BURKE, BARTHES, BERLIN AND THE COMMUNAL CONVERSATION

OF BUSINESS BLOGGING

by

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ABSTRACT

As a business composition professor or one of their students, you are most likely already engaged in intensive web and weblog writing lessons. I hope to add to what you’re learning because the job market demands creative content providers who understand how to build and maintain an online community. Using rhetorical theory, composition philosophy, practical analysis and personal experience, I’ll incorporate into this thesis an easier way to utilize the blog, and therefore a way to maximize exposure in the community as a trusted expert in your field.

The adage goes that people do business with those they know and trust. The blog builds those relationships online, and adds value to all of your other marketing activities. This thesis gives a glimpse into creating and accessing online communities. It’s also for those who’d like further insight into the historical and rhetorical depth that delivers unto us an intuitive move for any company: get online and blog. What is the goal of a business but to profit? Meeting that objective and maintaining solvency cannot be a simple endeavor, but building a blog for your company can help greatly in attracting new customers and retaining those that you already have.

“Start a blog” might seem like a flippant suggestion to those embedded in their offices, cubicles and other workspaces buried in what seems an insurmountable amount of work. Keeping in mind that there can be nothing more annoying than a zealot of one
form or another shrieking about how companies need to adopt and adapt, in this thesis I will create a place where theory and practice meet; where the business blogger can make the most impact by incorporating the requirements of the blog into what they’re already doing within their daily work routines.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Michelle Comstock
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CHAPTER I

THE FOUNDATION OF A GREAT PLATFORM

We know the importance of the Internet and we are aware of how integral online discourse is to the success of business. Even businesses that aren’t online are affected by the trends and topics that are weaved into the interconnectivity of the World Wide Web’s evolving dialogue. This paper is going to argue that the weblog, more commonly known as the “blog,” is not only an important part of the discourse on the Internet, but also that its simplicity of use makes it a worthy investment of your time and effort. Simply “put in your oar” and become part of the conversation, might say Kenneth Burke, who shared such sentiment long before the web. Like other inspirations for this thesis, Burke’s analyses of symbols, actions, communication, history, writing, relationships, rhetoric and their relevance are principles by which communication thrives. In Burke’s *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, he wrote his oft-cited metaphor for the parlor dialectic that makes history:

“Where does the drama get its materials? From the ‘unending conversation’ that is going on at the point in history when we are born. Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment of gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress” (96).
The “Burkean Parlor” provides a lush visual backdrop for the endlessly cavernous Internet, and it leaves a place at the table for James Berlin’s landmark book *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* where he somehow fits eighty-five years of composition studies in fewer than two hundred pages. From him we get insight on the importance of rhetoric, mostly Classical Transactional Rhetoric, and discover a brazen connection between the ease and usefulness of business blogging and his declaration that “all truths arise out of dialectic, out of the interaction of individuals within discourse communities” (16).

There are many more sources to cite, because with business blogging you can’t have only theory, but guidance to put it into practice. For that, I will share insight from interviews with multiple business bloggers. Erika Napoletano, Rick Ramos and Erik Wolf have all been published on the subject of blogging, including why you blog, how you blog and exactly what you do to make your blogging matter. For the basic writing lessons to get the content your blog requires, I go to Peter Elbow, the author *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*. His hope is that he can make “you comfortable putting words on paper,” which is, as you can imagine, a very important part of the blogging process (95).

The history of blogging, its rapid ascent to communication juggernaut, and its relevance is delivered to you via analytical blog commentators like David Barlow, Robert Klotz, Michael Keren and Scott Rosenberg. I also invoke tech evangelist and blogging pioneer Robert Scoble. His insight, along with the basic how-to knowledge of Eric Butow and Rebecca Bollwitt, found in their collaboration *Blogging to Drive Business*, help lay out the bones to the blog. For the blog’s soul, I consult Carolyn Miller and Dawn
Shepherd. Their article “Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog” is some of the most intriguing reading around blogs and the “recurrent rhetorical motive that has found a conventional mode of expression” (1468).

I share multiple rhetorical theorists, modern bloggers and business consultants, and will synthesize the information currently available to prepare you for successful business blogging. Finally, for inspiration--for sensuality in the minutiae of the sentence--Roland Barthes illustrates the need to appreciate writing for more than its words. His short The Pleasure of the Text rollicks through the pages giving your writing a body, a vessel for pleasure, and not simply the subjugation of a day’s work. Blogging allows for a company to blow away the bricks and mortar of traditional business with a launching of ideas into the ever-expanding “blogosphere.” Business blogging can be transcendent. It lives beyond the boardroom and in the fluorescent exhale of a modern technology office. It’s a newly defined space, perhaps even the plush upholstery and fireplace warmth of the Burkean parlor. What you as a blogger creates is up to you.

What’s up to me is this very moment creating a path that takes someone from staring blankly at their computer to smiling at their blog. It’s a fulfillment that begins with the individual and spreads throughout the blogging community. It’s the unending conversation; it’s Berlin’s transactional truth. It’s deriving pleasure from Barthe’s text because with just one posting the process begins and new media are linked into action.

And that brings me to the main point of this thesis: business blogging is not business writing, it is communal sharing.

This might not be the case with everyone, but for some I feel that the phrase “communal sharing” can lead to side effects such as furrowed brows, rolling eyes and
dismissive mutterings about group hugs. That could just be my experience in business, but as a reader you’re likely a student or a teacher; the former growing up in the modern era of online collaboration and the latter renowned as a Swiss Army knife of interactivity. Even if you are not immediately taken by the idea of a community gathered around your work, you might be more moved to find that, with blogging, your goal is to share your expertise. You get to be who you are and, through the process of the online conversation, build your reputation while helping others. I’ll argue the blog is key for sharing what you do, how you do it and why.

In the spirit of a sharing community, this paper is not at all dismissal of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Linkedin), or even that of traditional media. Newspaper, television and radio are the big three “traditional” sources of media, but going back even further, my argument will not at all forget the granddaddy of modern communication, the printed page. Because I’d like to show that, with a blog, all communication platforms can be better utilized to make them accessible. When you step outside of school and decide what you want to do, then make it count by sharing your business ideals, culture, products and services. The blog is a hub where you and your efforts can be fully appreciated and understood.

It should be disclaimed that while the Internet has inspired a lot of heartwarming talk and symbolic rainbows, that that isn’t enough to get a blog beyond the door. This thesis will focus on composing text for the blog. At points it will be at risk of falling into the giant bargain bin of “how to” blog books because it’s not productive to discuss blog composition without blog strategy. I’ll begin with a story of my own failure and success before propping up the platform with the basics of blogging, search engine optimization,
building communities and, finally, an analysis of the innovative rhetorical structure of the blog. Turns out the genre revealed itself in the nick of time, giving businesses a place to go in the great flood of the Information Age (or it could be the blog’s popularity became a result of circumstance.)

