndication or attract direct visitors through RSS readers. Indeed, a blog that reads like an extension of the marketing line, pushing product and services in marketing speak, may well damage your standing and the brand.

Remember a blog can be about anything and is only limited by the imagination of the blogger/publisher. For a business site, a blog should be about the industry. Growth, legislation, takeovers and mergers can all be talked about in a blog if you can offer some genuine commentary beyond the regular business news channels. Funny stories (for example, unusual claims for car insurance or customer travel experiences) can attract links from personal blogs, and more importantly links from news sites, which may choose to pick it. With so many consumer generated opinion, often a journalist will seek a counter opinion from an industry expert.

Blogpulse.com is just one entity that is using blogging as a way of identifying current trends. They offer tools ([www.blogpulse.com/tools.html](http://www.blogpulse.com/tools.html)) that enable you to identify 'the buzz' – what everyone is discussing right now, track trends and follow conversation threads. It's good fun and could be invaluable in helping you to understand what people are interested in and to position your own blog.

## 6. Is it OK to include press releases in your blog?

While it makes sense to make your news as widely available as possible via syndication, including a straight press release in a blog is too corporate. You could pick up an issue in a press release and refer to it with an inline link, but you shouldn't simply reproduce it word for word.

If you want to syndicate your news online, present your press releases in RSS format and publicise through news networks such as Topix.net or PR Newswire, which use RSS technology, but do not position themselves as blogs.

## 7. Why and how should you optimise your blog?

The main priority when writing a blog to attract search engine traffic is the language used in the post. Just like the content on the regular parts of the site, a blog entry must be written in the common language of the searcher looking for your entry. In search engine marketing terms, this means conducting search term research to understand what specific phrases and keywords people in your industry or sector are most interested in. Sources such as Overture, Google as well as Hitwise can provide valuable data on the popularity of search terms. Include the popular terms in your blog and you will appear against those terms in the search engines.

If you're addressing a current issue in the news, then look at the language used in the media (online, TV news, newspapers). Also look at the language used in other blogs in your sector. Identify four or five search terms that are the must include phrases for your blog. These need to appear in the most important elements of the page: HTML page title, heading and copy.

## 8. Linking out to other blogs and websites

Blogs are about connecting with the community, so linking to relevant or related online articles or other blogs can benefit users and search engines. This will also help your blog to be seen as a genuine source of information rather than just company propaganda.

If you intend to have a permanent reference to another site or blog, place this link in the template of the blog, so it appears on all pages.

If you simply want to reference another site related to the post, place this link directly within the copy of the post.

For example, the BBC news online states [link underlined text to BBC.co.uk] .....

## 9. Linking to other parts of your website

While a blog is a great way to attract traffic by covering a current topic of interest, the conversion of this traffic should be considered when designing the blog. It's more than likely, after reading your post, at least some of your audience may want to look into your company's offering. Clearly defined opportunities for linking to the regular parts of your website will do this effectively. It may be as simple as a signature link at the end of every post:

Posted by Name at 'Big Name Car Insurance' [link underlined text to home page]

Search engines pay greater attention to inline links (those included within the copy) compared to navigation links. Blog posts provide a good opportunity for creating inline links to other parts of your website. When linking to other pages in your website from the blog, always link the words that are most relevant to the page you're linking to.

The text describing the link (often referred to as Anchor Text) is given relevance weighting by search engines.

For example, with rising interest rates, more and more people are careful to calculate mortgage repayments [[link underlined text to your mortgage calculator page](#)].

## 10. Why and how to archive your blog

As more posts are added to your blog, the older posts should be archived. This enables you to:

- Maintain fast download speed
- Maintain the effectiveness of the optimisation. As the page grows and different content is introduced, you can optimise for different topical search terms
- Make it easier for visitors to find what they searched for

Blogs are usually archived with links to older posts, ordered by date. But to maximise search engine visibility, it is recommended that text contained in the link to older posts describes the subject of the post.

