



## Effecting Blogging: Joining the conversation

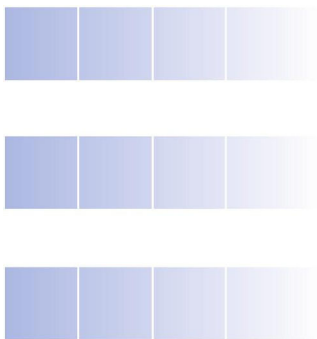
January 2008

***Executive summary – To some blogging is intriguing but mysterious. But with some basic tools and a few guidelines, it can be an effective business tool and even replace email as the center of work activity. The keys to successful blogging are writing about a theme you are passionate about, being consistent and persistent, having a thick skin and recognizing, above all else, that you are not in control. In essence, blogging is interactive, which means listening and reacting is as important as having your say.***

*In this Executive Technology Report, Peter Andrews interviews Luis Suarez, who works as knowledge manager, community builder and social computing evangelist at IBM in Amsterdam. Luis hosts two Internet blogs: <http://elsua.net> and at ITtoolbox professional network (<http://blogs.ittoolbox.com/km/elsua>).*

**Peter Andrews** Luis, what are the themes of your blogs?

**Luis Suarez** Normally, everything that has got to do with knowledge management / knowledge sharing, collaboration, communities, learning and especially social computing.





**Peter Andrews** Could you say a bit about social computing and its emerging value to businesses?

**Luis Suarez** Social computing is an emergent movement that has been going on for a while now and that tries to empower knowledge workers to take control of how they manage not (only) information and their knowledge, but also how they connect with other knowledge workers.

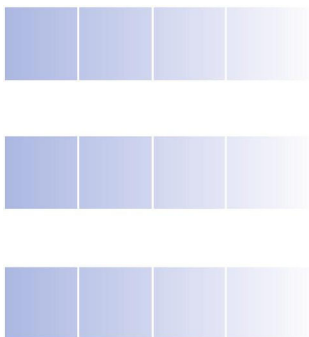
Perhaps the most significant business value is the fact that for the first time in years, the focus is now on the people and the connections they make with others. And social computing helps achieve that quite effectively.

**Peter Andrews** Back to blogging. What advice would you give to someone who wants, not necessarily to blog, but to get the most value (from a business perspective) from the blogs that are out there?

**Luis Suarez** I would advise to start with, to get an RSS / Atom feed aggregator (a Web application that puts syndicated content -- news headlines, blogs, podcasts, and vlogs -- into a single location) in order to subscribe to blogs. There are so many (blogs) out there that in order to keep it humanly sane one has got to get the content sent out to them. And a feed aggregator is the best thing.

Second thing is to start searching and reading blogs that would be of interest to that knowledge worker. Blogs that would share the same passion on whatever the topic with the original author and engage on the conversations. Leave comments, join his/her social networks, get yourself known to them, provide relevant commentary adding to the dialogue, etc.

Blogging is a two-way conversation, and people need to feel comfortable with the fact that they are no longer in control. They are part of a conversation, and listening and reading is key.





**Peter Andrews** This naturally leads to the advice you'd give someone who wants to be a successful blogger (for his or her career/business), since participation becomes inevitable. What would that advice be?

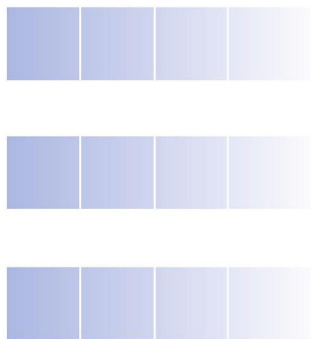
**Luis Suarez** Without making that list too long, here are some of the key elements from a successful blogger, in my experience:

1. Find a theme you are passionate about and stick to it. In (posting opportunities), show that passion.
2. Be consistent and persistent: Don't expect to have a successful blog from day one. Work your way through it over the course of time. Don't focus on the page hits you get. Focus on providing content you find useful for yourself. There is a great chance it will be useful to others, too!
3. Stick to a schedule and set right away the expectations with the readership as to how often you plan to post and stick with it. People want to know when to come back for more and when not.
4. Have a thick skin: Remember it is a two-way conversation where constructive criticism may be part of the deal. A successful blogger needs to be able to take that up and provide relevant feedback.
5. In the first few weeks, schedule a time in your weekly workflow to just blog. No interruptions. Over time you will see how practice will make perfection. Finally, realize that you are no longer in control – that you are part of a large dialogue and, as such, you are just a blogger with a voice, your voice. Most leading indicators of innovation are qualitative in nature, and there are adequate ways of measuring anything, no matter how intangible.

