



Emerging Media Series

Research into the Role
of Blogs, Podcasts and
Other Emerging
Media Formats on
B2B Technology
Purchase Decisions

Issue Two: Blogs and Real Simple Syndication (RSS)

September 2006

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Summary of Key Findings	4
Conclusion	6
Detailed Findings	8

→1



Introduction

A New Online World for Technology Marketers

For several years, marketers have been transfixed by the possibilities of influencing and engaging large audiences via the Internet. While it's true that the use of Internet marketing has skyrocketed, it still remains (for the most part) a one-way pipe. Email marketing, paid search, banner advertising and other online derivatives of one-way, offline techniques lead the way.

New research by KnowledgeStorm and Universal McCann identifies that this may be changing. This report, the second in a series of studies looking at the impact emerging online applications have on B2B technology marketing, finds that blogs and Real Simple Syndication (RSS) are catching on more quickly than previously thought. This year, for the first time, blogs have joined top-rated communication tactics such as free-trial demos, Webcasts and white papers as successful means for attracting high-quality technology prospects, according to *MarketingSherpa's 2006 Business Technology Marketing Benchmark Guide*.

The rising importance of blogs — and to a lesser extent RSS — cannot be understated, and is significant because these technologies are inherently bi-directional. They represent the core and spirit of the Web 2.0 ethos whereby millions of daily peer-to-peer conversations and dialogs occur throughout the Web. Now, instead of these conversations simply pertaining to politics or world events, they are also coalescing around topics such as

CRM software and network intrusion detection and other B2B technology topics. Indeed, this report finds that the blogosphere is making inroads into technology circles with 53% of respondents saying that blog content has already influenced a technology purchase decision.

53% of respondents say that blog content has already influenced a technology purchase decision.

A less prevalent, but still significant, rise in RSS usage is further evidence that technology marketers must come to grips with the fact that they will have less control of the prospective buyer relationship. Technology buyers can anonymously and automatically pull RSS feeds from various Websites and blogs and evaluate this content on its own merits — without input from vendors. This may mean the quality of the content determines whether a prospective buyer engages with a vendor — not necessarily the efficiency of the marketing program.

Study Methodology

The study was conducted by KnowledgeStorm, the Internet's top-ranked search resource for technology solutions and information, and Universal McCann, one of the world's largest media service firms, and was fielded in online format to KnowledgeStorm's global registered user audience.

→ 2

More than 4,500 participants responded to this survey.

Administered in August 2006, the survey represents responses from more than 4,500 participants on the topics of blogs and RSS. Specifically, the blog topics examined reader behavior, credibility, value and impact on purchasing decisions — as well as challenges and opportunities facing this medium. Research conducted on RSS explored user preferences and behaviors.

The survey was answered by business and IT professionals across a variety of job titles, vertical industries and company sizes. The demographic profile shows:

- 45% of the respondents were involved with their company's technology at a strategic level
- 55% are engaged in implementation or day-to-day management
- 42% are relied upon by 10 or more people within their organization for IT research and expertise
- 28% have a major influence on IT purchasing or actually authorize purchases

Powerful Presence of Blogs in the B2B Marketplace

Touted as one of the fastest growing mediums on the Internet, the blogosphere — consisting of Web logs, called blogs — continues to expand at an astounding rate. A July 2006 report by *comScore Media Matrix* shows a 56% increase in blog visitations during the past year, up to 58.7 million visitors. This figure already represents more than one-third of the total Internet audience, indicating that blogs have quickly progressed into a mainstream medium.

→ 3

By all accounts, blogging has transformed the Internet into a true democracy, where millions of people can have their voices heard. Blogs have reconstructed the landscape of the Internet just as reality shows changed the course of modern television programming. The new, live Web now offers users a true “experience” where they not only gather information, but also generate, disseminate and interact with it.

Blogs give marketers the perfect opportunity to generate demand, nurture leads and stay connected with customers.

Blogs are now commanding a powerful presence within the B2B marketplace, as demonstrated by the large number (80%) of respondents in this report who already take advantage of this technology. With their ability to offer relevant content and generate immediate feedback, in the form of comments and posts, blogs give marketers the perfect opportunity to generate demand, nurture leads and stay connected with customers.

Technology Marketers Should Experiment With RSS

RSS is one of the main delivery channels that has helped catapult the usage of blogs by delivering only the content users want.

RSS describes news and other Web content from online publishers — such as bloggers — and makes it available for syndication or distribution across the Web. Instead of bookmarking favorite Websites and periodically visiting them, RSS allows users to have news and information from these same sites automatically delivered to their desktops in one convenient and organized reader. RSS also notifies users each time content changes or a new feed is published.

While RSS usage is on the rise, it is not nearly as prevalent as blog usage among technology buyers.

While RSS usage is on the rise, it is not nearly as prevalent as blog usage among technology buyers. Thirty-one percent of respondents said they receive RSS feeds. Apparently, most buyers of technology products and services still visit Websites and blogs themselves.