Consistent and phenomenal blog content can thrive on its own, but this thesis will help with what online content creators should do: position their creative material for most possible exposure. Those benefactors of business who granted permission for a company blog will appreciate it. And, of course, for anyone blogging as a sole proprietor or freelance scribe, it’s downright necessary.
CHAPTER II

TRUE STORY WRAPPED IN USEFUL BLOGGING ADVICE

I’m a professional blogger, and never has there been more of a demand for blogging content. In my case, the success of Twitter and Facebook has given the blog a new life, opening arteries to share more information. It is suggested that if you have a business Twitter and Facebook account, you have to have a blog. As it turns out, sharing you ate a biscuit or that you love your children, while both arguably necessary, aren’t the status updates that keep people coming back. Web browsers (both human and computer) want content; they want to be informed, and the blog is the meat on the bare bones of a micro-blogging platform.

I don’t consider myself a consultant (although it might be a good idea for pay purposes.) I create blogging content for businesses that want to be a part of a bigger conversation. They want a reason for others to share their information online, they want people to see that their site is updated and relevant, and they want their web address to be associated with useful information to both people and search engines. Actually, one feeds the other. If people like it, comment about it and link to it, so will Google. Suddenly, after a decade of trying all kinds of trickery to be found on the Internet, it comes down to simply being interesting. Not unlike a good conversationalist at a cocktail party, but now you don’t have to do your hair or dress for a pageant. You can be heard and get the necessary feedback without having to outshout the kids in the front of the class. Just as the blog can make a small business more of an authority than a bigger company, it can
also move the voices in the back forward, creating a level front on a more even playing field.

Carrying on the sports analogy, I was getting trounced at the sharing game. As a radio guy I’d gotten very used to the one-way blasting we incurred upon our audience with regularly scheduled programming. Great radio is often interactive, but it can be very patriarchal, too. Radio talent gets very spoiled with the ability to tell people where to go, how to live and what to listen to. So when I got out because I was certain my brain was beginning to atrophy, I tried my hand at this new-fangled social media stuff. I’d promote my standup comedy shows on Twitter and Facebook, yet no one would show up. I’m not saying radio doesn’t provide a value to the public, I just didn’t know how to thrive without the built-in community that comes through billboards, giveaways, tireless promotion and a controlling stake in the oligopoly of in-car entertainment. In 2008, after some sporadic success, I caved. I folded my freelance business and became a bureaucrat.

A few years later, with my term as a government communications specialist at an end, and with a decision that was met with mixed reviews from my wife, I decided to do 100 comedy shows in 10 days. After learning difficult lessons about making bureaucracy interesting to the average American household, my first goal was to make my own personal event mean something to somebody other than me. To add relevance to my quest, I teamed up with Volunteers of America so that every show raised money for their multitudes of charitable projects. Every blogger I interviewed for this thesis echoed a similar sentiment about being more than just a shallow and perhaps shameless promoter. Erik Wolf, a blogging consultant, said in an interview that advertising a simple sale won’t work on a blog, and in his book *Blog for Business: Leveraging Content for Online*
Marketing and Lead Generation, declares that online “people who ‘sell’ in the traditional sense are generally looked upon as cheesy, selfish, spammy or altogether irrelevant” (127).

To avoid becoming a flaming ball of failure, I moved forth in a fashion that (unwittingly to me at the time) corresponds with James Berlin’s research in critical rhetoric. His work shed light on a rhetorical altruism where students can become “subjects, not objects, of their experience” and with that a world “can be made to serve more equitably the interests of individuals” (Berlin, 773). What I understood is that there needed to be a quid pro quo for people to be motivated. The irony is that without my partnership with VOA no one’s interest, not even mine, would have been served. As a blogger in a world of billions of daily rhetorical transactions that allow for a more diverse selection of entertainment, news and promotional stunts like mine, you’ll sit in a lonely place if you cannot offer some benefit to the community in which you communicate.

Having the potential benefit of bringing laughter to the community, along with the rock solid offering of helping the community with donations to VOA, all I needed was a way to let people know what I was up to and how they could become involved. Here’s where blogging comes in. First, I bought a domain name (100in10.com) and used URL (Uniform Resource Locator) forwarding so that it would resolve at my site on the free blogging platform, Squarespace.com. There are blog services that range from really easy to quite tech-savvy difficult. Squarespace is in the “easy” category in that, like Blogger or Tumblr, you don’t need website hosting. The blogs live on their computer servers, which means I had less flexibility with content and design, and I couldn’t move from one hosting provider to another. I traded those options for convenience. I did not need to buy
a domain name, as once an online blogging platform is set up, it has its own URL, or web address. Buying the domain makes it more memorable and easier to share.
CHAPTER III

SEO: THE NECESSARY EVIL THAT’S NOT SO EVIL ANYMORE

In the case of my 100 shows in ten days, I chose a platform that was hosted because this was going to be a short-lived blog. I did not need the extra flexibility and space that comes with Wordpress.org, for example, that must be uploaded to a separate hosting account.

In about ten minutes I was ready to blog and share. I’d spent ten dollars for the domain, but the blog was free. Most all of the basic blogging services are free, with graduated levels of expense for more memory, functionality and features. Still, with my completely free blog I was able to:

- Provide a unique and memorable link to anyone interested, especially media outlets,
- Define myself as a comedian who gave a damn,
- Post pictures and videos of the shows I was doing and for whom,
- Have one consolidated place to send traffic and
- Create a public calendar for the times available for interested participants

I did not employ much Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which is the process of employing content to improve the relevance of your website to Internet search engines. Usually, with blogs, search engines can find your site based on your organic inclusions such as written entries, headlines, images and descriptions. This means the end of the forgettable days of stilted web copy jammed with as many relevant keywords as possible.
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Search and post homes, houses, land, commercial & investment property, realty and real estate for sale in the Global Listing Service® at MyREALTY.com.

Global Listing Service® (GLS) compared to Multiple Listing Service (MLS)

The Global Listing Service is a superset of homes, houses, land, property, realty and real estate for sale. The Global Listing Service includes homes, houses, land, property, and real estate that are listed for sale in the MLS (Multiple Listing Service), new homes, rentals, foreclosures, and many other property types. The Global Listing Service® can be found exclusively at MyREALTY.com.

Find Real Estate Agents/Brokers/REALTORS®

You can search and find Real Estate Agents, Brokers, and REALTORS® in the Global Listing Service® Provider directory at MyREALTY.com. Many real estate agents, brokers, and REALTORS®, are posting their properties into the Global Listing Service® (GLS) at MyREALTY.com because they understand the value of maximizing the exposure of their client’s real estate and homes for sale.

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Renters can search and find Apartments and Houses/Homes for rent in the Global Listing Service® (GLS) at MyREALTY.com. Many real estate owners, investors, and property managers are posting their apartments and houses for rent into the Global Listing Service at MyREALTY.com, because they understand the value of maximizing the exposure of exposing their apartments and houses for rent to millions of renters who are search the Global Listing Service® (GLS) at MyREALTY.com.

