

The Next Generation Enterprise: A Conversation about the Basics

BSG Alliance helps its customers become Next Generation Enterprises through its on-demand Strategy, Delivery, and Applications offerings. BSG Concours – the company’s strategy arm – regularly convenes teleconference updates for the members of its C-level programs.

On the July 12, 2007, “CIO Staff Meeting” teleconference, Nick Vitalari and Susan Scrupski discussed with program member participants the subjects of blogging, Wikis, and the movement of these and other new technologies into corporate environments.

Nick Vitalari is an executive vice president and co-founder of BSG Concours. His work focuses on how people solve complex problems, how technology enables extraordinary corporate strategies, and the changing nature of sustainable corporate growth.

Susan Scrupski is the Chief of Applied Research at BSG Alliance. She’s been a researcher, a journalist, and a columnist for a number of years, as well as an active participant in the blogosphere.

The following dialogue was excerpted from their discussion.

Vitalari: What is the blogosphere and how is it affecting companies today? Is the blogosphere only about blogs, or is it something more?

Scrupski: The blogosphere is a tremendous repository of information. It is also, in some ways, a subculture. Within the blogosphere there exists a community of bloggers with all sorts of personalities. But increasingly what we’re finding is that certain bloggers and blog sources are becoming information resources that are indistinguishable from the mainstream media.

Technorati, the recognized authority on what’s happening on the Web, tracks the blogosphere, and according to their latest quarterly report, they are currently tracking over seventy million blogs. They claim that about 120,000 new blogs are created worldwide everyday. That’s about one and a half blogs created every second of every day.

Vitalari: I know a lot of people think that blogs are soft, opinions only, and completely egalitarian, but you believe the blogosphere is hard-edged?

Scrupski: Yes and no. Obviously opinion is pervasive in the blogosphere; however, in order to survive in the blogosphere you have to back up your opinions with something substantial. And in order to attract a readership – people linking to you and commenting on your blog – you have to have some credibility.

There are serious analysts out there who are doing research that monitors the blogosphere. For example, PR and marketing firms are contracting with BuzzMetrics, BuzzLogic and others. Technorati attempts to rate bloggers on what they call an “authority index.” It’s basically the total number of bloggers who have linked to you. My authority index is around fifty-six. It’s not that high, but people who are linking to my blog are actually ranked very high. I believe it will get to a point where the links between the bloggers is really what is going to be most interesting.

Vitalari: I’ve noticed that a lot of people are blogging about companies. Sometimes companies are totally unaware of what’s really going on in the blogosphere and what’s said about their organizations. Interestingly, some bloggers’ opinions have a big impact, and if companies are totally unaware of what’s being said, that could be a real risk. For example, last fall the business development unit of a large company had a vague sense that things were being said about their company, but they couldn’t be sure and didn’t know how to go about tracking it. One of the things they did is to work with the IT organization to use external services to track it and to become much more systematic about doing so.

Scrupski: I would definitely recommend that IT people work with PR and marketing in your company because a lot of the tracking work is actually being done on that side of the business. IT is beginning to recognize that they can do this as well. These two lines of business really need to be working more closely together. This is a scenario where both areas of the business bring complementary strength and can build a knowledge base and an expertise that will benefit the company’s reputation and experience as well.

Vitalari: What does the blogosphere mean for “Next Generation Enterprises,” companies that are trying to move out of the industrial era and into more flexible, agile, positions with greater contact with their customers?

Scrupski: I believe the blogosphere is helping to define the Next Generation Enterprise. The whole notion of on-demand is there – the blogosphere is instant gratification. It is an always on, always connected, information resource for you and your company, your product, your future employees, your future relationships, and your supply chain. It means everything to the Next Generation Enterprise . . . in my biased opinion.

Vitalari: I understand that some companies are actually taking a very strategic focus on the blogosphere, in other words, figuring out ways that they can actually use it to their advantage in the marketing and sales arenas.