Yet technology marketers should experiment with RSS in order to push relevant content out to their audiences, especially as spam filters and firewalls continue to reduce the effectiveness of e-mail marketing. With nearly one-third of technology buyers using RSS, it already is a significant online distribution mechanism. As RSS continues to penetrate the mainstream, it will be an essential part of the marketer's toolbox if companies want to ensure that their content becomes visible in the vast expanse of the blogosphere.

Summary of Key Findings

→ 4

Blogs Represent Familiar Territory

Eighty percent of the survey respondents claim to be blog readers. Of these respondents, 51% read blogs at least once a week. An additional 28% check out blogs once a month.

Blog Readers Find Relevant Information

Technology buyers are getting both business and technology information from blogs: 53% of respondents read blogs weekly for business information, while 57% find technology topics of interest each week. Only 10% have “never” used blogs to access this type of content.

Blog Information Deemed Credible

The survey indicates most respondents (57%) rated blogs equally as or more credible than more traditional forms of media such as news outlets, industry publications, vendor white papers, analyst reports and industry or professional associations.

Objections to Blogs

Although blogs are deemed equally as (or more) credible than other leading content types, credibility tops the list of the major challenges facing the mainstream acceptance of blogs, according to 57% of the respondents. Then again, respondents also have challenges with searching for and finding blogs with relevant content in the first place as well as staying abreast of any updates.

IT Purchase Decisions Heavily Influenced by Bloggers

When compared with the impact of podcasts, blogs' influence on IT purchases is almost two-fold. More than 53% of respondents in this survey felt the content they read in blogs already impacts their purchasing decisions. As previously reported by KnowledgeStorm and Universal McCann in the first Emerging Media Series study, *Issue One: Podcasts*, 27% of respondents answered "yes" when asked if podcast content influences their work-related purchase decisions.

Buyers Place Extreme Value on Certain Technology Blogs

Nearly half of the respondents (49%) said quality blogs on specific technology topics such as CRM, security or storage are extremely valuable.

There is a Need for More Expert Bloggers

Sixty-seven percent of respondents did not feel there were enough expert bloggers currently covering technology topics.

From Readers to Contributors

Respondents are taking advantage of the interactivity blogs offer. At least once a month, nearly half of respondents comment on or contribute to content they read. Thirty-two percent have considered starting their own blog while 4% have already taken that leap.

Blogs Become Recommended Reading

Beyond contributing, the majority of technology buyers are recommending content from blogs to co-workers and colleagues. Seventy percent of respondents endorse or pass along information they deem relevant at least once a month.

→ 5

Thirty-One Percent Use RSS

A disparity in user familiarity exists when it comes to blogs and RSS. While 86% of respondents are "somewhat" to "very" familiar with blogs, only 59% said the same about RSS. Thirty-one percent of respondents subscribe to RSS feeds or readers to access content delivered through this medium. Nine percent did not know whether they were even using either of these tools. This suggests that buyers are still going to blogs, rather than having the blogs' RSS feeds published to them.

Industry and Company News Top Content for RSS

Specialized news, covering specific industry or company information, tops the respondents' list of the most commonly accessed content using RSS feeds with a 79% response rate. Other popular types of information accessed via RSS include general news, garnering 59% of the responses, and blogs, which a little more than one-third of the respondents listed.

RSS Readers Need an Hour a Day

Of the respondents who use RSS feeds, half of them subscribe to as many as five RSS feeds while another 25% utilize between five and 10 sources. Each week, 90% of RSS users are spending up to five hours, or one hour of each work day, accessing content from these feeds.

Conclusion

A few short years ago, blogs did not even register as blips on the radar. Now, they command an impressive presence on the Internet. According to Technorati's *State of the Blogosphere* report (February 2006), approximately 70,000 new blogs appear daily. Blogging has become equally as important for B2B technology companies to understand as it has been for politicians and the media. It will be these technology vendors, embracing the marketing opportunities afforded by new online applications, that will build demand for their products and services as well as reinforce the strength of their brands.

The objective of the Emerging Media Series is to explore the impact innovative online media, such as blogs and RSS, is having on the B2B technology marketplace. More specifically, this particular study is designed to closely examine the interaction of technology buyers with blogs and RSS to determine marketing opportunities using one or both of these applications. The results from this study show the solid penetration blogs have made into mainstream media — in addition to the ample opportunity RSS affords.

Interestingly enough, a large majority of technology buyers have already joined the flood of readers who visit blogs regularly, with more than half of them reading content on a weekly basis. Fifty-seven percent of respondents feel that this content is equally as or more credible than more traditional channels of influence to which they've become accustomed to, such as news outlets, vendor white papers and analyst reports. In fact, 70% feel comfortable enough with the material in blogs to recommend or pass along information to co-workers and colleagues at least once a month. This type of endorsement mirrors the impact blogs are already having on the purchase decisions within the B2B marketplace.

Seventy percent of respondents feel comfortable enough with the material in blogs to recommend or pass along information to co-workers and colleagues at least once a month.

More than half of respondents felt there were not enough expert bloggers covering technology topics.

