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COMMERCIAL BLOGS AS AN INFORMATION ACTIVITY AREA

Summary

Development of the Internet and remaining information technologies have resulted in a new view on markets patterns and have made enterprises rapidly adjust to new conditions. The growing number of information as well as enhanced access to it provided to citizens is a visible trend in the social development process these days. “Societies abundant in information”¹ are created and their features are significantly different from “societies abundant in material resources” whose economies are based on exploitation of these resources. Development of social media: social portals, blogs and discussion and recommendation forums is essential in internet activities. This paper presents a blog analysis as a corporate tool of influencing customers for information purposes as well as building a brand and bonds with customers. Results of secondary research will also be presented as well as ranking of the most effective corporate blogs on the Polish internet in 2011.

Blogs as a social media area

Blogs constitute an element of Web 2.0 which defines an evolution approach to building an application – creating Internet environments which would not only gather Internet users but also build virtual knowledge based communities, modify and develop services in accordance with internet users (customization of the content). Web 2.0 applications have various forms and applications in thematically various platforms bringing together internet users creating social media.²

¹ *Internet. Fenomen społeczeństwa informacyjnego*, red. T. Zasępa, Edycja Świętego Pawła, Częstochowa 2001, p. 54–57.

² Ch. Li, J. Bernoff, *Marketing technologii społecznych. Groundswell, czyli jak wykorzystać Web 2.0 w twojej firmie*, MT Biznes, Warszawa 2009, p. 36–39.

Social media is defined as communication channels which enable Internet users to interact by mean of information technologies and computer sciences. These are all media and on-line services where individuals, companies or organizations place information about their activities, products and services offered –which is supposed to result in the “integration” of internet users through meaningful individual participation.³ Social media can be characterized in the following way:

- it can be used in a free extent,
- primary information may be modified endlessly,⁴
- an access to creation of contents and its modification is infinite,
- all elements resulting from the creation process (co-creation) of the content are not deleted and are accessible,
- the content is spread through the social interaction,
- there is an unforced way of content formation.⁵

Social media is a communication channel which as opposed to traditional channels (e.g. television, radio, the press) where the message is delivered by only one party – to the customer, secures bilateral communication.⁶ Recent years have observed a large participation of enterprises in social media where activities are targeted at an individual customer/group of customers. The following areas of social media⁷ can be differentiated (tab. 1).

Next to Internet forums and discussion groups, blogs are one of the most popular tools of publishing the content; they give companies an opportunity to address their message to internet users from all over the world.⁸ A blog is a kind of Internet page where a person (a company or a private person) puts dated posts or images which are displayed on a www site beginning with the latest one. There are the so called photoblogs: a kind of blog, an Internet diary whose basic content consists of photographs. There are filmblogs called videoblogs based on film files (VODcast) published by an author chronologically. Blogs usually have a system of archiving posts, readers have a possibility of comment-

³ Ch. Treadaway, M. Smith, *Godzina dziennie z Facebookiem*, Helion, Gliwice 2010, p. 23–18.

⁴ A. Joshi, *Web 2.0 Mining: Analyzing Social Media*, *InProceedings*, Proceedings of the NSF Symposium on Next Generation of Data Mining and Cyber-Enabled Discovery for Innovation, 2007, p. 28.

⁵ D. Bell, *An Introduction to Cyberculture*, London–New York 2001, <http://networked.digital.com/2010/04/17/definicja-social-media/> (12.02.2012).

⁶ *Definicja social mediów. Raport Social Media 2011*, Internet Standard, <http://www.internetstandard.pl/news/365447/Internet.Standard.prezentuje.raport.Social.Media.2011.html>.

⁷ A. Dejnaka, *Aktywność przedsiębiorstw i internautów w social mediach*, report – own research, Wrocław 2011.