Scrupski: Absolutely. There are countless efforts to influence bloggers and create positive coverage for companies. And it’s not only the in blogosphere, but with all forms of online communities. I heard a wonderful example just yesterday about the Prius and the Toyota community. There’s a large, passionate user group who is constantly engaged in discussing the Toyota Prius, so Toyota is obviously interested in reaching and gaining feedback from that community about product improvement.

Vitalari: What are some of the do's and don'ts people should be aware of when joining the blogosphere?

Scrupski: Some of these I borrowed, like we do in the blogosphere, and some of them are my own.

- My number one message is, "To thine own self be true." Find your voice – be sincere. For corporate blogs specifically, number one on the list is never lie. From Robert Scoble to the Z-list blogger, all will agree.
- Two, write about your passion and write passionately. Whatever it is that you want to blog about, you have to really put your heart and soul into it or it won't be credible.
- Three, you really need to participate in the community. Blogging is not a solo activity (though that is probably one of the greatest myths about blogging). Linking and commenting are key to the experience of blogging and really taking flight in the blogosphere. Encourage comments.
- Four, try to be humble, but if you do have a strong point of view on something, bring it on, get it out there, but be prepared to defend your arguments.
- Five, when you reference other bloggers, you should mention them by name as opposed to just linking to them. This is blogger etiquette.
- Six, check your links. Bloggers are very forgiving, but definitely check your links. Also check your spelling and your grammar and probably in that order.
- Seven, don't ever edit or rewrite something that you wrote in the past. The common courtesy in blogging is to strike through and then rewrite on your blog post, if you have made an error.
- Eight, never delete posts. Never delete something that you've written. The rule of thumb in the blogosphere is that if you have committed something to digital ink, it's there for perpetuity and you can't go back.
- Nine, use a human voice, not PR speak.
- Ten, keep your posts regular and relatively short. The rule of thumb here is definitely less than 500 words and usually a lot less than that.

Vitalari: A lot of people still think that the Web is anonymous, or that it's temporary. They believe something you say today will go away or get lost in the vast number of messages that are being sent everyday. That's just not true. With search engines, you can say something and it will be on the Web for five or ten years, or maybe even longer....

Participant: The corporate world is definitely struggling with how to make the best use of blogs. How does a corporate blogger follow your guidelines – "To thine own self be true" and "Write about your passion"?

Scrupski: If your company allows you the flexibility to blog, which I'm hoping they will, there should be something within the scope of your job everyday that you can blog about, something you're excited about – say the iPhone, or maybe it's Vista.

You can blog about anything that you're interested in, or something that maybe you're not happy about, but have suggested solutions for change. However, if you want to blog

specifically for your company, then that's a subject unto itself. You should probably involve marketing, communications, and PR.

Participant: Do you have any good examples of people who do individual blogging under a corporate name?

Scrupski: Robert Scoble from Microsoft is the number one A-list blogger, bar none. He's been the guy who has set the standard for blogging; just look him up. He was the one who really reversed Microsoft's image as a "closed society." He opened up Microsoft just by virtue of his blogging.

If you're interested in this topic, check out the book *The New Influencers* by Paul Gillin, which tells the story of Robert Scoble. Gillin also explains the influence of these new bloggers and what the blogging phenomenon is about.

Vitalari: It's interesting because some of these corporate bloggers actually help to explain products, or reasons for product features. I think it's the kind of thing that is perfectly appropriate for people to explore with their companies and then use it for their company's advantage. Ask yourself: how can I use a blog to create new value for my company?

Participant: When is a blog better than a Wiki, or vice versa? Can you talk about the differences between them?

Scrupski: I love Wikis. Wikis are my second favorite thing, but they are certainly different from blogs. Wikis are a collaboration platform. This is where you actually get work done and share information with others. For example, you can share video, PowerPoint presentations, documents, anything. Wikis are for where you're working together in a group in order to achieve a certain result, whether you're working on a project, or you're moving toward a certain goal.

Blogs are something different, a communications vehicle. Information can change in a Wiki, but as I said before, with a blog, if you change your mind, you don't just rewrite or delete information.

If you are interested in registering for a future BSG Concours teleconference briefing or event, please visit our Web site at: <http://concoursgroup.com/calendar.asp>. Thank you!