

## Marketing matters

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### Wag the blog

Blogs are dogs. This was my initial opinion when I started to think about the topic in relation to professional services firms. Not a seasoned blogger myself, I could not comprehend why firms would include blogs instead of communicating more directly with their clients.

But the nature of blogs means that they need not necessarily be created for clients. They can be designed to provide a forum for discussion about the firm, its people and services and this may attract prospective employees e-savvy enough to blog. However, shadow websites created for the purpose of graduate recruitment and engagement with prospective employees also do this.

Professional services firms don't strike me as cultural leaders – they are usually followers. And as blogs have not yet been embraced by mainstream business, I cannot imagine that this trend will catch on quickly with this group.

A necessary component of blogs is the target audience and I don't think that white-collar companies with time-poor, high-powered executives look to blogs as a way to discuss issues of passion or even relevance. They would use meetings to offer feedback to the firm.

Firms who market themselves on their intellectual capital should look to the top end of town with their marketing efforts and may see blogs as diminishing the quality of their service. A small number of law firms currently offer blogs. There is a school of thought that blogs can personalise firms and partners, but this argument doesn't convince me because public relations consultants would probably censor the blogs and remove content of any interest.

If we view professional blogs as a form of voyeurism then they would offer an insight into a firm and represent a brand. If the blogs were consistently monitored, had value, were written for a target audience and were vetted thoroughly then they might serve a purpose even for this discerning audience.

If I had to jump off the fence and pick a side, I would say that blogs wouldn't work for professional services firms in Australia at present. A cultural change will need to take place before clients and firms embrace the concept, participate and actually benefit from the experience. But I don't believe that blogs are a low-rent marketing tool, either.

People such as marketing guru Toni Fitzgerald "prefer to use blogs to eavesdrop rather than interact" with clients, which makes sense. Blogs have value from a consumer perspective and would work well for businesses trading in consumer goods that want to know what their customers think about their products and services.

So while blogs do get the boot for me among professional services firms, I would say to those brazen enough to run them that they should ensure that their blogs are consistent, valuable, monitored, informative or entertaining and written for a specific audience, whether it be clients, staff or prospective employees.

For those who will steer clear of this emerging communication tool, there are plenty of other ways to interact with clients directly through meetings, seminars, emails, newsletters, publications and – my favourite – viral marketing.