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News, Most Recent 90 Days (English, Full Text)  
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Business Wire

October 24, 2005 Monday 8:45 PM GMT

**DISTRIBUTION:** Business Editors**LENGTH:** 815 words**HEADLINE:** Business Wire Helps Chicago PR Experts Navigate the Blogosphere; Blogging expert panel offers insight and advice to Midwest's top communicators**DATELINE:** CHICAGO Oct. 24, 2005**BODY:**

Leading members of the Midwest's public relations and corporate communications profession gathered this month in Chicago to hear top bloggers explain how this newest media channel is impacting the communications industry.

Speaking at a breakfast hosted by Business Wire, a panel of three blogging experts headlined a discussion titled "Navigating the Blogosphere" that was moderated by Kevin Johnson, a Senior Blog Analyst and Media Relations Manager at Tech Image, Chicago's leading independent high-tech public relations firm.

The speakers took a close look at how corporate communicators and PR professionals across the country now use blogs to increase exposure, strengthen brands, and reach target consumer markets, and how news journalists are leveraging blogs for their own use as well.

Since people who blog may be current or potential customers, the speakers encouraged companies to get involved in the blogosphere as a means to engage and empower a company's customer base. This encourages an ongoing conversation and a chance for customers to have a positive impact on the company.

"What's revolutionary (about blogging) is not what's going on - it's who's saying it," said Chris Thilk of AdJab.com, a blog focused on the advertising and marketing industry. "You don't need to go through established gatekeepers. Most people have something to say about something - that's where the power is."

However, there are dangers in the blogosphere - especially when it comes to postings on company blogs that can be accessed by the general public.

"A lot of companies are afraid that someone will post something negative about a product on the company blog, and other people will see it and agree," said Rochelle Bowden of Chicagoist.com, a blog focused on news and events in Chicago. "But if a company says 'We're sorry you feel that way, but this is what we are thinking,' then they are acknowledging the customer's feedback and becoming a part of the conversation."

Blogging has also had a tremendous impact on the mainstream media, who can't afford to neglect the information exchange that is happening through the blogosphere.

"What's unique about blogging is that it's changed journalism by letting the air out a little bit," said ePrairie.com's Brad Spurrison, whose blog focuses on news in the Chicago IT, entrepreneurial, business, and venture capital communities. "It has required mainstream media to be more accountable. Blogging allows people within the space to be more creative and more accessible. But as with any other communications medium, we shouldn't rely on blogs as our only source of information."

The panelists also stressed the importance of being up-front and honest when approaching a blogger with a story idea.

"Though the panelists are encouraging blogging, they also are noting that it may not be for everyone and every company," said Tech Image's Kevin Johnson. "But companies need to at least be aware of the presence and influence of blogs, whether industry-specific or from the overall communications standpoint. If nothing else, companies should be

paying attention to what is being said – and, more importantly, who's saying it."

In light of this advice, the panelists suggested a number of tools for searching and monitoring blogs, such as the new blog search engines being offered by Google and Yahoo. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds were also recommended as a way for companies to listen as well as to inform their target markets.

"There's no question that blogs are having a significant impact on media and communications as we know them," continues Johnson. "There's no better way to find out about these technologies than to ask the people using them every day. Events such as this one are invaluable to us as professional communicators as we continue to educate ourselves about the value of these new media opportunities and to determine the best ways to get involved."

**About Business Wire:**

Business Wire was founded in 1961 by chairman/CEO Lorry I. Lokey, veteran journalist and public relations executive. The company's multi-channel delivery network, with access to some 60 international and national news agencies, financial information providers and Web-based news services throughout North America, Europe, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa, provides real-time, simultaneous access to key audiences — the news media, trade publications, institutional and individual investors, business-to-business decision-makers and consumers.

Business Wire electronically disseminates some 1,000 full-text news releases daily to the media, the Internet, online services and databases, and the global investment community in 150 countries in 45 languages. Business Wire has 24 U.S. offices, Frankfurt, London, Brussels, Paris, Sydney and Tokyo offices, and reciprocal offices throughout the world.

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