The Beginners Guide To Blogging

This seminar will consider the issue of blogging in 5 parts:

- What is the internet revolution underpinning blogging and what are the business uses of blogs?
- How do you set up a blog?
- What is podcasting and how do it?
- What is video blogging and how do you do it?
- How can we use our practical knowledge of blogging, podcasting and video blogging in our working lives?

Setting blogging in context - The internet revolution

Prior to considering the phenomena of blogging, let us see the issue within the context of the internet revolution.

One of the key business books of 2005 was written by the Pulitzer prize winner, Thomas Friedman entitled *"The World Is Flat."*

The book was the winner of the inaugural Financial Times/Goldman Sachs award last November for best business book of 2005.

The argument put forward by Friedman is that the explosion of knowledge pools and resources have connected all over the world, levelling the playing field as never before. Professionals everywhere can work from home as if they were in offices next door; and each of us can be a competitor of the other.

In his book, Friedman identifies 10 different forces which have flattened the world and made the world a level playing field.

These include:

- The fall of the Berlin Wall - which tipped the balance of power across the world towards those advocating democratic and free market orientated governance and away from those advocating centrally planned economies with authoritian rule.

- The date when the internet browser, Netscape going public – Effectively we went from a PC based computing platform to an internet based platform. The Netscape browser enabled people to use computers to link up on the world that could transport digitalised words, music, data and photos to anyone else in the world.

- The interoperable nature of systems – Friedman summarises the position *"For the world to get flat, all your internal departments –sales, marketing, manufacturing, billing and inventory – had to become interoperable, no matter what machines or*

software was running." This contrasted to say 1980s where a company's sales department was running Microsoft and the other department was using Novell. They could not communicate with each other. He uses the example of PayPal did was to empower people and individuals to accept credit cards. Previously you would have to receive a cheque or cash.

- Open Sourcing – This involves people around the world combining together online to collaborate in writing everything online from their own software to their own operating systems to dictionaries. A great deal of the motivation derives from creating a collective product such as free software out of the conviction that this will be empower people and take them out of the grip of global organisations such as Microsoft. As we will see later this is profoundly relevant for creating blogs. In November 2004, Mozilla Foundation, a non profit group released Firefox, a free Web browser that has contributed to Internet Explore losing market share.

- The process of in-forming. The nature of "Googling" where individuals can easily be informed about anything on their own has led to a world where any individual can find out anything about someone else or anything. As Friedman writes *"Never before in the history of the planet have so many people – on their own – had the ability to find out so much information about so many things and about so many people."* This is a tool which anyone with a computer can access the internet ranging from a top CEO to a student.

How significant is the internet revolution?

We live in interesting times and are within the state of a revolution comparable to say the industrial revolution.

At his recent speech to the Society for Computers and Law, Professor Richard Susskind observed how significant of the internet revolution was.

He referred to the following facts:

- There are now 600 billion webpages in existence
- There are now1 billion users of internet
- 9% of retail spending is done online
- The online auction firm, e-Bay has 150 million users which does $50 billion of trading
- There are 50 million web logs(blogs) and a new one emerges every 2 seconds

Last month, Rupert Murdoch who initially was not known for his embrace of what is called the internet revolution delivered a speech to the Worshipful Company of Stationers and Newspaper Makers about the supreme challenges facing the newspaper industry from the online revolution which in my opinion gives a useful summary of the revolution as a whole.

Some memorable excerpts include of his speech include:

"...we probably haven't heard the name of what will be the world's largest company in 2020. Indeed, that company may not even exist yet..."

"From the wheel to the web, from the printing press to fiber optic cable, it has always been technology that has driven history. Those in the driving seat have always been those who fully understood and used that technology. Today one of our great challenges is to understand and seize the opportunities presented by the web. It is a creative, destructive, technology that is still in its infancy, yet breaking and remaking everything it its path."

Another factor is that the evidence is that the revolution is going to speed up and there will be effects which we have not foreseen. Professor Richard Susskind at the lecture also referred to the book "*The Singularity is Near*" where Ray Kurzweil predicted that mankind will see as much progress between the years 2000 and 2014 as there was in the whole of the 20th Century.

You need only look at what is happening to the telecommunications industry, Voice of Internet Protocol telephone. VoIP allows you to make telephone calls over the internet by turning voices into data packets that are sent down internet networks and converted back to voices the other end. VoIP is going to totally change the telecommunications industry in that voice will become free and companies will have to charge for add ons.

Furthermore, consider the increased bandwidth and the ways that technologies are emerging such as WIFi and later this year, we see the emergence of WiMax which will see people able to connect to the internet wirelessly kilometres away from a wireless port.

Nearly every expert that I have heard speak about the significance of the internet revolution refers to the fact that the revolution is going to speed up and have far greater significance than we can realise at the moment.

The emergence of blogging as phenomena

The phenomena of blogging have been one of the creatures of the internet revolution and specifically emerges from the open source movement and the concept of individuals collaborating together online.

It was first drawn to the attention within the media consciousness in the summer of 2004 when bogus documents were used by CBS News' Dan Rather in a report about President George W. Bush's Air National Guard service. Effectively these bloggers who have no barriers to entry can create their online communities and can act as open source intelligence gathering. In this instance the bloggers worked together and exposed the story as a sham.

Also, the United Kingdom had its defining blogging moment when the Guardian journalist who wrote an opinion piece for the newspaper in which he expresses anger at moderate Muslims who don't "*rock the boat*," and explains the bombings as a "*sassy*" expression of opinion after the London 7th July bombing was sacked after he was exposed as belonging to a radical Islamist group Hizb Ut Tahrir which "*promotes racism and anti-Semitic hatred, calls suicide bombers martyrs, and urges Muslims to kill Jewish people.*"

An influential factor which brought down the journalist were bloggers who exposed his membership of that group and forced the newspaper on the defensive.

A possible reason why blogs have not emerged as a business tool is due to they have emerged as a social phenomena enabling any individual to communicate online with other people. They can be seen as being for "*geeks*" yet using blogs within a business context, do have significant sponsors.

Bill Gates made a point of dwelling on blogs in May 2004 at his speech to CEOs in Seattle and said that although they started in the technical community and have come to be a broader social phenomenon, businesses can use them too.

Gates said that blogs had advantages over more traditional ways of keeping in touch such as e-mail and websites. E-mail messages could be too imposing or miss out key people who should be included, said Mr. Gates. Websites were a problem too, he added, because they demand that people visit them regularly to find out if anything has changed and require regular updating to avoid going stale.

These problems could be solved, said Mr. Gates, by using blogs and Really Simple Syndication (RSS), that lets people know when a favourite journal is updated. "*What blogging and these notifications are about is that you make it very easy to communicate. The ultimate idea is that you should get the information you want when you want it.*"