

## **Working With Bloggers to Create Genuine, Authentic Content, To Promote Your Brand Destination**

Bloggers and online influencers are real people with real voices and real opinions. People follow a blogger because they relate to them; find common ground in their story and experiences. They trust the blogger. When someone they read and trust recommends a brand, product or destination readers are paying attention. How do you capture their attention? How do you find the right bloggers? What are the positives and pitfalls in working with bloggers? How do you start and define the mission for bloggers to represent your business?



### **Moderator:**

Beth Krusi, Director of Marketing & Communications at Montshire Museum of Science  
(802) 649-2200, ext. 222, [beth.krusi@montshire.org](mailto:beth.krusi@montshire.org)

### **Panelists:**

Karen Boushie - Public Relations Director at Smuggler's Notch Resort  
802-644-8572; [mediarelations@smuggs.com](mailto:mediarelations@smuggs.com)

Sarah Wojcik - Public Relations Director at Ski Vermont  
802-223-2439; [sarah@skivermont.com](mailto:sarah@skivermont.com)  
Blog: <http://allmountainmamas.skivermont.com/>

Jennifer Rossetti Neary - Director of Marketing,  
Integrated Services Cabot Cheese Cooperative  
802.496.1273; [jneary@Cabotcheese.coop](mailto:jneary@Cabotcheese.coop)

### **Why work with bloggers/create a blogger program?**

- Blogs are now the third most influential digital resource (31%) when making overall purchases (Technorati's 2013 Digital Influence Report)
- Blogger programs can be a strategic and efficient method for amplifying your brand messages online.
- A trusted voice: Bloggers tend to have a sincere voice and cover both the highs and lows of destinations and products in their reviews. Consumers trust and look to bloggers for an honest assessment when making decisions. They can tell the story of your product without sounding like a marketing pitch.
- The blogger community: Strong bloggers are often part of a large community of other bloggers with similar topics and connect with them regularly via social media and conferences. They also

have networks of readers and friends who trust them and who read their blog and other social networks regularly. They also often blog for more than one outlet. This can widen your net of coverage in many ways.

- Brand Ambassadors: Treat a blogger well and you could have a brand ambassador for life. If they love your product, they'll shout it from the rooftops and try to mention it as often as possible, which could mean mentions in other blogs or via social media.
- Bloggers can provide a cost-efficient extension of your brand messaging with third-party endorsement (so more like a recommendation).

### **How to identify the right bloggers for your goals.**

- Outline clear goals: Are you trying to reach a certain market? Create content that is engaging? Show a different perspective? Defining your goals are the first step!
- Learn who is already writing about your brand. Bloggers who already love your brand are a great starting point. Some inexpensive ways to do this are with Mention.net, Hootsuite (set up searches for twitter); Socialmention, Buzzsumo. You can also use these tools (and many others) to start searching by keywords and begin reading and researching. You'll be amazed at how quickly you'll start seeing the networks of the bloggers.
- Research: Delve into the community you're hoping to reach and find out who is influential. There are a million ways to do this, but here are a few:
  - Google: Simply search for blogs that are relevant to your subject and read, read, read. Developing your own blog? Look at what competitors are doing and take notes. Who is blogging for them?
  - Follow: Bloggers have strong connections to Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube and more. Once you've found a few via research, follow them on their social media. When possible, start lists of certain bloggers for ease of following.
    - Twitter: Follow relevant hashtags, and twitter chats to see who has a strong voice on social media. Follow influential bloggers to track their posting habits.
  - See who is following you. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube all have follower information publicly available. Finding traffic information is trickier. You can try Compete.com but many blogs aren't measured.
  - Connect: Comment on blog and Facebook posts, retweet, like, etc. Start a relationship of engagement with bloggers of interest.
  - During the research phase, check with business partners or sponsors to find out if they've worked with bloggers, who they think might be a good match for you.
  - Keep a grid of bloggers that interest you, with links to their sites and notes on the length of time they've been blogging, any analytics you can find and perhaps a few positives or negatives for each one in terms of alignment with your goals.

