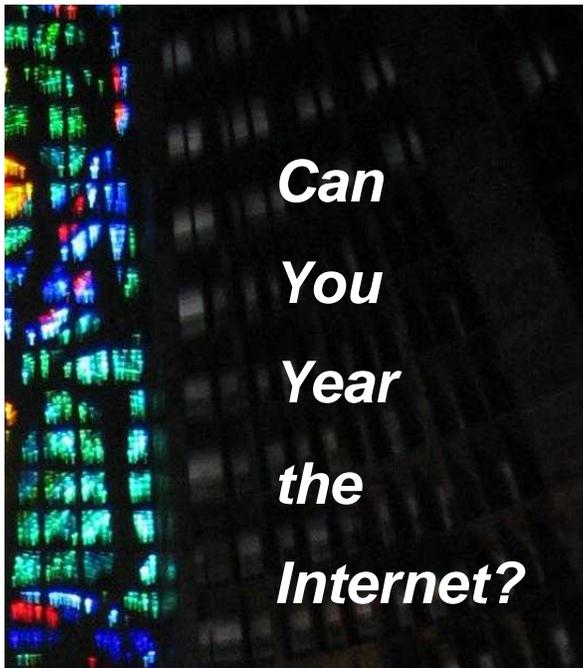


by Liz Strauss

*Internet relationships are changing
the way business works*

Shh!



A conversation is going on. It's happening on blogs, via podcasts, and in interactive videos. People are building trust and forging bonds with colleagues and friends. Online friends of (likemind) [meet for coffee and conversation](#) all over the world. These relationships cut across traditional rules and business hierarchies. The ease and authenticity of those relationships are radically changing the way business works – right now.

Are you listening? Are you part of it?

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Blogging? What?

This book is about how blogs -- video, audio, and text -- start conversations, establish expertise, create communities, and turn visitors into customers and customers who become loyal partners.



Think of the resources we spend on finding folks who want to buy things. Catalogues, sales calls, advertisements, direct mail and telemarketing. And folks ignore them. Ever wish you could just talk to the people who need your expertise directly? They could bring you their problem, and you could help them. Maybe you could make exactly what they're looking for. They could let you know when things were slipping, so you could show how fast you fix things.

Blogging is a conversation with people who want to be there. If we're helpful, not hopeful, they return and bring new folks along with them. A community who trusts us is a powerful tool in any market. It's not hard to start a blog. It takes humanity, trust, and leadership to run one well.

But if you show up your customers will too.

What Is a Blog?

Conversation, Print, Online . . . Online Conversation

Some folks start with the idea that blogs are online magazines. It's a start, but only part of the picture. Let's extend that idea to say that a blog is online media that offers information that gets people engaged in conversation. Great blogs are like the [literary salons of the 17th century](#), [\(as described by Wikipedia here\)](#).

A salon is a gathering of men and women to participate in formal and informal discussion centered around a specific topic. . . . which may include politics, literature, art, fashion or business. . . . The participants sought to increase their knowledge through conversation and readings, . . . the practice continues today in many cities around the world.

And here.

The salon evolved into a well regulated practice that focused on and reflected enlightened public opinion by encouraging the exchange of news and ideas.

Sounds a lot like what happens on a blog.

The living web is built on relationships that grow through conversations about news, business, world events, literature, art, fashion, or business that often happen in the comment threads of blogs. A certain magic occurs when comments turn into conversation. When a blogging conversation happens, ideas, thoughts, and information gets passed from person to person. We find human thoughts shared via keyboards around the world.

Blogging is a distinctly new and evolving genre. As bloggers, we have about one-twentieth of second to gain attention before new visitors click away to other endeavors. In this genre, bulleted lists, contractions, sub-headings, and short paragraphs are used with frequency and purpose to keep up with readers who have little time to linger. Quality content communicates quickly, stands out, and is easy to scan before it's read.