⁸ L. Evans, *Social media marketing*, Helion, Gliwice 2011, p. 24.

ing them and there are links to blogs recommended by the author and to other www sites.⁹

Table 1

Selected areas of social media

Social media areas	Example and application
Social portals	Facebook: establishing relations with customers, building a brand
Content portals	You Tube: presentation of multimedia materials, corporate advertising
Networking portals	GoldenLine: building an image of en employers, initiating business cooperation.
Repositories	Wikipedia: presentation of information materials sponsoring keywords, building a brand.
Discussion and recommendation forums	Streetcom: recommendation service, building a corporate image, building confidence towards brands
Blogs and microblogs	Twister: microblog of the information and image related character Blogs: corporate, entertainment, information

Source: elaboration on one's own based on the Internet research (participatory observation): A. Dejnaka, *Aktywność przedsiębiorstw i internautów w social mediach*, report – own research, Wrocław 2011.

The blog originates from 70s and Les Earnest is considered to have created the first protoblog tool called finger protocol. The term weblog was coined by combining words web and log. Two years later Peter Merholz applied the word blog by breaking down the weblog into “we blog”.¹⁰ Contemporary blogging began in mid 90s and three persons: Dave Winer, Jorn Barger and Justin Hall are considered to be its founders though the mere term blog belongs to Peter Merholz.¹¹ The greatest development of blogs occurs over the years 2002–2005. 2004 was significant for the blog in terms of business. It is then when business leaders discovered the potential behind business blogging. A year later in 2005 leaders of General Motors and Sun Microsystems service showed how to use this Internet tool in an interesting and effective way in order to build a brand image.¹²

⁹ Technically a blog is a simple system of content management (CMS – Content Management System). According to: W. Gustowski, *E-społeczność*, Internetowe Wyd. Złote Myśli, Gliwice 2008, p. 48.

¹⁰ <http://redaktor.pl/> (10.03.2012).

¹¹ E. Fedorowicz, *Blog, czyli nowa nisza reklamowa*, „Marketing i Rynek” 2009, No. 10, p. 36.

¹² J. Wright, *Blogowanie w biznesie*, Wyd. Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2007, p. 9

Intensive development of blogs over a few years has led to its usage as a tool for different purposes. Basic purposes of applying commercial blogs are presented in table 2.

Table 2

Purposes of applying commercial blogs

Purpose	Description
Building a corporate image	Modern corporate image (banks) Customer friendly corporate image
Getting to know consumers (insight)	Adjusting products/services to needs of the changing society
Building a brand	Little known brands – inspiring positive emotions. Stable brands – building emotional involvement and loyalty.
Promoting an idea	Acting together with customers for the sake of a common matter
Promoting corporate products	Paid and unpaid advertising Competition (photographic and writing) Social gaming Product placement
Social gaming	Product placement Involvement and an emotional bond with the brand
Propagating one's own creativity	Involvement and an emotional bond with the brand (musicians, actors, theatres etc)
Conveying information	Building a recommendation system

Source: *Ibidem*.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the purpose and activity of the blog may interpenetrate e.g. an image related blog may become a corporate or individual one. Criteria presented above are to systemize generally applications of blogs.

Classification of blogs

The division of blogs into types begins with establishing their usage however there are no unified criteria of this division and different authors prepare various classifications of this tool. According to E. Fedorowicz classifications of blogs consist in dividing them in terms of their character and topic discussed, number of authors, the type of device used for blogging, the frequency of publishing posts and comments as well as their content.¹³

The first division of blogs is done according to authors and purposes in other words according to the person running the blog and the objective:

¹³ E. Fedorowicz, *Blog, czyli nowa nisza reklamowa*, „Marketing i Rynek” 2009, No. 10, p. 36.

- private blogs: typical diaries written by the biggest number of blog participants,
- professional blogs: written by journalists, politicians, independent experts in order to promote themselves and create an image of an expert in a particular field,
- partner blogs: they result from the cooperation between private persons and companies (a person running a private blog agrees to promote a specific brand in exchange of the remuneration),
- corporate blogs – run by companies or on their behalf in order to communicate with internet users.¹⁴

Due to the nature of the content one may differentiate:

- textual blog: news, self-help books, diaries, books,
- videoblog: contains a video,
- photoblog: contains photos,
- audiolog: contains audio recordings,
- miniblog: contains short posts e.g. on Twitter,
- link log: contains links.