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If you are in the market for a mortgage, home loan, or to refinance your existing house or real estate, you need look no further than MyREALTY Mortgage.com. In addition to our Heroic Service Guarantee, we offer a FREE pre-approval letter, which sellers and their agents value much more than a pre-qualification letter. After you have shopped around for your mortgage and you are ready to obtain your home loan or refinance, make sure and visit MyREALTY.com. In addition to mortgages and home loans, you can find many mortgage calculators at MyREALTY Mortgage.com as well.

Second Mortgage and Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC) for your House

In addition to Mortgages and Home Loans, MyREALTY Mortgage.com offers second mortgages and home equity lines of credit (HELOC). As a matter of fact, MyREALTY Mortgage.com also offers mortgages and loans on commercial real estate, luxury homes, raw land and property for sale.

Figure III.1: “Keyword Stuffing” for SEO circa 2006. Do not write weblogs or any web copy like this, which may have been written by this graduate student.

Recently, search engine algorithms have been modified to favor content that humans might actually enjoy as well. If you were to focus on SEO with your blog, you’d do four simple steps, and then do exactly what pioneer tech blogger Robert Scoble and SEO professional Rick Ramos will soon share. First the steps:
1. Use key phrases in the descriptions and headlines when setting up your blog.

2. Update your blog often.

3. Be genuine and real in using key phrases that you’d like people to find.

4. Register your blog with search engine directories.

One of the biggest boosts, however, to your Google Page Rank (PR) are backlinks, or other bloggers and other websites linking back to your site. This is where tech evangelist and blogger Scoble comes in and, it’s funny, the PR he’s talking about is Public Relations, but with updated search engine queries for Google Page Rank qualifications, there are now many similarities between the two. In his article “How to Get Good PR for Yourself in the Blogosphere,” he offers these tips:

1. “Go where the bloggers are.” That is to say, meet and create relationships with those you want to share material. Show them you care about them, and they’ll care about you.

2. “Read the blogs of the people you want to cover you.” Find them in forums, conventions, on Twitter, Facebook and other social networks. Find them and interact on their sites. Even the most popular bloggers seek interaction in their comment sections.

3. “Send bloggers interesting stories.” It’s about the community. When you take care of fellow bloggers, there’s a better chance they’ll link back to your site and be more receptive to reading your material.

4. “Start blogging.” Other bloggers are searching for stories that you’ve yet to write.

That’s SEO simplified and if you use Wordpress there are plugins like the “All-In-One SEO Pack” that helps you boost your blog. In my case, I had confidence that the social networks would help me spread the story. In retrospect, that sounds more cocky than confident as chances were very high that no one would care. Out of the 95,000
weblogs created every day, you probably don’t hear that much about most of them.

(blogpulse.com) You can see that being too ideal about blogs can be hazardous to your hopes, but blogs have become catalysts for discussion, and despite any immediate success (or lack thereof) blogs deliver better and more organic SEO.

Rick Ramos, SEO strategist at seOverflow in Denver says that “Keywords are still important but instead of solving for keywords, solve for relationships. Building links is about building relationships. You find where the people are and you go there, engage intelligently and sound like you know what you’re talking about and then create phenomenal content.” Once you’re in or have built a blogging community, you become involved in the give and take (providing feedback, comments, and linking) of the conversation to get more links on more sites. This is important to business blogging composition because you can write as you were intended to write and search engines are more responsive to actual conversations within the community.

The discussion I had with my wife about how I wanted to get into comedy again became magnified on a global scale, and once it gained notoriety online, was picked up by national television and even cable channel Comedy Central. A small part of the blogosphere was sharing this idea that I’d put into action from my kitchen. And here’s the best part: people started to reference me as a comedian again. After ten of the more arduous days of my life, companies and organizations hired me to entertain for their events. I had, with the help of an ever-expanding digital dialogue, become who I’d wanted to be. The same can happen to personality of a business owner or to the brand (personality if you’d like) of a business by blogging about who or what the company decides to establish as an online presence.
With all the hype surrounding blogs, anyone who has started a website or a blog has most likely felt the disappointment. It always starts big and, on wings of enthusiasm, you make big plans to conquer the blogosphere. You take extra time to cultivate ideas and even more placing the photos, video and ensuring that the grammar and spelling are perfect. You send out the blog to hundreds of friends, post it on Twitter and Facebook, and then go wild with dreams of your writing gone viral.

Waking up the next morning, the newborn blogger opens their laptop to find that no one, not even their closest electronic friends, have visited their site. On Facebook they’ve received a few “likes,” which it appears has become the new pretending to listen. A chill blows across the Super Information highway.

With disappointment ringing throughout the blogosphere, it’s hard to believe that any but a few of the most popular weblogs can have any kind of impact on the actions of a political body. How can a lonely blog have any democratic will if there’s no public participation? Hours of work and frustrating design experiments can culminate into your own forgotten Internet dead zone.

So how...HOW...does one have a chance in getting their message beyond their a few “likes” on Facebook?
CHAPTER IV

HOW ONE HAS A CHANCE IN GETTING THEIR MESSAGE BEYOND A FEW
“LIKES’ ON FACEBOOK

We’ll start with some history here. The next few paragraphs should do at least three things:

1. Impress you with the blog’s quick rise to interactive dominance.
2. Depress you that you’re up against a tsunami of competition.
3. Inspire you with the ease you can enlist yourself into the conversation or, as Burke says, “Symbolically aligning” yourself with your assertions.

It is called innovation: one day we’re enjoying the latest Internet platform for self-expression (and by “enjoying” I mean raising the limelight level beyond the merit of anything ever) and the next we’re mocking it as outdated. We still drive gas-powered cars and the Edison’s incandescent light bulb remains best in the market, but it hasn’t even been twenty years since the first “weblog” was published and we’ve already seen a microcosm of evolution that has forever changed human interaction.

As David Barlow puts it in his book Blogging @merica, blogs “are part of the attempt to manage the information explosion” (134). An example of this deluge of data comes from two of the biggest media platforms on the Internet. In January of 2013, blogging juggernaut WordPress.com reported that its “users produce about 33.9 million new posts and 40.9 million new comments each month.”
Fig IV.1 WordPress.com shares the growth of their blogging platform.

On YouTube, the vlogging (V for “video”) giant with individual video entries and user feedback, seventy-two hours of video are uploaded to the user-generated video website every minute which, in turn, provides the “500 years of video” that are watched on Facebook every day (youtube.com). Blogs are helping to organize and “regularize” the network of the World Wide Web with “the growing culture of linking on the web, pressure towards always providing a pathway to the source of any bit of information” (Barlow, 134).
That’s a perfect sentiment for what Miller and Shepherd call an “unusual opportunity to study the evolution of a genre” in their article “Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog” (1463). They discuss the “rhetorical exigence” of the blog as it characterized a “cultural kairos” of a people suddenly overwhelmed with an abundance media. In the 1990s we moved into the *Real World* on MTV and got a dose of an even realer world with our President’s sex life served up to a bleary-eyed audience growing more callous by the day. From this, blogs arose with a new rhetorical power (1451).