Print to Online

In print, the writer and the audience never meet. When a book or article is published, that's when the process ends. You could say a one-way conversation happens before and after that point. The writer has a conversation with the reader as the work is being written. Then the reader has his or her own separate conversation with the writer while reading the finished work. The two conversations most often never meet.

Blogging is conversational writing with intent. When a blogger hits publish, when the podcast or video goes live to chat, it's the beginning, not the end. The conversation begins. Blogger and audience are together.

Conversation grabs our brains and captures our attention in ways that formal language never will.

Why is conversational writing so compelling? Kathy Sierra explained it in [Conversational writing kicks formal writing's ass](#)

A study from the Journal of Educational Psychology, issue 93 (from 2000), . . . one of the theories on why speaking directly to the user is more effective than a more formal lecture tone is that the user's brain thinks it's in a conversation, and therefore has to pay more attention to hold up its end! Sure, your brain intellectually knows it isn't having a face-to-face conversation, but at some level, your brain wakes up when its being talked with as opposed to talked at.

What makes blogging different from other publishing platforms is that what we publish is often picked up, referenced, pointed to, passed on, cited, and indexed by search engines for others to find. Something we say this morning might be shared globally in minutes. Blogs are linked by their content and context, i.e. the people who produce them.

A business can use a blog to become the first trusted source people hire. It can be the forum on which they get to know potential customers and where they learn from customer friends. A great business blog can get ideas, test them, and sometimes find evangelists. Google loves the new content that every helpful, customer-relevant blog post makes.

Community

Like Minds, Us and Us

It's a networking event. Two of us are at the cheese table, eyeing the brie and cheddar. Someone talks. In seconds, we realize the guy's a crab. Common ground never will exist between us. Yet, respect demands time drags until someone finds a polite excuse to bring the wasted talk to an end.



Visit my blog. If you don't like it, click on by. I won't notice.

You can read for days, months, years, before we meet. If you comment, we'll have a conversation. The likelihood we'll connect is exponentially higher. We've self-selected by hanging out on the same blog where we've found likeminded thoughts.

We like to do business with people we know, like, and trust. We don't want to be sold. We know when we want to buy. We tend to trust other bloggers. We've learned to figure out what's authentic and what's not.

A while back, [I wrote in the Blog Herald that . . .](#)

Blogging is the tipping point of communication because no other form of communication has been so immediate, so interactive, so far-reaching and so ready-made for relationships. And it's adaptable to any schedule — even the cell-phone won't wait around until you are ready to take that call. Relationships that fit into our time and space to make them.

It's what Tony D. Clark said to me just last week.

"The whole thing changes when the world is your community."

Bloggers ignore push marketers and pr pitches. New marketing think says you should get to know us before you tell us what we need. Win us over. We're loyal customers, and we tell our friends about you.

[Seth](#) underscored the radical change in his book, [Meatball Sundae](#),

It's easy to write the whole thing off or, even worse, to try to manipulate it by sending out free laptops to influential bloggers.

I think it's a lot bigger than that.

Here's the fundamental shift that I hope every marketer will understand. For the first time ever, blogs convert readers and viewers into writers. And YouTube converts them into directors.

That change in posture undermines the fundamental core of almost all traditional marketing theory. It's not us and them. It's us and us.

Now we can hear our own voices. We can also hear what the crowd thinks. We're having a conversation that no one controls. We're talking in a culture, where relationships link us and our voices are how we meet. Anyone can join. No one leads it. . . . Can you hear the Internet?

Listening

Are You Listening?

I share a joke with a friend in California. It's a script that goes like this.

I call him on the phone. He answers.

I say, "Hi, Eddie, how am I?"

He replies, "Oh, you're fine. How am I?"

I tell him he's wonderful.

Then he says, "Enough about me. Let's talk about you. . . .

What do you think about my sweater?"

That's when we laugh, enjoying the joke on the people who think like that.

A new year's post over a year ago, Butch Ward at Poynter Online made me realize how easy it is to do what Eddie I joke about.



[Butch Ward gave five New Year's Resolutions.](#)

Number 2 brought this thought home to me. It was talk to your audience.