As far as corporate blogs are concerned one may divide them according to their functionality, thematic scope and authorships.¹⁵

One may differentiate according to functionality criterion: sales blogs, image related and customer service oriented. While creating a business blog it is worthwhile defining its strategic direction at the beginning and focusing its content on the main thematic scope.

Sales blogs are created when the company wants to generate greater sales (e.g. introducing a new product in the market). Such blog plays a major role in evolving customer loyalty – it is regularly updated and run in a direct and informal way and it may maintain permanent customers. Typical tools used in such blog are the following: subscription to a newsletter, promotional e-mailing informing about novelties and interesting promotions which may make users come back to the website.

Image related blogs are primarily focused on creating a corporate image or specific products. They are useful in “warming” a corporate image in the market and in rebranding. In case of companies with a good position they may promote the company as a leader in the industry. Creation of a leader’s image may be

¹⁴ K. Łazowska-Widz, *Blogi jako narzędzie komunikacji marketingowej w świetle badań empirycznych*, http://www.swiatmarketingu.pl/index.php?rodzaj=01&id_numer=598602 (2.02.2012).

¹⁵ G. Mazurek, *Blogi i wirtualne społeczności – wykorzystanie w marketingu*, Wolters Kluwer business, Kraków 2008, p. 52–53.

realized by a specialist as well as a series of employee's blogs placed on the blog platform. The image related blog is not only targeted at customers but also at opinion creating groups: specialist media, independent expert, business partners.

Customer service oriented blogs are focused on conveying information about purchased products or researching their satisfaction from the purchase. Blogs play an important role when a company wants to reduce costs related to responding to customers' questions, explain doubts related to the usage of products or get a feedback. Creation of customer service oriented blogs facilitates building customer-company relations and helps achieve an image effect. Customers are aware that the organization uses modern communication methods and is open to making remarks and criticism.¹⁶

According to the criterion of the thematic scope, apart from corporate blogs which build and strengthen relations with customers and media, there are products blogs constituting the type of commercial blogs. Product blogs are devoted to a particular product, service or selected category of products. Their main objective is supporting the sales including a broadly understood promotion. These blogs often take over the customer service function which is done through publication of answers to customers' questions, showing solutions to problems connected to the usage of products or informing about principles of making a claim. Such blogs are seldom used however it a future solution thanks to enabling communications with the customer by means of the cheapest and the most effective channel.

According to the criterion of the criterion of authorship, a blog can be run by individuals or persons representing a company. At present this division is mixed– corporate blogs are often created by individuals (e.g. Winiary or Lurpak) and the individuals are supported by advertising and product placement by companies.

Application of the blogosphere in business

The blogosphere constitutes the general content functioning in the form of blogs aided by platforms and tools enabling functioning and its structure – a network of mutual relations. The worldwide blogosphere has reached a maturity phase which is characterized by greater stability and slower development. Simultaneously blogs have become a massive phenomenon which has not had a positive impact on the quality of texts published in blogs. According to the

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

report prepared by Universal McCann in 2010 the number of blogs set up in the world amounted to almost 185 million including 2.84 million blogs in Polish.¹⁷

Polish blogosphere has been developing at a faster pace. At present about 59% of Internet users have contact with the blogosphere in a passive way (as readers) or in an active way (as a person running the blog or commenting posts in the blog).¹⁸ Considering corporate blogs, then on the basis of the Ranking of Blogs 2011 one may present the most popular professional blogs in 2011 (tab. 3).¹⁹

Table 3

Rankin Blogs 2011

Professional Ranking Blogs 2011 (category: large firms)	Professional Ranking Blogs 2011 (category: regardless of the size of the company)
Play	Play
Dom Maklerski BOŚ	Dom Maklerski BOŚ
Cropp	Bank Zachodni WBK
Bank Zachodni WBK	Eura 7
Groupon	MBank
mBank	Szafy
Nokia	Plodni.com
AXA Direktion	Ślubna Pracownia
Bank Pocztowy	Kraina Ślubów
Infovite-Matrix	Infovite-Matrix

Source: *Najlepsze polskie blogi firmowe*, [http://blogifirmowe.wordpress.com/2011/12/29/najlepsze-polskie-blogi-firmowe-2011/\(1.03.2012\)](http://blogifirmowe.wordpress.com/2011/12/29/najlepsze-polskie-blogi-firmowe-2011/(1.03.2012)).