However, a minor conundrum seems to plague the technology blog domain. More than half of the respondents felt there were not enough expert bloggers covering technology topics. And, of the technology blogs available, respondents had concerns about the credibility of the content. On the other hand, sheer demand should dictate the need for more technology bloggers with word-of-mouth continuing to determine and promote its integrity and reliability.

Beyond just reading blogs, respondents are starting to take advantage of the interactive component this medium offers. They are not only commenting on and contributing to others' content, but almost one-third are also contemplating starting their own blog.

→ 6

Good Content Needs Good Delivery

Any efforts put forth in building a blog that houses even the most relevant, up-to-date content could quickly and easily be lost if no one knows about it. Good content needs good delivery. Although the majority of respondents are familiar with blogs, their experience with RSS, as a delivery channel, is quite the opposite. Only 31% subscribe to RSS feeds or readers, with many respondents not even knowing whether they used these tools or not. Additional education on this delivery mechanism may be required in order for users to fully understand the time-saving benefit it offers.

Many respondents did not even know whether or not they were using RSS.

Nonetheless, respondents, who are already RSS users, are regularly accessing specific industry and company information, general news and blogs — all the types of content relevant and influential during the decision-making process. This group also realizes the advantage of subscribing to multiple RSS feeds — half of the users depend on as many as five feeds. This practice has significantly cut their Internet research and reading time down to an average of five hours a week.

These new online media formats will help companies better address shifting preferences and opinions in the B2B marketplace. Marketing campaigns have the greatest results when companies truly listen to and come to understand their audiences. In this new era of open and direct communications, companies must be willing to engage in a two-way dialogue with their constituents — taking the bad comments with the good, moving past the typical marketing speak, and turning defenses into opportunities.

→ 7

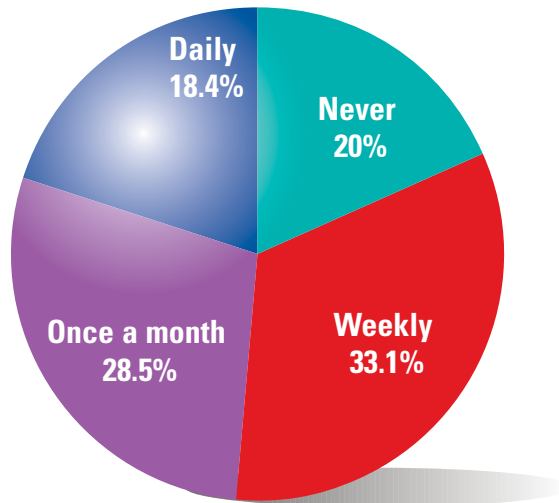
Detailed Findings

Frequency in Blog Readership

The blogosphere represents familiar territory for technology buyers, as 80% of respondents claim to read blogs. This new form of online media obviously offers substance for this audience, as more than half of the respondents are regular readers. As the number of expert business and technology bloggers grow, a good many of the 33% of weekly blog readers should be expected to be converted to daily consumers.

On the other hand, for the 20% who have “never” read blogs, factors such as preference for more traditional media sources, content credibility, time restraints and few topics of interest may be contributing to their aversions.

How often do you read blogs?



→ 8

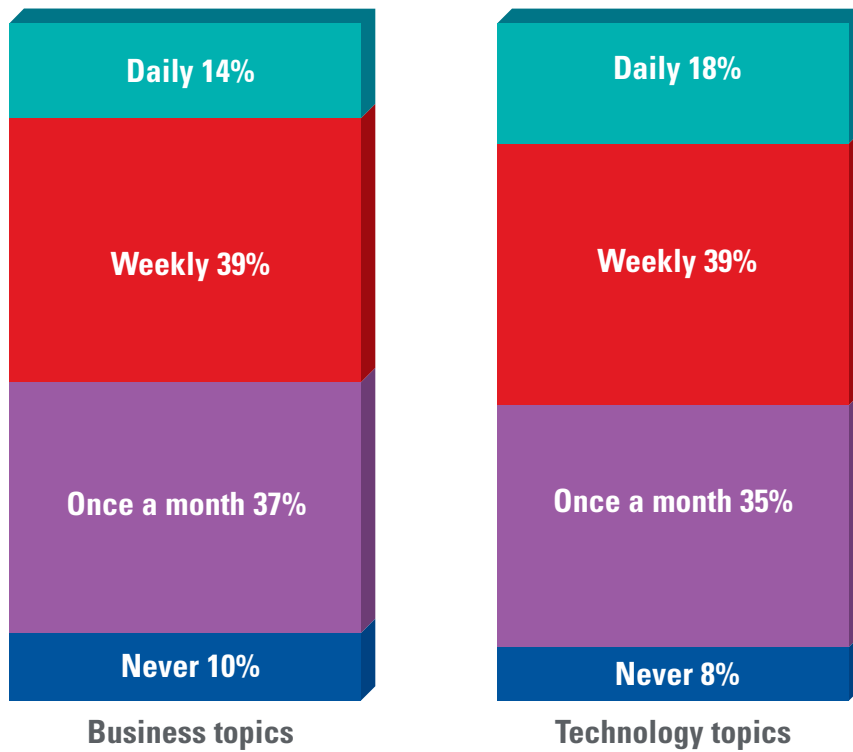
Blogs Are Perfect Forums for Business and Technology

With the majority of bloggers describing their life and personal experiences online, the key for B2B buyers is locating the smaller portion who emphatically write about business and technology topics. And, they have.