My thought was *I do that*. He offered fine advice on ways to engage in dynamic conversation. Then Mr. Ward made a suggestion for this New Year's conversation . . .

Don't ask him what he wants you to put in his newspaper or on his news broadcast. Instead, ask what he does. What she thinks. Then you decide how your newsroom can be more relevant to their world.

That's when I realized it. Those standard, customer-survey questions sound like my questions with Eddie.

"What do you think of my sweater? What do you think of ME?"

Sure, we need to ask how we're doing, but those can't be the only questions, or we'll never know our customers will we? Authentic values aren't revealed by survey questions.

Relationships and understanding come from listening to what folks *want* to talk about — dreams, desires, unexpressed needs and wishes — what they find marvelous, annoying, heartwarming, concerning, breathtaking. At least, that's my experience.

But hey, enough about me. Let's talk about what you think.

A blog gives our customers a place to say what they think. By the way, they're saying it anyway.

The question is whether we're listening. A blog invites them to tell you.

Business

Co-opetition, Transparency, and Trust

Whether you're blogging for business or expression, blogging is not about selling what you say. It's making relationships. The best bloggers are helpful, not hypeful. They share what they know in a "givers get" sort of way. Co-opetition -- constructive collaboration -- works better than competition and wins loyal fans and readers.

The culture of the blogosphere is authenticity and transparency. It has to be in order to work. Unlike in the concrete world, I can't see whether you're who you say you are. If we have a relationship, if we're going to do business, we have to agree that your words and your promises are true. Hierarchies don't matter. Social proof of authenticity and communities of people who trust you do. Transactions happen faster where relationships matter. Trust speeds things up and lowers costs too.

A truthful explanation for an unsolved problem given by a human is raises a brand's value. Now that we're part of that two-way business conversation. Businesses that are helpful, not hypeful, get to know us.

In that way, the blogosphere challenges us to be more real and trustworthy than in the concrete world.

Stephen M.R. Covey explains the value of this to business in his book, the [Speed of Trust](#),

A cynic might ask, "So what? Is trust really more than a nice-to-have social virtue, a so-called hygiene factor? Can you measurably illustrate that trust is a hard-edged economic driver? . . .

Here's a simple formula that will enable to you to take trust from an intangible and unquantifiable variable to an indispensable factor that is both tangible and quantifiable. The formula is based on this critical thought that trust always affects two outcomes – speed and cost. When trust goes down, speed will always go down and costs will go up.

Less Trust = Less Speed and More Cost

More Trust = More Speed and Less Cost

It's that simple and that predictable.

Think about it, when we trust someone we don't spend time going over their work. That costs less. Without trust, we worry and check things to ensure results. That costs more and adds more time.

When we trust our customers, we offer them a chance to speak. They give us answers, ideas, and their dreams. With a community of customers on a business blog, we can build the right product for our customers, instead of finding the right customers for the products we build.

Conversation

Build Trust Through Conversation

The web is turning writing into a conversation. Twenty years ago, writers wrote and readers read. The web lets readers respond, and increasingly they do—in comment threads, on forums, and in their own blog posts . [Paul Graham.com](#)How to Disagree

Trust doesn't come because we say "Trust me." Trust comes because we prove we are trustworthy. We share who we are – our competence, our credibility, and our integrity. It's hard to imitate those when you blog every day for months.

How to Engage in Conversation on a Blog

Blogging has rules for both culture and etiquette. The ability to write well helps immensely, but the ability to communicate with authenticity is even more important. These four points won't stun you. You already know them. They're what we all do when we talk to any person we value.

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- 1 Don't instruct or lecture. Come down from the podium. Talk to me like a person who can listen. Let me be as smart as you are, even when I don't know what you do.

We don't like to be taught, but we like to learn. And learning is easier, more fun, and more meaningful when we do it in the company of friends who support us. Rather than be the "sage on the stage," be the "guide alongside."

