



Press Release - 24 Jan 2006

First European weblog survey reveals divide between converts and sceptics

Two in five PR professionals plan to launch weblogs

The first pan-European survey to investigate the use of weblogs in public relations and communication management shows a sharp split between converts and sceptics, with one in three practitioners regularly writing or contributing to weblogs but a quarter ignoring the new medium.

The picture of a "two-speed Europe" emerges from the ground-breaking EuroBlog 2006 survey conducted by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (Euprera). Lead researchers Philip Young from the University of Sunderland (UK), Dr Ansgar Zerfass, MFG Baden-Wuerttemberg / University of Erlangen-Nuernberg (Germany) and Swaran Sandhu, University of Hohenheim (Germany) were supported by academic colleagues from 12 countries.

The survey was conducted online in November / December 2005 and drew 587 responses from PR practitioners in 33 countries. It reveals a clear divergence between enthusiasts who see wide-ranging benefits from weblogs, from tracking competitors and monitoring industry trends to communicating their own messages directly, bypassing journalists, and "anti-bloggers" who fail to see benefits for their companies or clients.

Although 31 percent said they regularly write or contribute to weblogs, 26 percent said they never do. Only 4 percent said they had not yet heard of weblogs, so one-in-four respondents were making a conscious choice not to use them. The most enthusiastic users came from Austria, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Germany.

42 percent of respondents who don't already maintain blogs intend to do so within the next 12 months. Nevertheless, a significant 32 percent don't expect to introduce blogs. Of those with no plans to add blogs to the PR armoury, every third said this is because the benefits are unclear and a further 22 percent said they don't have the personnel.

According to the survey, the most important factors limiting the use of weblogs are the inability to control the communication content, integrating blogs into communication strategy and creating content.

Dr Ansgar Zerfass said: "It's not the technology, but the lack of ideas and concepts that holds back the spread of weblogs within public relations. Communication managers need to think about application scenarios that support the bottom line. Our research offers frameworks and identifies best practices that help to find one's way."

Philip Young said: "Many believe the internet and social software are accelerating the evolution of Public Relations from message delivery to facilitating conversations. But our work highlights a worrying gap between those who are embracing the challenge and those yet to appreciate the impact of the new social software. Although it is important not to overestimate the importance of weblogs, the survey shows a pressing need for academics and PR professionals to demonstrate the contribution new technologies can make to communication strategy."

The EuroBlog 2006 survey also brings new insights into key areas such as strategies for monitoring blogs, introducing blogging guidelines, emerging tensions between "official" external blogs, internal or project blogs, CEO blogs and independent employee blogs.

Detailed findings will be presented to a symposium "Public Relations and Social Software: Meeting the Challenges of Weblogs, Podcasts, Wikis and RSS", to be organised by Euprera and MFG Baden-Wuerttemberg in Stuttgart, Germany, from March 16th to 18th, where academics from across Europe will discuss ways of taking the research forward.

A summary of the initial findings can be downloaded from www.euroblog2006.org

Philip Young, Ansgar Zerfass and Swaran Sandhu are available for interview.
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Anyone wishing to contribute to further phases of the EuroBlog research programme should contact a member of the research team.

www.euroblog2006.org / www.euprera.org