Today, in 2013, the basic blog has evolved into a fully functional publishing platform that is being used for dynamic websites, versus the simple entry type blog made popular by Justin Hall’s first weblog (justinslinks.com). The reverse chronological journal of Hall’s list of hyperlinks, poetry, stories and personal updates has not changed with more modern blogs. Typically entries are still posted from top to bottom, posts reading downward like a journal on a scroll. The changes that the weblog has seen since then fall in three categories: a rise in access to the medium with more user-friendly software and applications, an increased capacity for sharing and reader interaction and recently, an image-heavy redesign that allows the reader more perceived control over
what they get to read.

**mere tweakery**

By Justin on January 13, 2013 12:05 PM

I spent most of my waking hours so far this weekend combing the thousands of files in this site:
- standardizing headers and meta information
- revising formatting
- fixing broken links and server-side include references

Our world is dying. We are confused, lurching from joy to sadness. Nothing is permanent. Our deities are delusional or out of reach. So why are you bothering with these trivialities and technical details Justin?!

I aim to reveal more in near time, suffice it to say this old site needs some housecleaning that it might remain useful, nay, readable in this pre-modern era.

**Thanksgiving 2012**

By Justin on November 22, 2012 1:17 AM

I have the job of saying grace before my big family meals. Thanks Mom!
Here is my offering for Thanksgiving 2012:
[don't read this if you're part of my family and we're having dinner together 22 November 2012!!!! I'm going to read this aloud to you instead :-)]

in this clarity of autumn
when the leaves ride high on the compost pile
looking through bare branches
we might see the capacity in our world for new beginnings
since we are all alive around this table right now
that means we have survived at least this long
and we can awaken our minds
to make something new
each day

Figure IV.2 Justin’s links still maintains the simple top-down reverse chronology of his original blog.
Generations
MONDAY, 17 JANUARY 2005
(Today’s usually longer Daily entry is brought to you by Seagram’s Gin. I will tell you the WHOLE story tomorrow, and believe me, it’s a good one.)
While bathing Leta Jon and I were talking about the names of her grandparents, specifically my mother and his mother, Grandmommie and Grandma respectively. He kept coaxing Leta into referring to me as Mother, and I felt a REALLY strong objection to that. I want her to call me Mama, or Mommie, just like my mother wants to be referred to as Grandmommie rather than Granny, for OBVIOUS reasons.
He asked, “So what are you going to be called when you are a grandmother?”
I answered, “I dunno, certainly not ‘Grandma.’”
And he said, “They’re going to call you, ‘Crotchety Old Hag.’”
And I responded, “Yeah, well then they’ll call you, ‘Crotchety Old Hag’s Bitch.’”

FILE UNDER: DAILY, PARENTHOOD
LINK TO THIS ENTRY

How to Charm Me
MONDAY, 17 JANUARY 2005
After the dog farts next to the baby’s head for the second time in one day reprimand, “Cut it out, dog. Your mother and I are in love enough that we’re the only ones allowed to do that to each other in this house.”

FILE UNDER: HOW TO CHARM ME
LINK TO THIS ENTRY

Living in the heart of the Aryan Nation
MONDAY, 17 JANUARY 2005
Just now as I was on the phone with Beth she asked if Jon had the day off work.
“Of course not,” I answered. “It’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Utah doesn’t even recognize that black people exist.”
Fig IV.4 Armstrong’s updated “Dooce” in 2013.

While Justin’s Links maintains the simple scroll-like look of some of the earlier blogs, Dooce’s look has completely changed. One large difference between the two is that Hall is not counting on his blog for a salary, while Armstrong has created a successful venture that supports her family and a handful of employees. Blogs have become moneymakers, therefore more likely to become a larger investment. Special
attention is paid to keywords and costs associated with search engine optimization (SEO), specialized content and paid ad placement throughout the web. The blog broadcasts the news for CNN.com, shares inspiration from business and lifestyle gurus and has been acquired as multi-million dollar commodities. Recently, the Huffington Post blog sold for $300,000,000. The publishing world saw the venerable weekly magazine *Newsweek* merge with the popular blog *The Daily Beast*, before the paper version folded into the web and is now like every other up-and-coming blog: digital articles optimized for aesthetics, waiting to be read and commented upon.

**The Inspiration: Making Your Blog Significant (With Insight For Pedagogy)**

While working at a company in the tech sector, the management team and I decided to bring in an intern to work for the summer. During the interview I asked if he was comfortable blogging. He said he was and, for a moment, I was a bit stung by his confidence. Apparently I was pining for him to pause and be intimidated by the art; maybe look to me for some advice as to how one begins to blog. But he did not. He said he blogged all of the time, so much so that he often starts a blog around a specific topic and then abandons it. I cringed a bit at what I'm hoping didn't appear as an old guy recoiling at the ways of our fickle youth. His confidence, however, had us set him loose on the Internet, and it turns out he's right. Blogging is no longer a big deal, especially in terms of production and maintenance. Like a company’s promotional flier with a short shelf life, with blogs you can simply move on (without wasting one piece of paper.)

The blog has become so user-friendly in its construction that the medium has become temporary. Just as a television news story can be a mere reflection of a single
event, a one-issue publication if you will, the blog can now emerge and fade with the moving news cycle.

Back in the parlor, the blog has shrunk Burke’s world into fragments of often forgettable instances of history. Regardless, history is being made, or at least documented (which seems to be one and the same), at a pace and volume that would frighten your casual parlor goer. The blog has piqued public interest in personal reactions of the public arena, thus creating a perpetual discussion that engages even further writing in a cycle of call and response.

I bring up these fleeting instances of single-topic discourse so that you too can realize how not difficult blogging can be. Tumblr is a fine example of the blog’s evolution, from the early days of computer code to being published in minutes. Tumblr is a platform for the long term or for a fleeting trend and, with its “reblog” function for sharing entries, is designed with community in mind.

Tumblrs are easily built, so much so that in one day, on February 6, 2013, Tumblr reported 72,190,713 posts were created in the 24-hour period. The result of this new expediency has allowed entire blogs—not mere blog comments or microblogging posts—to become quick rejoinders to any situation. The blog bindersfullofwomen.tumblr.com became an overnight sensation with reader-generated photo responses to Governor Mitt Romney’s October 2012 statement that he had “binders full of women” as potential job applicants for his Massachusetts’s gubernatorial cabinet. After only a few months the publisher has announced that “It’s time to close the binder,” the blog having successfully captured and magnified the moment for public engagement.
The second reason I share this section about Tumblr is that successful blog writing is often about capturing trends. Whether it’s commenting on them or weaving them into a discussion about your business, brands are now putting up quick Tumblr sites that seize on a trend, a public persona or any number of innovations and/or train wrecks whirling around the web, and using them to bolster their image, increase traffic to their website and even make money with ads and affiliate sales. The criticism of Tumblr is that it attracts a very young demographic, one that isn’t making a lot of major household purchasing decisions right now. However, as Cathy Davidson writes in her book *Now You See It: How the Brain Science of Attention Will Transform the Way We Live, Work, and Learn*, today’s youth have “grown up searching for information online. They had grown up socializing online, too, playing games with their friends online and, of course, sharing music files online” (62). It’s a good time to introduce yourself to the most
Internet savvy generation yet.