Have a beginner's mind. Begin with a question that you personally are curious about. Explore and let us see your process. Let folks see you find paths and walk into walls. Nothing draws us together more closely than the fear of falling. Be the brave kid on the block, who gets it wrong sometimes. Let folks who read help you as much as you help them. Friendships that go one way feel out of balance.

2. Leave what you say a little unfinished. Talk about one idea or event at a time as in a conversation. Don't try to share every detail. When you make a list, don't suffer for days to be sure it's thorough. If you do, I'll have nothing to add.

In conversation we don't get a chance to finish up a point and tie it neatly with a bow. Someone else gets a turn to reply with thoughts of their own. Leave room so that I can add those thoughts. Otherwise it's a presentation. The only response becomes applause or that other awful noise.

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3. Information is all over the Internet, but you aren't. Blog your experience. Imagine a movie critic who only gave you the facts of the plot. Imagine moving on to find another critic who did the same thing. They'd be sharing information you could get anywhere and it would (or should) be the same. Ask a friend about a movie and she'll fill in with her experience of seeing it. It won't matter whether you have your friend's taste -- if you know her, you'll know whether you'll like the movie.

If I know you, I'll respond to what you reveal. I don't have to be you for what you say to resonate and be meaningful.

4. A conversation goes two ways. Hold up your end of the bargain. If I take time to leave you a thoughtful comment, respond as you would to my conversation. It's only polite. If you want to extend a relationship, follow that response with a question that might invite another exchange.

They say "no blog is an island." But a blog can be one. Blogging is not the same in isolation.

The ideas, thoughts, and information that we share in conversation make us stronger and expand us, as people, not just as bloggers.

Therein lies the magic — we meet and in bits we build something incredible.



Connections

10 Reasons to Write and Publish Every Day

Look in a scrapbook. Look in your wallet. You'll find written messages. Diaries, wedding invitations, resumes, love letters, even our names are written as words. Yet, the best writer — the most prolific, the most proficient — is never finished learning, never finished becoming a writer. We are apprentices every one of us. We're all in the process of becoming.

We're all part ego and part self-doubt. It's the ego that helps us face down that blank page to say what we have to say. It's the self-doubt that stops us from casting the movie about what we've written.

In this age of noise and clutter, we all need to be writers. Writing and publishing are the way we connect to the world.

We write to record our thoughts . . . and by recording them we think them through, rearrange, and re-organize them. We make our ideas clearer. We make our thinking stronger and more easily understood. We carve a path that a reader, a listener, another person can follow from our

minds to their minds, from our hearts to their hearts. Writing is a connection waiting to happen.

Publishing makes the connection more natural and accessible.

Here are ten reasons that writing (and publishing) every day is important.

1. Writing every day makes us better thinkers. It takes our thoughts out of our heads and challenges us to express them in understandable ways. Effective writing is the opposite of seat-of-the-pants thinking.
2. Writing every day teaches us how to work with words in print, to construct a meaningful message. Like playing a guitar or doing math, writing takes practice.
3. Writing every day helps us develop a voice that is natural and consistent, strong and confident, and attuned to readers. Everything we write has an audience. Even when we write for ourselves, we go back to read, listening to what we wrote. We question. We consider. We critique our choices.
4. Writing every day improves our ability to craft remarkable prose that people want to share.

Every time someone shares something that we write they add value to our ideas — when they change them and when they don't.

5. Writing every day gets us comfortable with the conventions of writing and the conventions of writing give our messages credibility. The credibility is how society finds the appropriate place for our ideas.
6. Writing every day lets us find our personal writing process. We lose our fear of flying and learn our way around our creativity. We get familiar with what to do when we need ideas, how to know what we want to say, what is always going to be hard, and what parts are worth looking forward to.
7. Writing every day teaches us how to tell our internal editor to be quiet until we need feedback.
8. Writing every day makes us better, more thoughtful readers. We bring the insights and appreciation of a writer to what we read.
9. Writing every day connects us to people. We meet more people in text than we can ever possibly meet

face to face. Many people will know our written voice as well as they know our names.