Fifty-three percent of respondents read blogs at least once a week for business information. A slightly higher percentage (57%) regularly turn to blogs for technology information.

Early adopters influence will only drive the necessity for more accessible content on business and technology for others.

How often do you read blogs on business or technology topics?



→ 9

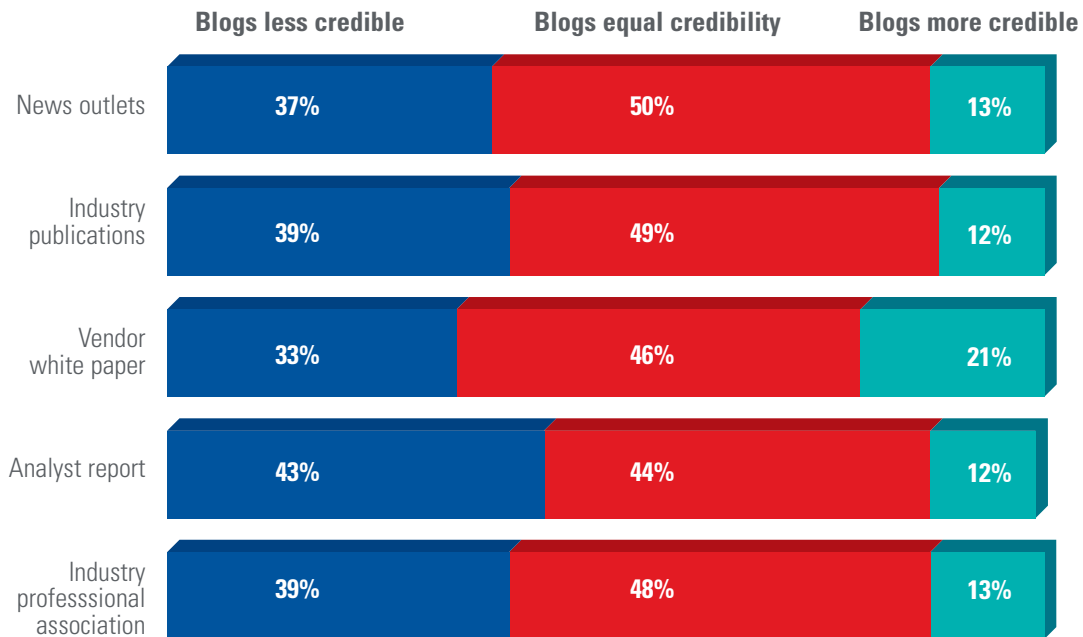
Trust and Confidence in Blogs Grow

Traditional channels for disseminating communications such as news outlets, industry publications, vendor white papers, analyst reports and industry or professional associations, have long been the mainstay sources where technology buyers place their confidence and prefer to gather information about products and solutions of interest. Tried and true, these mediums have developed a credibility factor unmatched in the marketplace — until now.

Already information-savvy, the survey respondents send a clear message that their trust and confidence in blogs are growing. The fact that more than 57% of the respondents rated blogs equally or more credible than the traditional channels of communications mentioned above should be a wake-up call for marketers.

The immediacy of a blog's give-and-take platform, often simulating an online focus group, offers a perfect arena for technology buyers to read and comment on the writings of subject-matter experts who are well-versed in niche content areas.

Generally speaking, are blogs more or less credible compared to the following information sources?



