



Steve Rubel Micro Persuasion

22

“Today you have to be different, because it’s harder to get noticed than it used to be.”

—Steve Rubel

Steve Rubel is a marketing strategist and senior vice president at Edelman, the world’s largest independent public relations (PR) firm. He has spent most of his professional career—15 years—in PR. Rubel’s first new computer was an Atari 800, which he bought when he was 12. He learned to program on the Atari and soon upgraded to an Atari 800 XL. It was around this time that he discovered the online world and its communications potential. In

Micro Persuasion

Steve Rubel on how technology is revolutionizing media and marketing.

Thursday, August 02, 2007

Search Wikipedia and RSS News Feeds via SMS

Lately I have been experimenting a lot with text messaging services since it's the primary way people interact with data on their cell phones. Plus, as you know, [I am into](#) the whole microblogging revolution.

You can do a lot with SMS, including [send them from your desktop](#), [query the Web](#) or even use it to [find a clean public restroom](#) believe it or not. Here's another one I really like.

[GoLiveMobile](#) has set up a way to query Wikipedia via text messages using their Text2WAP technology. All you need to do is send a text message to the number 23907 with the word ABOUT followed by your search topic - e.g. ABOUT WIKIPEDIA. You will then get a link back to a special mobile-friendly version of the Wikipedia entry.

In addition, the company has a news search engine as well that scans RSS feeds. Simply text NEWS [Search Term] - eg NEWS MINNEAPOLIS - to 23907 and you will get back a link to a special formatted web page.

The service is free but typical SMS charges apply. Handy stuff.

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addition to setting up a bulletin board system (BBS) on his home computer, Rubel spent time on several of the pre-Web online services—CompuServe, GEnie, and even the PLATO network for Atari owners. He was, of course, an early adopter of the Web.

Rubel became interested in blogs in 2003 and soon had several on his RSS feed. (He cites bloggers Robert Scoble and David Winer as his favorites.) He realized that blogging was going to have a strong effect on the business world, so he began thinking about how to get on top of the blogging phenomenon.

At the time, Rubel was working at a small PR agency, and there he found an opportunity to get two of his clients to start blogs early in 2004. The move was highly successful, increasing the companies' media coverage. "From there," Rubel says, "I was hooked."

Blogging Persuasion

Rubel increased his consulting on blogging as a business strategy, and in February 2006, he moved to Edelman to advise the company and its clients on effective blogging. The subtitle of his blog, *Micro Persuasion*, is "Steve Rubel on how technology is revolutionizing media and marketing." He uses the blog to explore conversational marketing and how blogging and other social networking experiences affect marketing and public relations. In addition to his roles as a consultant and blogger, Rubel writes a biweekly column for *AdAge Digital*. Rubel has been named on several important lists, including *MEDIA* magazine's 100 People to Know in Media, the AlwaysOn/Technorati Open Media 100, and the CNET News.com Blog 100.

When did you set up *Micro Persuasion*, and how long did it take you to get on the Technorati Most Linked To list?

I just stumbled into this. I've been a geek my whole life. It's been about 25 years since I bought my first computer, an Atari 800, and I've been playing with computers ever since.

"Feedback helps me learn, which is primarily why I blog."

In 2004, I started thinking about what I could do with social media, and I began to try things with clients that ended up being successful. Then I decided to have my own blog and be a part of this giant conversation that I'd

been missing. So I launched the site and called it Micro Persuasion. I figured it was a good place for me to go and really advance the profession.

I had no ambitions for it, no idea of where it might go. I figured I'd just see where it went. And it took off. I discovered blogging was my calling—something I love to do. I really enjoy putting out valuable information and getting responses back—even when they're negative. Feedback helps me learn, which is primarily why I blog.

You have 45,000 readers via RSS. How long did it take you from a cold start to build this audience?

Oh, things moved quickly. It just kind of happened organically, in less than six months. But it was a different time then. What I did in 2004 is very difficult now—the niche I covered was largely unmet back then. I think you could do that in some online communities, but I don't think you could do that on a blog.

To do that today on a blog, you need a smaller area that is not fulfilled—a really good niche. Becoming the most influential food or mommy blogger will be very hard to do. All of those popular subjects are taken, filled.

You've been on the Technorati Top 100 lists for about two years. Do you spend a lot of time blogging?

I have cut down a lot. I used to blog 10 to 15 hours a week. Now I'm probably down to about four to five hours a week. But I am engaged with other social networking activities, and when I do blog, I put more into it. It's my brand, and it's my laboratory to try out new ideas.

I spend much more time exploring, learning about, and working with the social networking revolution. I help Edelman and our clients benefit from it.

Is there anything you find particularly difficult about keeping a blog up?

One is that... it's really hard when you have a day job to do news—it's just really hard to do news. There are many sites that already do this. If blogging is your sole profession, you can do it. Otherwise, you're really competing with too many people.

Two, I now work with a big company with a lot of stakeholders, and I can't blog about companies or products as often as I used to. It's too risky. I

could alienate my coworkers, or I could alienate my clients. Or I could alienate my competitors' clients—companies that could one day become clients. It's just too difficult.

And so I went to a longer format, and it became much more work. It now takes about two hours to do a post, most of the time. Occasionally I do one in about 10 minutes. But for the most part, a post takes me an hour or two. And I have a pretty hectic schedule, so it becomes harder now to find the time. And I have to be a lot more thoughtful about it.

“[Blogging] is a great relationship builder, just like social networks.”

At the same time, all these social sites—Facebook, Twitter, and so on—have arisen. They allow you to blog anywhere in a short format. I'm getting a lot more mail through Twitter, Facebook, and other channels. People who I normally would not think would be

[blogging] are using them—maybe there's some sort of big shift happening. Maybe people are just spending so much time on these sites that it's easier just to send e-mail from them—I don't know.

I became very attracted to those because I'm on the go a lot. I can fire off an SMS [Short Message Service or text message] and still be in touch with people. I think it's where a lot of people are going. It's a lot of work just to build an audience, just to get people to come to your site. If you can go where people are, it's easier.

What do you find gratifying about blogging?

A lot of things. First of all, it is a great leadership tool for me and the agency. It's a great way to put out ideas and express yourself, and to take the temperature of the public—to listen. It's a great way to connect with people I've met offline and online. [Blogging is] a great relationship builder, just like social networks.

Social networks make communications a little bit more closed and a little bit more controlled than blogs. But in one respect, everything is a social network. Community is going to run through everything online—I think that sites will interconnect and people will kind of scoop up community from many different sources.

What advice can you offer bloggers who want to increase their readership or do a better job?

Today you have to be different, because it's harder to get noticed than it used to be. And you've got to fill a void, by providing something that people need. You've got to add value. And you have to be a salesman and a sales promoter.

Quality is important. And you have to be active—to post in volume—although I don't think you have to go crazy with it. But if you're just getting started, you have to be much more active.

One of the best things you can do is become a part of the daily themes on which conversation and news are based by linking your product or service to one of those themes. And it is in your power to do this through social media like blogging.

Don't be afraid to explore new technology. It's our future. Most of it may not pan out, but the small portion that does can pay off.

And of course, you should have a passion for what you are doing.

Points to Review

Steve Rubel was one of the early adopters of blogging as a PR tool, and he has proven that blogs can be a channel for mainstream media attention. He harnesses the power of online conversation by following these basic guidelines:

- If you want people to come to your blog, you must offer them something of value.
- Bloggers just starting out must post in high volume to build an audience.
- Sometimes it's easier to go where people are than to get them to come to you.
- With competition among news bloggers being so strong, and bloggers filling every available subject, the best option for new bloggers is to find a niche.