10. Writing every day makes us architects and builders. We record our history, and we imagine the future. We inspire and motivate, both ourselves and others. We make something that changes the world, something lasting. We make a unique contribution that others might use.

Everything written is inherently personal and at the same time dynamically social. In a noisy world, it's the way we communicate across continents, across living rooms; with folks we just met and with every generation of our families. We write our dreams, our business plans, and ask questions. We read. We respond. We get the ultimate first impression.

Each time we write our voice becomes clearer, more focused, and stronger, until our writing is inseparable from our voice. Everything we write is written about us.



Publishing is how we talk to the world and how the world hears us. What have you told the world today?

People are talking to you. Tell them that you're listening.

Writers

How to Write Intelligently from the Heart

Words tell us how to . . . how to be beautiful, how to fall in love, how to make money. Words try to move us to be happier, be more active in a cause. Words us connect with each other. Words appraise us, explain us, and help us describe who we are. Words are how we find out what we need to know. Yet there are far more words to read than there is time.

We can think and write. We can craft our sentences to be clever. We can make sure that each part is factually, structurally, grammatically correct. But clever and accurate only go so far in satisfying readers. If we want our writing to resonate long after, our words need to come from the heart.

Intelligent heartfelt writing is respectful. It strikes a balance of logical thinking in the context of meaningful words. Here are some tips on how to bring together the best of your head and your heart when you write.

- Know what you want to say Distill your message down to one sentence.

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- Decide why you care about it. If you don't care about what you're saying, why should I?
 - Use simple words to describe your experience or argument. Choose words that you would actually say.
 - Write for an audience you respect and care about. Love your dissenters and detractors. Doing so will give your writing life and depth.
 - Write the whole piece entirely before you edit. A message from the heart still being formed won't survive the scrutiny of a brain.
 - Revise it twice. Read once for logic and sense of what you're saying. Read a second time — this time aloud — for the tone, voice, and words you're using to say it.
 - Be willing to put yourself into what you write. Be authentically you. Show us what you see.

Writers who capture our attention share who they are. They connect with our minds and with our hearts. Great writers blend information, thoughts, and opinions with a light touch of humanity.

It's the in the humanity that we see ourselves.



Liz Strauss

What do I do when I'm not doing this?

Hi. I'm Liz. I write, speak and work with businesses on how to make relationships the center of their marketing strategy. I show companies, universities, and service professionals how to create a community that loves what they do and how much easier it is to make products for customers than to find customer for their products. My usual bio and contact information follows. Please contact me if I can help you hear the Internet.



About Liz

"Relationships are everyone's business, and every business is relationships," explains strategist and presenter, Liz Strauss of Successful-Blog.

According to EatonWeb, "Liz Strauss is perhaps the most influential relational blogger on the Internet." Her blog . – [Liz Strauss at Successful Blog](#) — has been called both a destination and an event. It covers the relationship side of business and how to combine head, heard, and purpose to focus strategy. The weekly SOB (Successful and Outstanding

Blogger) award is sought after and proudly displayed throughout the Internet. She also writes for [Liz Strauss \[dot\] com](#),

Currently, Liz works with businesses, universities, and individuals on their products and social web strategies. She has worked over 20 years in print, software, and online publishing, and strategized with publishers in Europe, Australia, the UK, and Ireland. She has worked with entrepreneurs, small businesses, companies in crisis, and corporate giants. Liz was recently a featured speaker at the Cass Business School of City University in London at a special event for the faculties and students both schools of Business and Journalism. She plans to return to City U in the late fall and also to give a presentation and seminar for Business and Publishing students at Oxford University.

Liz is a founder of the highly successful business bloggers conference SOBCon — that gained the attention of BusinessWeek, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Chicago Tribune, and the Innovation Initiative of the Kellogg School of Business.

Her writing is known for its clarity, originality, and a voice that develops a warm relationship with readers. Her presentations are known for being jam-packed with information, motivation, and fun.

Writing is about making sure that the message you
send is the one that is received.

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Go write something outstanding!

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