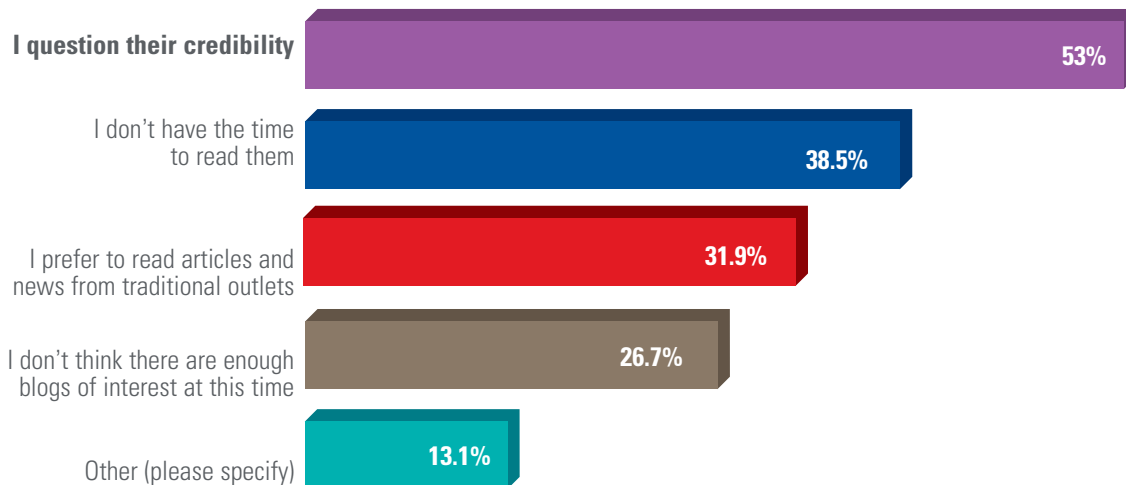
→ 10

Major Challenges with Blogs

By all accounts, blogging has become an influential component within the technology buyer's due diligence process. Although blogs are considered equally as, or more, credible than many other leading content types, credibility still topped the ranks as a major challenge with this medium. Fifty-three percent "question their credibility." Even among daily blog readers, credibility was listed as a major challenge by 41% of the respondents.

More than likely, this perception stems from the sheer number of blogs currently in existence. The range in content quality runs the full gamut — from lively dish about Paris Hilton to drilled-down product reviews. Unfortunately, it remains the user's responsibility to discern which blogs warrant attention and continued patronage. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents also said they don't have time to read blogs which, in some ways, may relate to the hours they spend culling the Internet for relevant information in the first place. Respondents say they struggle with ways to search for and evaluate blogs, then fight to keep up with frequent content updates. On the other hand, a little more than one-quarter of the respondents don't even think there are currently enough blogs of interest.

What are the major challenges with blogs? (Check all that apply)



→ 11

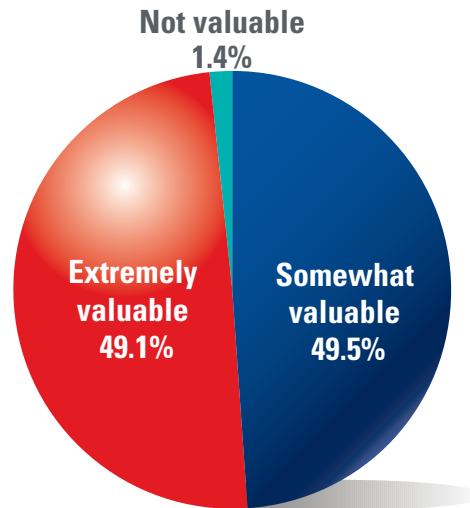
Value Seen in Technology Blogs

Even though respondents still clamor for more blogs that contain relevant content, they place enormous merit in the quality sites currently focusing on technology topics. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) agree expert bloggers who write on specific technology topics such as CRM, security, storage, etc. are “extremely valuable.” And, that number jumps to 65% for the daily blog readers.

However, respondents also believe expert bloggers in the technology marketplace are too few and far between. With 67% saying they do not feel there are enough experts currently covering technology topics in blogs, the focus turns to what defines an “expert” blogger.

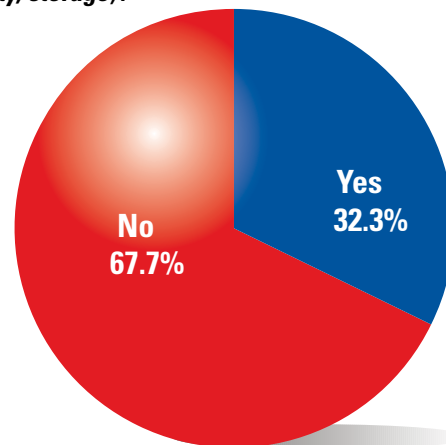
Readers want to hear about a company or product from “someone like them,” so the most credible source for blogging may not necessarily be the CEO or the analyst on retainer. Credibility seems to follow the self-styled experts who more closely resemble water-cooler conversationalists, are well-versed in their fields, and up-to-date on issues and information affecting their subjects.

How valuable are “expert bloggers” who write about specific technology topics (e.g. CRM, security, storage)?



→ 12

Do you feel that there are currently enough expert bloggers covering specific technology topics (e.g. CRM, security, storage)?



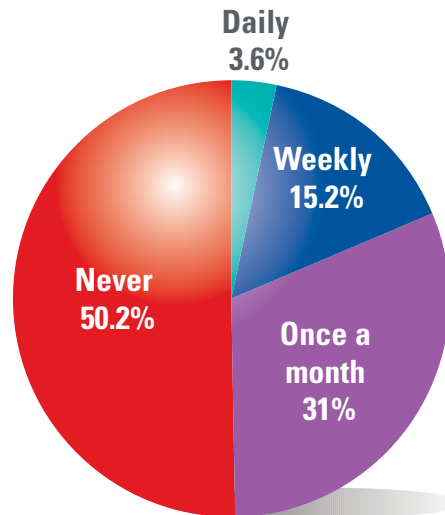
User Interaction with Blogs

The acceptance of emerging media tools such as blogs has produced a paradigm shift within the Internet's landscape — one that allows users to interact with content as opposed to merely accessing information on the Web. The most appealing aspect of blogging is its resemblance to a natural conversation between friends or colleagues.