For example:

[21.03.06. Women's accidents cost less](#)

[20.02.06. Insurance premiums set to rise](#)

[3.02.06. Car insurance fraud on the increase](#)

Note: Including a popular search term in the links to your post will help search engines to define relevance, as well as improving usability for visitors.

## 11. Choosing a template for your blog

The blog should be in the same design template as your other website pages. Remember, when your blog page ranks in search engines, visitors will arrive on this page, and not your home page, so keeping all the usual site navigation and branding visible is helpful.

## 12. How regularly do you need to update your blog?

One of the main advantages of adding a blog for search is to encourage regular crawling. If the blog is not frequently updated, search engines will pay less attention to it, the blogging community will lose interest and link references will subside. It will soon become a stale part of the website with little added benefit for search or its audience. We recommend that a blog is updated weekly or bi-weekly; once a

month as an absolute minimum. Anything less, and it is no longer fulfilling its function as a blog or as an asset in your search optimisation strategy.

### 13. How to integrate your blog into your existing site

Ideally a blog should be linked from the navigation on your site. This will increase its prominence in the site structure and improve visibility in search engines. The more you reference your blog from other sections of the site, the better chance it will have of gaining visibility.

### 14. Conclusion

A blog can be a very useful part of your online marketing effort, and I hope this article has help clarify some of the benefits to your search marketing campaign. But remember, blogging is first about engaging the community, with any increase in search engine rankings an added bonus. In my experience, nearly all company blogs designed primarily to attract search engine traffic have failed to attract the links necessary for ranking benefit. If you get it right, a blog will enhance your user experience generating traffic and customers while keeping the interest of the community. If you really haven't anything interesting to say, then blogging is probably not for you.

Blogging can play a significant role in search engine optimisation and offers an excellent opportunity for business sites with fixed products to introduce fresh content. Blogging in the world of the individual is simple. Blogger.com explains how as an individual you can be up and blogging in literally five minutes ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)). A business blog needs a little more thought as we have explained above. It also needs a commitment from someone in the organisation (or someone external, but on your side) who relishes the opportunity to write fresh relaxed, challenging, content about issues that will be of interest to your target audience.

The rewards are significant. Get it right and you can open an invaluable dialogue with your customers or clients, improve your brand positioning with added value opinion-leading content, increase brand loyalty with existing customers, generate a community around your brand, grow online sales, improve link equity and ultimately, improve search visibility.

Happy blogging!

## 15. About the author

### **Nilhan Jayasinghe, Head of Search, Spannerworks**

Nilhan Jayasinghe is Head of Search at search marketing agency, Spannerworks, the eighth fastest growing digital agency in the UK\*.

Nilhan began working at Spannerworks having worked as an electronics engineer and later conversion to Software Engineering. Following spells at ICI and Ericsson, he worked as a programmer and Web developer for a Brighton based company, where his interest in search engine optimisation began.

In his time at Spannerworks, Nilhan has helped grow the company from a handful of search marketers to one boasting the largest natural search team in Europe. With a largely corporate portfolio of clients, he is an advocate of long term search marketing strategies focusing on delivering a good user experience. While not averse to speaking at the odd industry event (SES London), he prefers spending his time directing Spannerworks' R&D and evolving search strategies for their clients.

\*Marketing magazine, Oct 2005

Contact Nilhan Jayasinghe on +44 (0)1273 828124 or [nilhan@spannerworks.com](mailto:nilhan@spannerworks.com)

## 16. About Spannerworks

Spannerworks are one of Europe's most dynamic and established search agencies, set up in 1997. Our experience ensures we deliver dynamic search solutions that consistently achieve exceptional return on investment (ROI) in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Our expertise and knowledge in natural search enables us to deliver integrated paid search campaigns that create maximum visibility and outstanding ROI.

Combining a highly specialised and performance-based approach with extensive research and development, Spannerworks utilise proven and best practice search engine marketing techniques for clients across a range of industry sectors, who choose us for our proven track record and because we work to the toughest performance targets in the industry.

<http://www.spannerworks.com/aboutus.0.html>

## 17. Contact Spannerworks

To find out more about Spannerworks' search engine marketing services and how they can add value to your business, please contact us on +44 (0)1273 828100 or [results@spannerworks.com](mailto:results@spannerworks.com).