**sexy bill gates**

Figure VI.5 Tumblr allows a fast way to gain traffic through any trend. Not every trend (like risque memes of famous people) will fit a business’s image.
The dogma of the big dog/little dog business binary has been buffered by technology opening “new avenues for expression” that are “beginning to challenge the hegemony of the purveyors of mass culture” (Barlow, 130). The business that is online and blogging moves the conversation beyond the interaction of the institution and into the community. Before that can happen, and before the discussion of actual composition, it is necessary to know how to sell the idea of a blog to management and to the rest of the company. I’m including “the Pitche” in the thesis because it shares how simply a blog can be executed while benefitting the company’s brand and bottom line.

Voice: Figure Out Who You Are And How You Should Sound

When you’re in this position of pitching a blog to management, don’t forget about including the “rest of the company.” Having everyone’s buy-in means a built-in audience, an in-house expansion of social networks and perhaps even some talented blogging contributors. William Toll of Profitbricks.com said in an interview about employees as brand ambassadors that “your employees could very easily tell your story much better than any marketing person or any customer.” Before a company unleashes the platoons of posts, however, it’s important to hone the company’s voice.

In Writing for the Web: A Practical Guide, Cynthia Jeney explains that online writers must know “(a) how to write cleanly and accurately in expected, user-satisfying styles and (b) how to develop exciting and stimulating new kinds of writing that will attract the attention and hold the interest of those fickle, click-happy Internet surfers” (100). Jeney goes onto explain that style for the web is not unlike writing developed by Erma Bombeck or Emily Dickinson. They developed their own style for humor and drama, and readers came to expect and adore the devices they used. A company can
implement a style guide and have only a limited number who can actually publish to the blog. To maintain voice, however, it’s a good idea to have one person who is the blog, the “Blogfather” perhaps, who writes most of the entries and can provide company context for guest posts. This is a good way to avoid micromanaging writing.

In her book *Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy*, Diane Penrod says that by understanding the blog, writers can learn “how to present the right information at the right time for the right audience using the right discourse strategies” (47). This is a reminder to utilize multimodality to maximize voice. Any good blogging strategy uses the platform’s ability to host multiple media formats. Video and podcasting are innovative ways to capture people when they are speaking without editing (don’t worry, future manager, editing can always take place in post-production.)

With modes of production outside of writing, the company’s spokespeople can speak without noodling over where to put a semicolon. They can slip back into the simplicity of sound and realize their authentic human voice. For SEO purposes, highlights of what’s being said can be transcribed and posted with the audio, video or graphic. And as far as recording is concerned, simply keep that recorder on hand and capture the idea so you can get down on paper or in a blog post.

The company voice (which very well could be your voice) may not congeal immediately, and the feedback may not show up in droves, but by using internal company insights, surveys and focus groups, you can sound and read as you’d like much faster. Then again, soliciting for comments is never a bad thing, as you need to invite your audience into the conversation and, as Barlow writes, the blog “enables immediate
reinforcement of the writing act, and that comes in ways more reminiscent of speech than writing” (Barlow, 15).

The First Rule Of Blogging: Blog

Management and co-workers will want to know when you’ll find time to write. There has to be about a hundred publications promoting unplugging to get things done (one of the best being Manage Your Day-To-Day: Build Your Routine, Find Your Focus and Sharpen Your Creative Mind). Today’s unplugging means you still get electricity, just not the Internet. You turn off chat, log out of email and, if you’re a serious case, get one of those applications that locks you out of your web browsers for a set amount of time. This has become necessary not only for blogs, but also the drafts, press releases, promotional items, newsletters, social media posts and internal documents that you will eventually be called on to write. You can use this material, not always verbatim, but in the voice, and in whatever template for public sharing that you can incorporate your brand to help you write for the public-facing blog.

I can’t tell you how to write (As Berlin also writes, “All that the teacher can do is provide an environment in which the student can learn, relying on such activities as free writing, rewriting, journal writing, editorial groups, and the encouragement of the original metaphor” [152].) but I can give a company many reasons why you should blog. The italics are intended because blogging gives you more options than writing. The blog is multimodal--the king of multimodality--and can be a place to post pictures, infographics, video, podcasts, relevant memes and whatever is timely and beneficial for a growing audience.
The multimodality of the blog offers great examples in what Eric Butow and Rebecca Bollwitt offer in their book, *Blogging to Drive Business*. It’s a lesson in company messaging by where you “Don’t plug your business. Instead, provide free answers.” The Renaissance for content providers (writers, videographers, graphic artists) has arrived for providing answers and, “If people like your answers and see that you’re an expert, they will find your profile and learn more about your business. (24)”

In showing what they’re capable of, businesses use the blog as a space where they can synthesize feedback and, in reaction, create a new composition that can now become a new source--a new part of the conversation. As Elbow writes, “It opens up a door for you and somehow helps you think of more things to write” (22).

Burke’s metaphor, a massive literary moment expanding outward over the entirety of human history, thrives in the microcosm of individual business blogs. The good news for the busy businessperson is that blog entries should be only about three hundred words long (Wolf, 58). For SEO purposes, you’re wasting time if your posts are under two hundred, and for the purpose of audience retention you really shouldn’t go over five hundred. Blogs can make words come much easier as you’ll be involved in the collaboration necessary to become a better writer. Elbow encourages freewriting so that you learn to “just say it” without getting “distracted from their meaning by considerations of spelling, grammar, rules, errors” (15). Write it down, edit it later. With business blogging you do have to forego the feel-goodness of an Internet that excuses mistakes, because conventional composition errors are glaring on a web page associated with a company’s website.
You’re surfing the Internet anyway (necessary or not) so take notes as you click around blogs, catch up on news and your favorite social sharers. Take notes to get ideas, to comment, use quotes and share. If you’re properly citing work and, in the high compliment of the digital age, linking back to the original blog, then you’re doing what is expected of an online community. Academic institutions usually do a pretty good job of scaring you away from plagiarism, which is good, because in the online business world, you’re risking a complete loss of credibility from whatever work you’ve done on your blog, throughout your social media, for your employee morale and your business in general.

To begin the process of writing, take in all the opportunity and then free write it into the tabula rasa of the blog. You can save and come back later to make it more appealing (editing, adding an image, and putting in the appropriate links.) Every entry is a new opportunity to connect and, even more so, make your website the epicenter for the conversation about your products, services, industry or even family, health issues, personal aspirations and interesting quirks. Sure, it has to work for your business, but don't be afraid to experiment. Besides, you should have an in-house editing process that includes a trusted team of coworkers.