One may notice among corporate blogs of big companies that the leaders are as follows: Play, Dom Maklerski BOŚ and Cropp. Ban Zachodni WBK and mBank run highly assessed corporate blogs – both in rankings of big companies as well as all companies.

In case of blogs interaction with internet users counts most. That is why the first place goes to Play in ranking of big companies and so is the case of Eura7: when it comes to smaller companies²⁰ (fig. 1).

¹⁷ *Blogosfera*, <http://www.mccannworldgroup.com/> (10.03.2012).

¹⁸ *PBI o blogosferze w Polsce, Social Media Day Poland 2011*, www.pbi.org.pl/index.php/ida/41/?getFile=49:0 (10.03.2012).

¹⁹ *Najlepsze polskie blogi firmowe*, <http://blogifirmowe.wordpress.com/2011/12/29/najlepsze-polskie-blogi-firmowe-2011/> (1.03.2012).

²⁰ *Blog Play*, <http://www.blogplay.pl/>; *Blog Eura7*, <http://www.labber.pl/> (1.03.2012).



Fig. 1. Corporate blogs of Play and Eura7

Source: *Play blog*, <http://www.blogplay.pl/>; *Eura7 blog*, <http://www.labber.pl/> (10.03.2012).

Information put in Play blog is actively commented on by internet users. A network of virtual information relations is created. Play actively acts in other areas of social media: on the Facebook and on Twitter (a form of a miniblog). It is similar to Eura7 interactive agency (the first in the ranking of the best blog in 2011– not a big corporation) uses a blog to communicate with Internet users, build a virtual community and educate Internet users on the subject of the commercial usage of social media.

It is interesting to know a large number of blogs used among companies rendering financial services. It is interesting to know a large number of blogs used among companies rendering financial services. Below there are blogs of selected financial institutions²¹ (fig. 2).

²¹ *mBank*, <http://www.mbank.pl/porozmawiajmy/blog/>; *Bossa*, <http://blogi.bossa.pl/>; *Inteligo*, <http://inteligo.pl/aktualnosci/inteligo.pl-w-nowej-odslonie/>(10.03.2012).

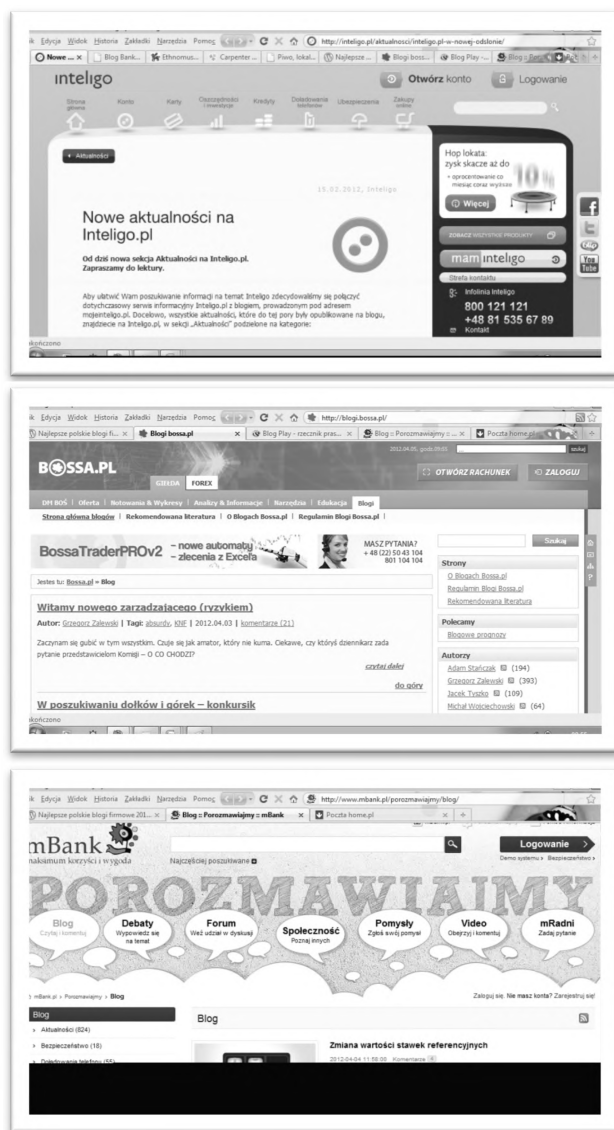


Fig. 2. Corporate blogs of mBank, Inteligo, Dom Maklerski BOŚ and Bank Zachodni WBK