Nearly half of the respondents claim to comment on or contribute to blogs they read at least once a month. And, when asked if they considered starting their own blog, 32% answered "yes," while 4% readily admitted to already having one. Not surprisingly, for the daily blog readers, the numbers were considerably higher with 73% contributing content, 42% contemplating their own blogs and 12% already blogging.

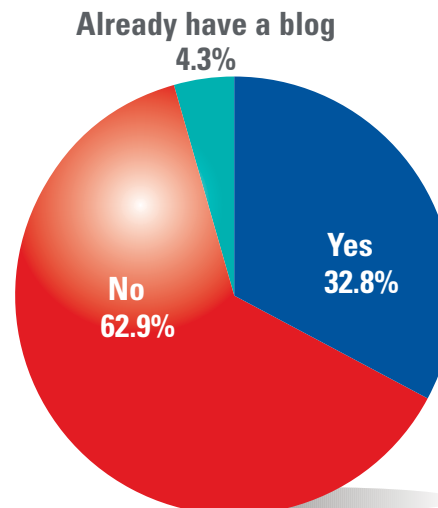
And, for the respondents turned bloggers, technology — not surprisingly — was the preferred subject, in addition to political and personal-interest topics.

How often do you comment on or contribute content to blogs that you read?



→ 13

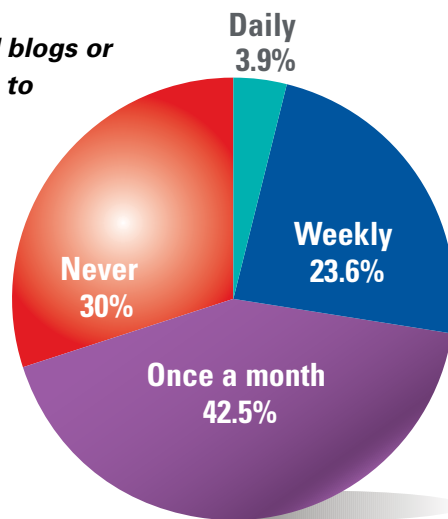
Have you considered starting your own blog related to a technology or business topic?



Blogs Become Trusted Source

Blogs have taken viral marketing to an all-new level. A blogger's success generally relies on word-of-mouth referrals and is supported by a self-reinforcing network of loosely connected people sharing information that resonates among the group. Technology buyers, in particular, seem more than happy to pass relevant information from blogs on down the grapevine. Seventy percent of respondents recommend or pass along content from blogs to co-workers and colleagues at least once a month. This pass-along rate is destined to grow as more blogs on technology and business topics appear and users become more comfortable with the credibility of the content.

How often do you recommend blogs or pass along content from blogs to co-workers and colleagues?

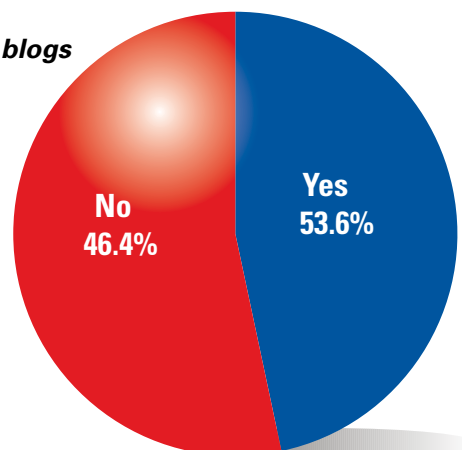


→ 14

Blogs have a Big Impact on Technology Purchase Decisions

While KnowledgeStorm and UniversalMcCann's previous report showed that podcasts influenced 27% of respondents' IT purchases, this survey indicates blogs are making a much larger impact — due in large part to the proliferation and consumption of blogs in the current marketplace. More than 53% of respondents feel the content they read in blogs already influences their work-related IT purchase decisions. The impact is even more prevalent among daily readers where 70% of them acknowledge this emerging sphere of influence.

Does the content you read in blogs influence your work-related IT purchase decisions?

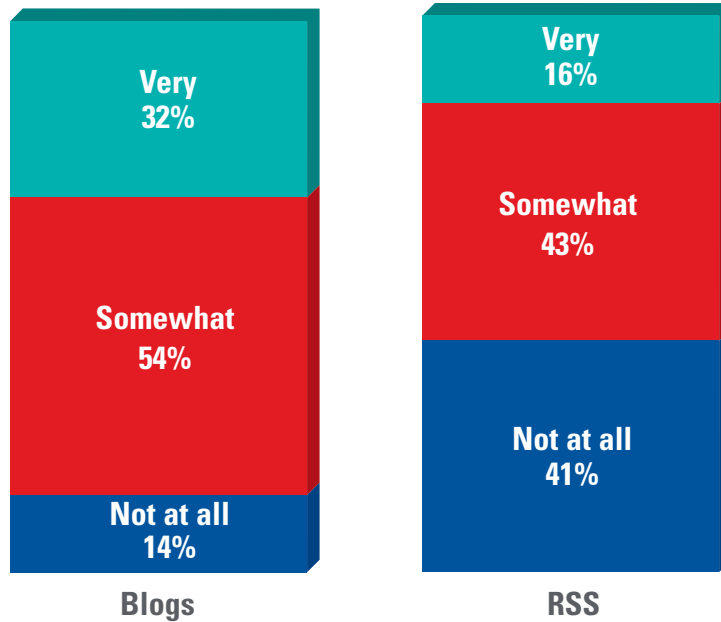


Blogs vs. RSS – User Familiarity

The symbiotic relationship between blogs and RSS is a necessary function within the fundamental architecture of Web 2.0. However, the disparity in user familiarity between these two types of emerging media is significant. While 86% of the respondents are “somewhat” to “very” familiar with blogs, only 59% can say the same about RSS.