Sharing internally before you share it with the world is necessary so you know it’s something you should share at all. This isn’t to say you can’t be trusted to write by yourself, but it offers assistance in not only editing and grammar, but also insight on potential public feedback to which you need to prepare a response. An example is the recent revelations of the National Security Agency’s (NSA) “PRISM” program that intercepts customer communications of major technology companies like Yahoo!, Google
and Facebook. If a company wanted to join the many in the tech sector that blogged against the program, they’d need to know how to respond to public (blog comments) questions about their own involvement, if any, and how they balance their commitment to customers with their responsibility to the federal government.

This entry from Brad Feld, a venture capitalist who has turned his blogging and writing into a successful brand, demonstrates how you can expound on more than product and profits (also the importance of creating a community, which we’re just about to discuss.)

**Regroup Successful**

_July 1st, 2013_

My theme for Q2 was “regroup.” I wrote about this in my post _When The Sun Comes Out_ in early May as I was starting to feel my depression lifting. It’s officially gone at this point — I feel normal, and have for at least a month (probably six weeks.) That’s long enough to declare this depressive episode over.

The feedback I’ve gotten from talking openly about my depression has been incredible. I’m deeply appreciative of everyone who engaged me, offered me support, help, suggestions, empathy, or just said “thanks for sharing.” While I didn’t have any urgency about feeling better, I was optimistic that I would based on the arc of my previous two major depressive episodes (the first for two years In my mid-20s, the second for three months in my mid-30s). This one – at age 47 – lasted about six months which is so much less than two years...

My goal in Q3 was simply to “regroup.” I’ve talked about some of the specific tactics that I tried. Many people asked me what they were. Here’s a quick list.

- Stopped drinking alcohol
- Stopped drinking coffee
- Stopped travelling
- Stopped waking up at 5am – just slept until I woke up
- Went to bed consistently at 10pm
- Running when I felt like it
- Scheduled a lot less things
- Took a digital sabbath – no email or phone from Friday night until Sunday morning
- Started floating in an isolation tank once a week
- Didn’t fight how I felt
- Shared openly with friends / spend more time with friends, especially with men
- Checked in with Amy every day – worked hard to communicate my emotions

From a work perspective, I focused on the things that mattered and tried to eliminate all the other stuff. I prioritized my Foundry Group partners, the companies we are investors in, and Techstars. Rather than looking at a lot of new stuff, I shut it all down and made sure I had time for all the existing stuff. I put more effort into videoconferencing and face to face interactions locally since I wasn’t travelling. And I tried not to schedule anything before 10am.

As Q2 comes to an end, I feel that I have successfully regrouped. I’ve added back in a few things that I want to do, including drinking coffee and getting up at 5am. I’m still not drinking, but I’m being more disciplined about my running. And I believe that digital sabbath will be a part of my rhythm for the rest of my life, although I’m letting myself answer the phone when it rings and occasionally sending an email or a text throughout the day when I need to communicate something to someone.

**Fig IV.6** The Interactive Rhetoric of blogging invites readers into your life, and in return they offer an opportunity for new conversations.
Even though he wades into the immensely personal, he still creates a conversation about commerce and keeps the content relatable to those in the business community. “From a work perspective, I focused on the things that mattered and tried to eliminate all the other stuff,” he writes before going into his business goals for Q3 (feld.com). You’re not going to be successful writing just anything and hearkening back to the ranting days of the early blog, but as Feld did in Figure 8, you can certainly write about things that affect your business. Will you take a job with Century 21 Real Estate and write about your depression? Maybe not, but any company would love to show that they care about a serious issues. Some of the more popular business blogs, including the newly invigorated LinkedIn blogging platform, cover everything from alleviating work stress to how to pull a successful office prank (note that both have a clear benefit to their niche audience.)

Mark Nicholson, Head of Digital and Interactive for the bank ING Direct Canada warmed the collaborative heart of online communities everywhere when he said, “Our whole view is that we shouldn’t have secrets. If we're willing to talk about it in a boardroom, we should be willing to talk about it in front of consumers” (Butow & Bollwit, 92). Any company should have a social media and blogging policy in place. Tim O’Reilly’s *Blogger’s Code of Conduct* is a good place to start. This is the draft of the code inspired by the BlogHer Convention, and since has been updated multiple times by different organizations and collaborators. Here’s the most succinct form from Wikipedia.

According to the *New York Times*, O'Reilly and Jimmy Wales based their preliminary list on one developed by the BlogHer women's blogging support network and, working with others, came up with a list of seven proposed ideas:
1. Take responsibility not just for your own words, but for the comments you allow on your blog.

2. Label your tolerance level for abusive comments.

3. Consider eliminating anonymous comments.

4. Don't feed the trolls.

5. Take the conversation offline, and talk directly, or find an intermediary who can do so.

6. If you know someone who is behaving badly, tell them so.

7. Don't say anything online that you wouldn't say in person.

You could write an entirely different thesis on corporate communication guidelines. Michael Goodman and Peter Hirsch’s subtitled “Strategic Adaptation for Global Practice” is a good place to start. In this thesis, the guidelines used are meant to aid in setting up a blog, the eventual composition, as well as making blog writing more significant to the community.

In addressing the significance of your blogging, online composition comes with the advantage of using Internet analytics. This is the data-driven opportunity to examine a conversation and find out how long people are staying to read your entries, what material they’re responding to, and just how well you’re doing in attracting people to your corner of the room. "What blog posting or broadcast message can I send out to my readership that really prompts a response?" asks Napoletano, who shared her Google Analytics in finding out how to replicate and improve upon success. She gets answers to her data
questions: “What time of day is listing the highest open rate on my email. What is it on my Facebook page that's really, really getting people? What's spreading organically? It's data that reminds me what's very important and I have to keep track of it” (redheadwriting.com).

**Figure IV.7 Google Analytics measures traffic to your site.** You’ll note the heavy traffic to Erika’s blog, a close second to her homepage.
Figure IV.8 You can see here that Facebook and Twitter (t.co) are valuable for bringing visitors back to the website.
A blog’s dialogue encapsulates the learning process. The reader leaves comments, the writer responds, creating a conversation that helps both parties better understand any challenges they are facing. Beyond the human interaction is the online trail created by analytics that trace where you should concentrate your efforts, and tells you in a very concise way what you’re doing that is working. In Figures nine, ten and eleven you get a high-level overview of how and where to focus your efforts. Who wants to be part of your community and why? The data tells you, especially when you investigate where your referral traffic (often coming from links on social media) is coming from. This
feedback helps incorporate ideas into the next draft or the next piece altogether. This
evolution of discourse is championed by Berlin’s classical transaction rhetoric that he
says is the individual “conceived of as inherently transactional, arriving at truth through
engaging the surrounding material and social environment” (16).
CHAPTER V

BECOMING BETTER BY BUILDING A COMMUNITY

This is where you get to become a better writer, a better communicator and a better representative to the company. This is where the “pull” comes roaring back to the blogger’s benefit. While you’re sharing your expertise, you’re not pushing products on people, you’re pulling them in with information from which they benefit. Blogging is about bringing value to your customers and has your target demographic realizing that you appreciate them. Being a blogger with traction is about creating conversations that make people say, “Hey, you appreciate me. You understand what’s important to me” (redheadwriting.com).