## How to identify the right bloggers for your goals, continued

- Analytics: Once you've connected with a blogger, be sure to ask for demographic, traffic and engagement analytics for their blog and social media channels. This will help you identify if they align with your goals.
  - Important Note: you probably don't want just big traffic bloggers! The more traffic, the more they are sought after. The more brands they write about, the less authentic their love of your brand is. That doesn't mean you don't want any big-time bloggers. It means that smaller blogs that are passionate and have good strong communities are wonderful and can grow with you.
- Content: Read, read, read and repeat. Make sure the bloggers voice matches your goals, and their writing is high quality.

## How to connect with a blogger and begin a relationship.

- Join the community: Don't just stalk them – talk to them! We suggested posting comments on their blog or social media; if that isn't relevant, simply direct message them to see if they want to chat to you about an opportunity.
- Lay out your goals: Be honest about what you are looking for and what sort of compensation, if any, is available. For example Cabot offers to send product, support their content, and ask nothing in return. If you choose to pay your bloggers, it's typically with a specific deliverable in mind – 1 blog post, 2 tweets, 2 Instagram posts. Many bloggers have packages to offer.
- Check the blogger's sites for their media kit or "work with me" page, which often spell out exactly how they prefer to be contacted.
- Be honest and sincere. Care about them. Read their content before you approach them.

## Positives and pitfalls of working with bloggers.

- Typically a story is pretty quick turnaround
- The bloggers that are hosted are very much about the experience – they tell a story that is very relatable to potential guests.
- Most bloggers are energetic users of social media – lots of "in the moment" tweets and Instagram photos.
- The blogging community is very interconnected and benefits of that are content spreading and suggestions of other bloggers that might work for your business.
- Pitfall – Expect a "warts and all" approach in their writing. Which isn't a total pitfall; it can be constructive.
- DISCLOSURE – It's imperative that you direct bloggers to disclose your relationship – per FTC guidelines. Read the guidelines and understand their implications.
- 

## Other Questions:

- How do I measure the ROI? The cost of a blogger program may be monetary or reciprocal support – but there is always a cost. Remember to include cost of product and staff time – a lot of staff time. That, of course, is the investment. To calculate return, there are several options, though measurement is difficult and fuzzy. Some companies look at "potential impressions"

which adds up the reach of the blog, tweets, Facebook posts, etc. to demonstrate how many people could potentially see the content about your brand. Naturally, there is duplication in audience – but this can be useful for comparative measurement. Another option is how many posts on each platform were published. This more 'action' oriented measurement is considered, by many, to be more grounded. Either way, these figures give you the ability to see how many actions (or impressions) you receive for the \$X investment – or ROI.

- How do I compensate for bloggers? - It depends on your goals. Many brands do pay bloggers just as they would pay for any advertising. Others send product for review. Ski Vermont compensates All Mountain Mamas with trade. There is debate in the industry about the best approach and we believe it is tied to what you are looking to accomplish. If you want guaranteed content, paying makes sense. If you are willing to 'pay' by sweat and helping bloggers with their goals, that can be an option. It is a commitment and as they say, there's no such thing as a free lunch.
- Do you *just* send bloggers a press release? Cabot - Never. It is proven to be ineffective. Ski Vermont – some of our trusted blogger contacts pull content all the time from our press releases, but we have established relationships beforehand.
- What happens if I get a negative review by a blogger? Stay cool. You have no editorial control – it's like getting a review by a newspaper or magazine. How would you handle that? Depending on your corporate culture, you may want to comment on the post or you may want to call or write and ask how you can address the issue (that was written about negatively). Treat them how you would any important customer. Often, they'll write an update. Sometimes, it's just one of the risks you face.
- Can I write a guest blog for someone? What are the pros and cons of doing this? You can, but most bloggers are not interested in branded guest posts. Alternatively, considering bloggers to write guest posts for your blog – or your newsletter – could be interesting. A great benefit to this is that they often share the content with their communities.

Presented at the Vermont Travel Industry Conference, April 1, 2015