

Why Blog?

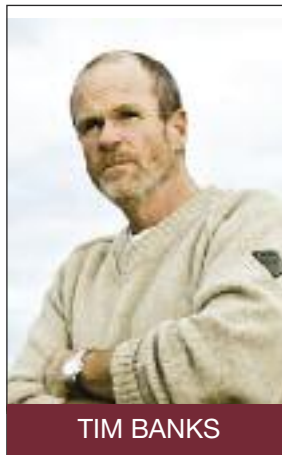
Not so long ago, I didn't think there were any more ways for people to slander me or my company. Then out came the Internet and the subsequent eruption of silliness from "bloggers". I didn't give it a second thought until a couple of events made me wake up to the strength of blogs and social media.

The first such event was when some staff members approached me with concerns about a "crazy" who was publishing libellous opinions about me. They felt we should sue. But I reminded them of the adage that it's tough to get blood from a stone and these comments were nothing that would keep me awake at night. The second incident, however, was a different story. A new customer told me that, prior to engaging us for work he had "Googled" us and what he found was not very flattering. In fact, he nearly didn't hire us. Now, when something starts to stand between my company and my employees getting work, then you better believe I'm going to take that issue seriously. After considering how to combat these negative postings, it became apparent that the only way to be successful in this wild new frontier was to fight fire with fire. As a friend pointed out, "if you are not telling the story of your company, someone else will". Thus began my venture into the world of blogging.

Over the past 18 months, my blog has morphed into something very different than what I had intended. I've used it to build public awareness of issues that affect Prince Edward Island's major municipalities, provincial government and politics. I've also used it to vent on a few pet peeves, such as selling our government owned business enterprises (e.g., golf courses) and IRAC – PEI's regulatory review agency (or as I like to call it, our "kangaroo court"). The really interesting thing is that I've actually built a reasonably-sized following of people who routinely read my blog. I particularly enjoy bumping into the many young people who follow me online. They never cease to amaze me with their keen interest, questions and commitment to Island issues.

And, I'm proud to say, I've made significant headway on my original goal. Nowadays, if you do a search for me or my company on Google, you'll find balanced information about who we are and what we do (as opposed to when you'd find allegations that I had parked my car in an illegal space). At first, I knew next to nothing about social media sites like Face-

book, Twitter and YouTube. Nor was I familiar with pod casting and RSS feeds. But I've learned that if you don't try them, you'll never understand what they are all about. Social media can work to your advantage as long as you are prepared to invest your time and develop a strategy that works for you and your business. If you're interested in starting a blog to help your business, here are some of the lessons I learned along the way:



TIM BANKS

A NEW CUSTOMER TOLD ME HE HAD "GOOGLED" US AND WHAT HE FOUND WAS NOT VERY FLATTERING

Blogs help to humanize your organization, so don't invent a personality you or your company can't live up to.

Make sure your blog has an instant feedback option so you can respond to a little problem before it becomes a bigger one.

Share some of your knowledge base. As it gets passed around, your customer will soon find you.

Only write about what you know (particularly if it's knowledge-based) and only on topics that interest you.

Make sure you have a live feed like Twitter to push out thought provoking posts that will continue to draw your customers in.

Keep your blog simple with interesting thoughts and not full of company ads or web images.

Write the blog yourself, but not about yourself, and keep it very active so people keep coming back for more information.

Be open to criticism. If someone points out that you have made a mistake or unnecessarily offended them, then own up and correct it.

As you've probably noticed, another unexpected outcome of my blog activity is that *Atlantic Business* has invited me to "spew my thoughts" on a regional basis, both in their magazine and in their new on-line edition (ABMonline.ca). My goal in doing so is to share my experiences of growing a business in hopes that it may spark a similar fire in someone else's efforts to move forward. Some of you will like it; others may not. Either way, I look forward to hearing from you. Let the dialogue begin! 🍷

As CEO of APM, Tim Banks is well-known businessman and blogger in his PEI community. You can visit his blog at ABMonline.ca and timbanks.ca. Since 1980 APM has provided construction and design-build services that include construction management, engineering and general contracting. APM operates across Canada with offices in Charlottetown, Halifax, Toronto and Calgary, providing construction services to local, regional and national clients. The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of *Atlantic Business Magazine*.