Robert Scoble says that blogging demonstrates a person’s passion “by using language that shows you are excited about going to work every day” (126). In that case, the reader seeks out enthusiasm in the voice, in the style, and in the topic. That passion garners readers of similar interest, thus creating a community of readers with shared features and conventions. Miller and Shepherd trace the history of the weblog to the log of a ship or an airplane that has the “implication that the genre is the record of a journey whose details may be significant to others” (1464).

Looking at data is one sure way to test whether you are significant or not. Within your professional community, you can use crowdsourcing, polling and even prizes. Crowdsourcing “refers to asking readers of the blog for feedback so that the business can meet those customers’ needs as directly and immediately as possible” (Butow and Bollwitt, 14). Glen Fleishmann postulates in his article “Been ‘Blogging’? Web Discourse Hits a Higher Level,” that the blog has grown so quickly in part because, “The
structure enables readers to have a more direct relationship with the writer and that builds over time” (110).

Listening is half of any conversation, so enabling your readers to speak and replying to their comments gives them “a sense of ownership, knowing their opinions truly matter to the company” (Butow and Bollwitt, 72). You can also “listen” to the Internet using the likes of “Google Alerts along with Truecast and Radian6 to scan the Internet for mentions” of your products, brands and conversations of interest (89).

While the blog can instigate great conversations, critical thinking and online corroboration, it can also be a source of destructive criticism. It’s something to keep in mind: you will be responsible for handling and providing feedback! The anonymity of online conversations has wrought a whole subculture of “trolls,” those blog commenters who can be downright cruel. Even the CEO of the Whole Foods grocery chain was found to be anonymously attacking a competitor on Yahoo’s financial message boards (Rosenberg, 245).

Erika Napoletano says that negativity is not entirely a bad thing because, as she asks, “Wouldn’t you rather have your customers come out and say they don’t like something so you can have that conversation directly with them?” Twitter and Facebook have become the greatest and most efficient places to show your customers that you are indeed listening. The blog is the reference to which you can guide those with questions that need bigger answers, such as policy queries, video tutorials and even amicable rejoinders to contentious issues. When you’re tactfully answering and directing negative comments, those in your community are watching and sharing what they are seeing as
quality customer service.

Figure V.1 It’s not if you have a customer service issue, but how you handle it. People are listening and sharing.

As Tyrone Adams and Stephen Smith write in their book *Electronic Tribes*, it’s all about creating community. It’s where we can be comforted that Internet is “where physical safety is not threatened and demographic information may be lacking,” and where “group membership derives in part from shared symbol use, meanings, norms, prescriptions, and worldview” (144-145). That online community is where businesses can benefit from the blog’s ability to emulate group settings, and even create a sense of loyalty where traditionally there may have been no sense of belonging at all.
CHAPTER VI

A RHETORICAL STRUCTURE FOR PROLIFIC WRITING AND DIGITAL INTERACTION

It takes some courage and assertiveness to blog. You’re putting yourself out there to be read and be judged, let alone the reputation of an entire company. Here in this thesis it’s time to slip into the impetus for blogging. It begins so innocently. You peruse a few other blogs until you believe that you could write something just as good. As Elbow prognosticates, “It makes you positively hungry to hear more, makes you wish you had written it, and then, finally, makes you realize that you could have written it” (23).

“If that nerd can write something like that, so can I!” is Elbow’s mantra for the sharing generation reared by a healthy diet of online collaboration (and perhaps competition.) The prewriting and free writing; the exercises that teach “you to write without thinking about writing” now can come to fruition beyond the writing classroom and with you into the modern workplace (15).

It is with that energy that you need to step into Berlin’s “discourse community” that serves to create meaning from the writer to the reader. If the traditional workplace were often a one-way public broadcast, the blog is the interactive network of company’s communication potential. David Barlow writes that the blog allows for, “Confirmation of understanding of a sort that could not come along with past composition, as it did with speech. This new possibility enables immediate reinforcement of the writing act, and that comes in ways more reminiscent of speech than writing” (15). With the blog your writing is more resonant and deep with flesh; an intertextual beast to be devoured by the consumers of the Information Age.
As we have read, Burke and Berlin provide a necessary rhetorical foundation for the conversation of blogging, but the depth of understanding to turn keystrokes into an organic, sometimes sensual, experience comes from Roland Barthes. The linguist and literary critic does something like the *Leaves of Grass* version of compositions studies in which he torches convention with a sensual jaunt through the hidden meanings of the written word. In short, it’s a brief but helpful tutorial on the bliss that darts ever elusively in the fog around it. The fog, at least for the purpose of this little paper, is everything seen and unseen, inflicted and mitigated, intended and not, in the atmosphere of a text. If you’ve ever heard anyone complain that the Internet needs a font for sarcasm or a tilde for dry humor, then you understand the depth of text.

Text arrives with baggage--bucket loads of societal and cultural expectations of what is to be understood. But in Barthes *The Pleasure of the Text* we are told how to turn our mess of guts and neuroses into a guiltless pleasure machine. It is, after all, our moment with the text, our conjugal visit with the words outside of our “historical, cultural, psychological assumptions.”

Barthes says that the text is “that rare locus of language” where “logomachy is absent.” According to Barthes, the text “supersedes grammatical needs” and can be free from the “reign of the stereotypes imposed by the petit bourgeois culture.” The text no longer needs to be bloodless parts of a canon, but can become more of a fertile body. Even the sentence, that “exceptional object” of language structure that is “infinitely renewable” (despite having its paradox “articulated by linguists”) takes note of the minutiae of organic familiarity. Daily routines murmured by a million mundane and minor voices create a catharsis of relation to the world.
Will you have that kind of voice online? Barthes suggests a variety of ways to access the pleasure of the text, from the fleeting first glance to the distraction that bolts in and away leaving you with some sort of new disruption. Whatever it is, you work towards pleasure and form an aristocracy of thought and understanding, an exclusive place for two, reader and writer soaring above the expectations of society, government and even business.

It might be rare that you find yourself rolling in hedonistic joy with your laptop pressed to your face and your inhibitions off on the waves of ecstatic, moaning pleasure. But there is a meeting point where your blogging becomes your own voice that it transcends so much of the “rules” of composition. People understand it because you’ve created a persona that could very well be an online version of you, but it’s writing that reads in a luxurious, almost guilty, comfort that persists to nibble away the foundation of everything you were ever taught about a taut and conformed five-paragraph essay.