You can find [www.spannerworks.com](http://www.spannerworks.com)

## 18. Appendix

### Technical tips on implementing your blog

#### **WARNING: Including a comment feedback function**

All blogs allow readers to provide feedback, through a comment box. With business blogs, this will be difficult to moderate and may harm the brand. Comment feedback functions can also leave the blog open for abuse by comment Spammers, who will use your blog to generate links back to sites they're trying to promote. It's advisable to remove this feature from your blog, unless the blog is constantly monitored and moderated.

#### **Relative Nofollow tag**

If you feel confident with your abilities to moderate feedback, and allow this functionality, use the "rel=nofollow" attribute in the link to prevent search engines from indexing links in comments.

This was an attribute introduced by the three major search engines Google, Yahoo! and MSN to discourage comment spam. If the tag is found on a link, they will ignore it in the ranking calculation.

More recent versions of blogging software will allow you to automatically add the "rel=nofollow" attribute to links posted in comments. If you're building your own blog script, with feedback, make sure to include this attribute to discourage comment spam.

The Trackback function should also be excluded to prevent other marketers from linking to your blog, in order to generate links to their site. Often Blog Spam is generated by automated scripts, and may result in your site linking to bad neighbourhoods without your realising it.

#### **Toolkit**

- ↘ [www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)
- ↘ [www.blogpulse.com](http://www.blogpulse.com)
- ↘ [www.blogsearch.google.com](http://www.blogsearch.google.com)
- ↘ [www.icerocket.com](http://www.icerocket.com)
- ↘ [www.bigblogcompany.net](http://www.bigblogcompany.net)
- ↘ [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

#### **Choosing content for the RSS Feed**

While the feed can contain as much if not all the content you publish on the blog, a shorter summary with a link to the actual post on the site is sufficient for syndication. This will also prevent any duplicate content issues with search engines, when your feed is published elsewhere on the web.

The feed should contain at least a title and an optional short description for each of the posts. There's no ideal limit to the number of posts, but keep it just to current posts. There's no point in syndicating posts that are out of date.

## Extract from an RSS Feed from the BBC

Woman makes Herceptin court bid.

A woman refused NHS funding for anti-cancer drug Herceptin wins the right to have the decision reviewed in court.

The above shows you what the feed will look like to a person looking at it on an RSS Reader or News aggregator. The actual RSS file looks very different and is more akin to an HTML file. This is because RSS files are created using the Extended Mark-up Language XML.

The actual XML Feed for the above BBC headlines look like this -

```
<rss version="2.0"><channel>
  <title>BBC News | News Front Page | UK Edition</title>
  <link>http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/rss/-/1/hi/default.stm</link>
  <description>Visit BBC News for up-to-the-minute news, breaking news, video, audio and
feature stories. BBC News provides trusted World and UK news as well as local and regional
perspectives. Also entertainment, business, science, technology and health news.</description>
  <language>en-gb</language>
  <lastBuildDate>Wed, 21 Dec 2005 15:31:40 GMT</lastBuildDate>
  <copyright>Copyright: (C) British Broadcasting Corporation, see
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/help/rss/4498287.stm for terms and conditions of reuse</copyright>
  <docs>http://www.bbc.co.uk/syndication/</docs>
  <ttl>15</ttl>
  <image>
    <title>BBC News</title>
    <url>http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/img/bbc_news_120x60.gif</url>
    <link>http://news.bbc.co.uk</link>
  </image>
  <item>
    <title>Woman makes Herceptin court bid</title>
    <description>A woman refused NHS funding for anti-cancer drug Herceptin wins the right to have
the decision reviewed in court.</description>
    <link>http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/rss/-/1/hi/england/wiltshire/4548950.stm</link>
    <guid
sPermaLink="false">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/wiltshire/4548950.stm</guid>
    <pubDate>Wed, 21 Dec 2005 15:16:06 GMT</pubDate>
    <category>Wiltshire</category>
```