Source: *mBank*, <http://www.mbank.pl/porozmawiajmy/blog/>, *Bossa*, <http://blogi.bossa.pl/>; *Inteli-go*, [http://inteligo.pl/aktualnosci/inteligo.pl-w-nowej-odslonie/\(10.03.2012\).](http://inteligo.pl/aktualnosci/inteligo.pl-w-nowej-odslonie/(10.03.2012).)

Presented blogs are image related – they show a company as a leader in the industry. Not only customers but also other opinion creating groups are recipients of these blogs.

The size of the company does not have such importance as in case of gathering a virtual community in the blogosphere. It is important when we analyze the financial aspect connected with the technology of using the blog. The blog of Bank Zachodni WBK is an example of applying information technologies in the blog²² (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Corporate blog of Bank Zachodni WBK

Source: <http://blog.bzwbk.pl/2012/04/business-zone-%E2%80%93-przepis-na-sukces#more-5587> (10.03.2012).

Bank Zachodni WBK in its blog informs Internet users about forms of using services and builds its corporate image. An interesting tool is applied to build a community namely advergaming – an internet game called “Business Zone – a recipe for success”. This is a kind of economic Internet game targeted at young people (students of junior secondary schools and secondary schools). While registering on the game site they define their type of activity: an advertising agency, an interior design agency, an IT company- the internet users begins

²² *Blog Banku Zachodniego WBK*, <http://blog.bzwbk.pl/2012/04/business-zone-%E2%80%93-przepis-na-sukces#more-5587> (10.03.2012).

an adventure with setting up a virtual business where one of the roles is played by Bank Zachodni WBK. Random elements add realism to the game. A long-term employee may be bought in by the competition or may not turn up for work due to problems in their love life. The objective of the game is to build a virtual community, the logo and services of the bank included in the game constitute a mere product placement.

Summary

The future of the blogosphere will depend whether blogs will accept new and more popular Internet phenomena – In particular integration with consumers and openness to consumers' opinions. If blogs can find a specialist niche in the internet world, they will survive and develop in their own form. Corporate blogs and their development will not only depend on Information Technologies – but also on creativity of companies and their openness to interactions with customers-internet users and their resilience to praise and criticism included in the blog. It is also important to gather those who through commentaries build a community – they create an information and social graph for the company.

BLOGI KOMERCYJNE JAKO OBSZAR AKTYWNOŚCI INFORMACYJNEJ FIRM

Streszczenie

Rozwój Internetu i pozostałych technologii informacyjnych przyczyniły się do nowego spojrzenia na schematy rynkowe oraz wymogły na przedsiębiorstwach szybkie przystosowanie się do nowych warunków. Rosnąca liczba informacji oraz wzrost jej dostępności dla obywateli to obecnie wyraźny trend w procesie rozwoju społecznego. Tworzą się „społeczeństwa bogate w informacje”²³, których cechy są zasadniczo odmienne od „społeczeństw bogatych w zasoby materialne” i opierających swoją gospodarkę na eksploatacji tych zasobów. Znaczący w działaniach internetowych jest rozwój social mediów: portali społecznościowych, blogów oraz forów dyskusyjnych i rekomendacyjnych. W artykule została zaprezentowana analiza bloga jako narzędzia oddziaływania firm na klientów w celach informacyjnych oraz budowania marki i więzi z klientami. Przedstawiono także wyniki badań wtórnych oraz rankingi najbardziej efektywnych blogów firmowych w polskim Internecie w 2011 roku.

Tłumaczenie: Agnieszka Dejnaka

²³ *Internet. Fenomen społeczeństwa informacyjnego...*, p. 54–57.