

## Clicks, nuts and bolts

### The (im)practicalities of blogging for business

If blogging sounds more like a way for teenagers to waste time than something companies would do to drum up business, consider what one chatty site did for a small Chicago marketing firm.

re:invention Inc. specializes in helping companies sell products and services to women entrepreneurs and executives. It's the kind of work lots of marketing firms offer, including some local multimillion-dollar agencies.

Yet type in "marketing women Chicago" on Google, and re:invention is among the first companies on the list. It has no offices or full-time employees, but its founder, Kirsten Osolind, who started the blog in 2002, has been quoted in *Redbook*, *Entrepreneur* and *BusinessWeek* magazines. And she's a popular speaker at conferences on women's business issues, earning \$7,500 per event.

Ms. Osolind, who declined to disclose her revenue, credits much of her success to [www.reinventioninc.blogspot.com](http://www.reinventioninc.blogspot.com).

"We've gotten our biggest clients through the blog," says Ms. Osolind, 39, who's been hired by Genworth Financial Inc., Vanguard Group and Jajah Inc., an internet phone company in Mountain View, Calif.

### REVENUE SPIKE

More than 70 million blogs populate the Web today. Many read like personal diaries, with angst-ridden musings about relationships or wild nights out. But thousands of blogs — no one is sure how many — are written by entrepreneurs and corporate leaders to connect with current and potential customers. These bloggers tend to write about industry issues, or excitement and dilemmas within their own companies.

There's no doubt a popular blog can push up company profits. Just ask Chicago sex and relationship therapist Laura Berman, who sees a spike in revenue on her subscription-only Web site every time her blog on Yahoo Health (<http://health.yahoo.com/experts>) gets picked by Yahoo editors for prominent placement.

With about 20 million visitors and 1,000 comments on a good day, she says the publicity is unbeatable for boosting subscriptions, which cost \$13 a week.

But few businesses see direct sales results from blogging, marketing experts warn. For most companies, the benefits of blogging come from showcasing expertise and listening to what people are saying about the business and its competitors.

## **FILMS AND FARMS**

David Zapata, founder of Zapwater Communications, a Chicago public relations firm, set up his blog early this year ([www.zapwater.com/blog](http://www.zapwater.com/blog)) "to show we handled TV stars and paper companies alike," he says.

He and his colleagues blogged from hip events like the Sundance Film Festival, which they attended on behalf of their client, the Illinois Film Office, and the opening of Grace, a new boutique in Bucktown. They also wrote about a farm bill debate in Congress, an issue important to another client.

With Google's [Blogger.com](http://Blogger.com), anyone can create a blog in less than 10 minutes for free. TypePad, another popular blog host, offers more customization and charges monthly fees ranging from \$5 to \$15. Public relations firms also set up blogs, usually as part of a larger marketing plan.

Last summer, GardenTech, a Lexington, Ky.-based pesticide company, hired Chicago public relations firm Arment Dietrich Inc. to blog about fire ants to create buzz about its insecticide Over 'n Out. Recent posts on FireRant have included a video of someone blowing up an ant mound with firecrackers, academic reports about fire ants and stories about property damage by fire ants. The number of visitors to the site has grown steadily since its launch, to about 10,000, with 1,000 posting comments on its message board.

Some marketers believe customers eventually will expect companies to blog, just like they now expect them to have Web sites.

"There's a real trend toward this," says Dave Friedman, president of the central region for Avenue A Razorfish, a Seattle-based online marketing firm. "Now is the time to experiment and make mistakes."