How does this happen? How do you get to this point where people other than yourself care about what you’re creating? It’s a victory to get one comment on a blog, let alone anyone attributing their pleasure to your writing. Although, of course, the mere fact you’re blogging in the first place—jotting down and sharing the written word—is a mild form of resistance to the blissless business space. As Berlin says, to be “committed to truth conceived of as a social phenomenon, with implications for the entire community. (47)” Wile that’s pretty heady stuff for someone who just wants to share the latest in shoes, blogger Rebecca Blood helps put the idea into perspective by writing, “The insightful weblogger has an opportunity to elucidate and navigate the unknown for his readers instead of pulling the gate shut behind them.” Now, how to do that rhetorically.
Blood has a nice fiery bit on professional bloggers and their need to be more open and communicative:

> Notably, weblogs that focus on a shared profession rarely exhibit this closed-mindedness or lack of respect with regard to dissenting opinion. They eagerly link to one another, disagree vigorously and respectfully, and are willing to test their ideas against the differing ideas of their colleagues. Sometimes they simply state their opposing opinions and leave it to the reader to decide. In a the world of professional weblogs, disagreement is a virtue, but disrespect and animosity are not tolerated.

You might reply, “Sweet God! I’m not going to toss typographical grenades at business colleagues!” Yes, for a business Blood might sound a little hot and opinionated. But it’s a nice mantra for the rhetorical key to access the attention your blogging deserves and to unearth the conversations that takes your conversation to near Barthes levels of appreciation. It is Invitational Rhetoric, and when Kenneth Burke wrote about in the article “A Rhetoric of Motives,” it was 1950 and women were expected to be vacuuming in a long dress and pearls. It is, however, a rhetorical turn based in Feminist Theory. To narrow this to business blogging: this is the Information Age, information is the currency by which you can interest and access customers, but that’s difficult if you don’t seem interested in them.

Burke turns Aristotle's rhetoric from an available means of persuasion and explains that it does not have to be manipulation. Invitational Rhetoric, according to Burke, can be a used to build communities and help us learn to live with each other
because “efforts to dominate and gain power over others cannot be used to develop relationships of equality” (Burke, 145).

Across the blogosphere the invitation to build communities is not only recommended, but deemed necessary to attract the readers you want for your business. Burke explains the two primary rhetorical forms of Invitational Rhetoric as, “Offering perspectives, a model by which rhetors put forward for consideration their perspectives; the second is the creation of external conditions that allow others to present their perspectives in an atmosphere of respect and dignity” (147). Sixty years later the same sentiments are echoed by some of the most successful business bloggers. Napoletano says that “The blog is a vehicle for me to start conversations and see what other people have to say. When I share stories, the stories that are shared with me create conversations I never knew I’d have.”

In examining Burke’s analysis of Invitational Rhetoric we find bloggers everywhere using its two primary tenets quite successfully. The “external conditions” he requires are the blog, the comments, trackbacks, shares and entire socially interactive landscape provided by the rhetor, which in this case is the blogger.

James Berlin’s life and writing predates the blog, but his defining of transactional rhetoric as “an epistemology that sees truth as arising out of the interaction of the elements of the rhetorical situation: an interaction of subject and object or of subject and audience or even of all the elements--subject, object, audience, and language--operating simultaneously” (15), bodes well for Michael Keren’s “rebirth of the public sphere.” Keren, a political scientist whose book Blogosphere suggests that blogs have “raised hopes for a reinvigoration of a public sphere worn off in an age of centralized
mass media” (9). Berlin’s portrayal of John Dewey's progressive education as a “social construction, a communal creation emerging from the dialectical interplay of individuals,” paves a road to blogger Rebecca Blood’s “vigorous exchange of ideas” (47).

The rhetorical structure of a blog leads to Blood (and, fittingly, not blood as Aristotle had promoted the earliest rhetorical theory as a superior means to brutality) and her “unprecedented tool with which to share ideas and understand other worldviews,” which is a very good thing for your company. By simply sharing your story, and therefore your passion and expertise, you’re pulling in new customers via inbound marketing, as compared to the sales calls of outbound marketing.

Rebecca Corliss, an inbound marketing strategist at Hubspot, says:

It’s content that’s of value to the customer on the blog that people like, share or click. You’re a business and your first instinct is to let someone know about you, but when someone is investigating information or looking for an answer, they’re not necessarily going to be thinking, ‘OK, what’s the best company to do this for me,’ but more ‘what is the information to make my life easier.’ With a car issue I’m looking to see if I’m caring for my car properly and not looking for a specific mechanic. So when a mechanic gives me helpful advice, I’m going to trust that person and when I do need a mechanic I know where to take my car.

The conversation you create with your customers is where truth can be found in a “social construct involving the interaction of interlocutor and audience (or discourse community)” (Berlin, 15). Ultimately, Berlin continues, “Choices are made on the basis of public discourse.” The structure of the blog’s discourse is built around a frame of Berlin’s definition of classical transactional rhetoric and Burke’s parlor conversation, which is always mutually beneficial when it’s wrapped up in Invitational Rhetoric. “Text is tissue,” adds Barthes. “We are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made; is worked out in a perpetual interweaving” (64).
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

On June 25, 2013, Wendy Davis became a national sensation when she stood for eleven hours to filibuster a bill on the floor of the Texas State Senate. The problem was that the nationally televised media didn’t seem to care or, as they’d profess the following day, they didn’t have the staff or time to make it appear that they cared. When you flipped through the television channels, the traditional bastions of information, there wasn’t a single story about the Texas senator. However, there was one public television access channel that carried the vigil online. Bloggers picked it up. Twitter carried links to it and the hash tag “#standwithwendy” went viral. The next morning one of the big stories was that she was successful in stopping the bill. The other was that, thanks to social media and blogs, Davis’ filibuster became news without any major media entity paying any attention to it.

Of course this is of little solace to a small business blog seeking to become a major news story. Davis has the advantage in that she’s elected official in a major institution in the second largest state in what is often considered the most powerful nation in the world. She was in a statewide office talking about a national issue and a groundswell of support grew. Luckily, however, your blogging is building your own grassroots campaign. Like Burke’s parlor conversation, the successful blog is created and grows over time. Your blog makes some memorable moments but it’s your passion and expertise that gives reasons for people to keep coming back. You’re blogging because it makes you better at what you do, keeping you ahead of your industry and buoyed in the
growing deluge of information. Probably the best part is that you’re now looked to as a trusted source for your ideas, products and services.

Miller and Shepherd discuss the blog as a “shared rhetorical convention” that “functions as a site of relative stability.” They suggest we see all genres as such backward motions, as “efforts at stabilization in the flux of continual change.” In a quickly changing culture, “the blog makes ‘real’ the reflexive effort to establish the self against the forces of fragmentation, through expression and connection, through disclosure” (1469). It’s a metaphor especially necessary under the fluorescent exhale of the office space where you have this page, a refuge really, where you can search through information to pull together something that, through your voice, sheds new light on the discussion already at hand. Within the web’s three-dimensional structure exists a new depth for movement, a hyperlinked slash right through the page and on and on, liberating you from budgetary and logistical restraints, and revealing new colleagues and clients who appreciate your presence.

And now you, transcending the neon hype of everything Internet, have joined the Burkean conversation. Its 19th Century parlor is now amplified across the World Wide Web, into homes, classrooms and businesses. You’re carrying the conversation and pulsing from nearly every pixel is an opportunity for enhanced exposure, collaboration and community. The implications can go global but your blogging begins right where you are.
REFERENCES