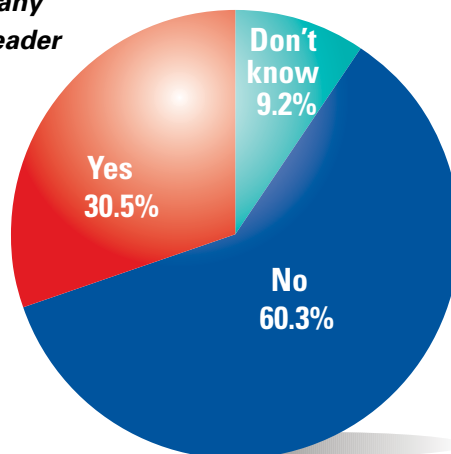
In fact, only 31% of respondents subscribe to RSS feeds or use a RSS reader to access content. Conversely, 60% say they do not use either one of these RSS tools. This number is more than likely skewed as it was apparent a large number of respondents, some of which are infrequent blog readers, simply did not know enough about the medium to recognize whether they used the technology or not. The higher percentage (56%) of daily blog consumers using RSS feeds or readers does point to the direct correlation between these two media.

How familiar are you with blogs and RSS (Real Simple Syndication)?



→ 15

Do you currently subscribe to any RSS feeds and/or use a RSS reader to access online content such news or blogs?



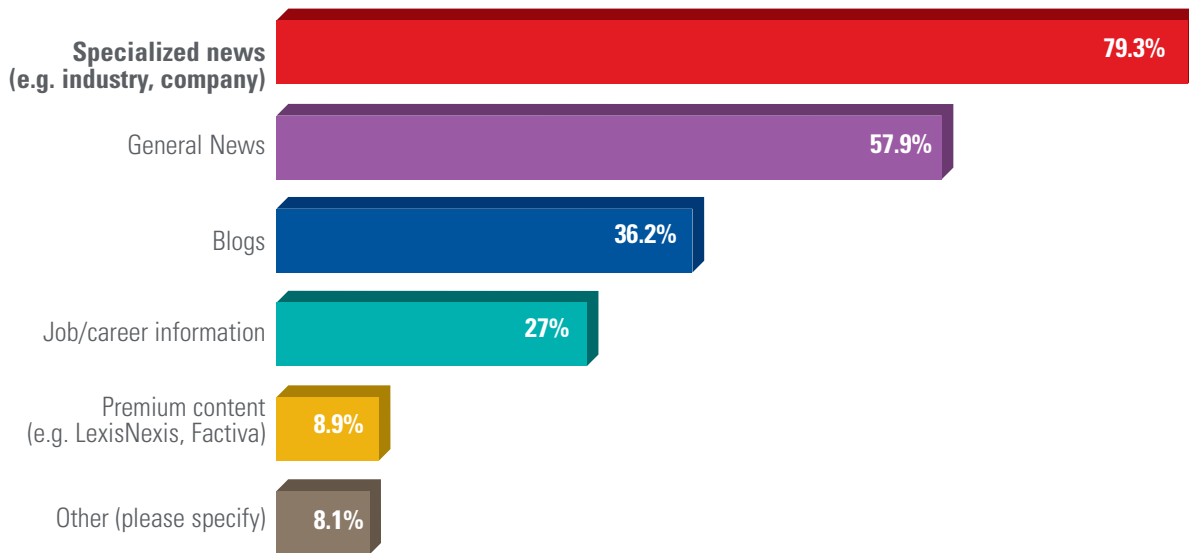
Utilization of RSS Feeds

RSS is designed to be a content delivery system, pushing information on a variety of topics out to the Internet masses on a regular basis — essentially any form of content retrievable via a URL.

Specialized news, covering specific industry or company information, claims the top spot in the respondents' list of the most commonly accessed content using RSS, garnering a 79% response rate. Another 59% used RSS to access general news. Respondents said they also used RSS to access stock quotes, community information, weather data, excerpts from discussion forums and software announcements.

Only a little more than one-third of the respondents said they actually used RSS feeds to retrieve content on blogs. But, for the power blog readers, that number jumped significantly to almost 58%, indicating they are successfully using this technology to cut through the clutter for easy access to relevant content.

What types of content are you accessing via RSS feeds? (Check all that apply)

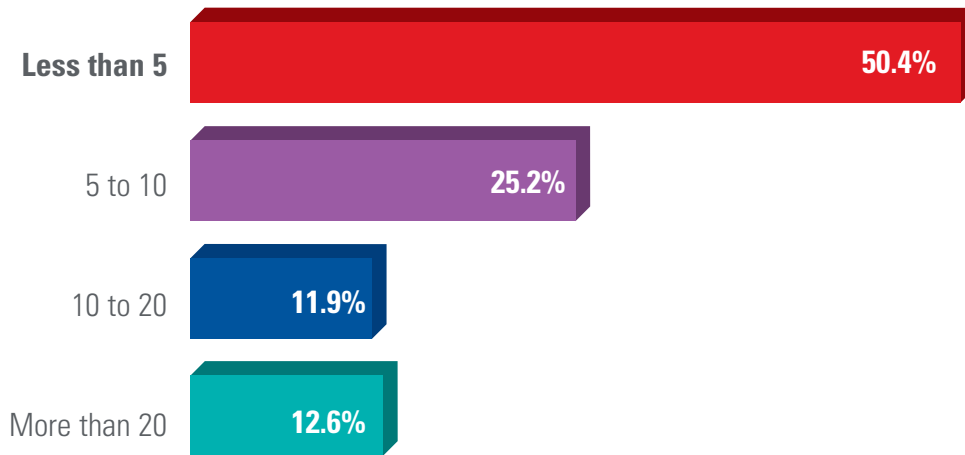


→ 16

RSS User Behavior

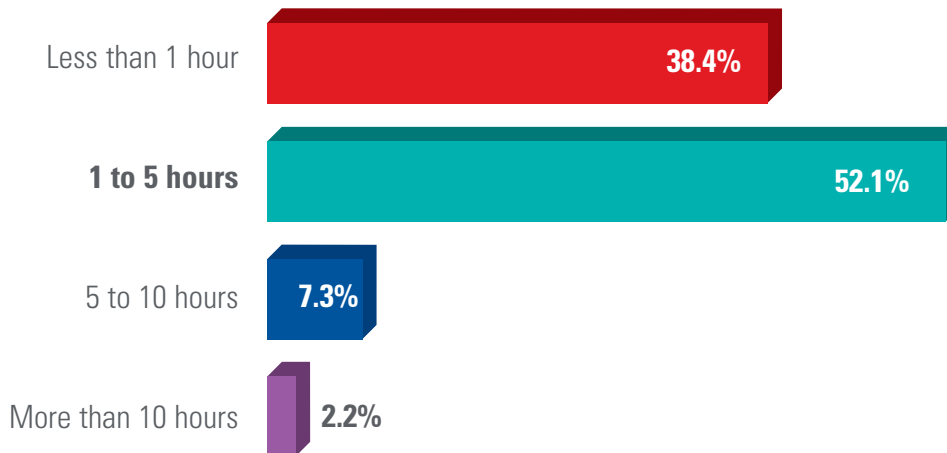
Of the respondents who use RSS feeds, the large majority seem to realize the value in utilizing this time-saving medium to easily locate and access content that resonates with them. Half of the respondents subscribe to as many as five RSS distributions, with another 25% registered to receive between five and 10 feeds. And, each week, 90% of the respondents are spending up to five hours accessing content delivered through RSS feeds. In work-week terms, technology buyers may be devoting up to an hour each day reading information distributed through this technology.

How many RSS feeds are you currently subscribed to?



→ 17

Approximately how many work hours are you spending per week reading content delivered through RSS feeds?



About Us

About KnowledgeStorm

KnowledgeStorm is the Internet's top-ranked search resource for technology solutions and information. Leveraging the KnowledgeStorm Network of premier partners and its extensive search expertise, KnowledgeStorm is able to reach technology buyers and deliver the information they need no matter where their search begins. KnowledgeStorm, with its network, search expertise and performance tools and services, is a powerful resource for technology vendors, providing them the most opportunities to reach buyers on the Internet and convert them into Web leads. For more information, call (877) 340-9274 or visit www.knowledgestorm.com.

About Universal McCann

Universal McCann is one of the world's largest media service firms providing strategic services and consultancies in the areas of traditional and non-traditional media planning and buying, communications architecture, digital technologies, and research/modeling. Launched in 1999 as the branded media services arm of McCann Worldgroup, Universal McCann is a primary element of Interpublic Media, a part of the Interpublic Group of Companies. Its multiple U.S. locations have the privilege of serving some of the country's most recognizable brands, such as Intel, Johnson & Johnson, L'Oreal, U.S. Army, Wendy's, Microsoft, Sony, Major League Baseball, Verizon Wireless and Bacardi. For more information, visit www.universalmccann.com.

→ 18

About Emerging Media Series

The Emerging Media Series is succession of thought-leadership studies conducted by KnowledgeStorm and Universal McCann that researches the role blogs, podcasts and other emerging media formats have in B2B technology purchase decisions. Current installments:

Issue One: Podcasts, July 2006

Issue Two: Blogs and Real Simple Syndication (RSS), September 2006