**Peter Andrews** One of your theses, which you put into practice, is making blogging, rather than face-to-face meetings or e-mail, the center of your worklife. Could you walk me through a typical day that illustrates this?

**Luis Suarez** Oh, sure thing. I live blogging (and social software) through my veins. Here is a typical day of how blogging impacts the way I work, the way I live: First thing in the morning, I check my feeds to find out what people are talking about, specially in the area of knowledge ,management and social computing. I scan typically about 2,500 articles, of which I end up with about 30 to 40 I want to save and comment on at some point. I then go and check out the various social networks I belong to and what the conversations are all about. This gives me stuff I can blog about at a later time. Then I would start working on various drafts to blog at a later time. I normally make use of off-line blogging tools like Qumana or Windows Live Writer (along with ScribeFire) so that I can come back and forth in between meetings and conference calls. I would periodically check my feeds to see what has changed, and eventually during the course of the day I would be posting a number of different blog posts.

Blogging has changed my working life in such a way that e-mail is the last thing I check in my usual morning catch-up. And when I look through it I always try to find





content from those e-mails that would be bloggable and blog it. One of the things I keep trying to tell people is that if you want to be an effective blogger and get the job done, (the) first thing to do is to stop using e-mail. Instead, make use of social software and, especially, blogging. Nowadays, the amount of e-mail I get is no way the same number I used to get a few years ago. People know where to find me, and e-mail is not the first place I check :-)

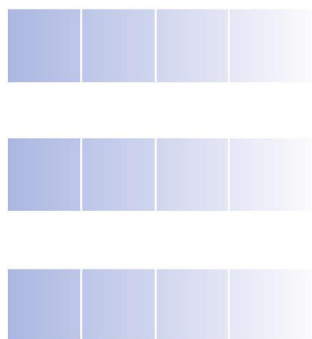
**Peter Andrews** This is almost unimaginable for some of us. Can it be approached with baby steps? If someone wants to make blogging central to their business life, what steps should they take?

**Luis Suarez** Yes, that method I explained above is something I have developed after four years of active blogging with over 3,500 articles published throughout different blogs. To get things started on easy, baby steps, (the) first thing I would do is find your theme / topic for your blog. Then put up a schedule to blog, at least, weekly. Every two or three days is also good. Go through your e-mail and decide right there what is private, which should remain private, and (what) should be public. And from the public e-mails, instead of replying to them, just blog them (or blog one or two) and tell people to go there.

**Peter Andrews** Is there any evidence that patient organizations outperform impatient ones; that is, that measurements predict performance of, say, stock?

**Luis Suarez** Many organizations undermine innovation by constantly trying to rush the outputs and outcomes (for example, products, patents and commercialization). It is like a farmer constantly digging up the seeds to see whether they are growing, rather than focusing on developing a good farming process, and trusting that process. With the right nurturing, the seeds will grow. In addition, innovation does not always occur on a 12-month calendar. Measurement systems must be suitable for what is being measured. Transactional sales need to be measured differently from complex sales, and product and service enhancements need to be measured differently from radical innovation.

You have to start teaching folks how to best reach you, and e-mail may not be the best thing for public stuff. So selecting e-mails you get and blogging a couple of them a week is what will eventually get you to challenge all of the e-mails you get, and more and more you will want to blog them. Another baby step is to get a feed aggregator to follow up everything that is going on around you, so that you don't have to hunt down the content, the content comes to you, when you want it.





**Peter Andrews** Any recommendations on feed aggregators?

**Luis Suarez** Yes, I can certainly recommend a few options in there: If you are looking for online feed readers, Google Reader for external feeds, and Spectacular (<http://reader.tap.ibm.com>) for feeds behind the firewall. If you are looking for desktop feed readers, for while on the road, my favorites are Omea Pro for Windows and Vienna for the Mac. All of them (are) freeware.

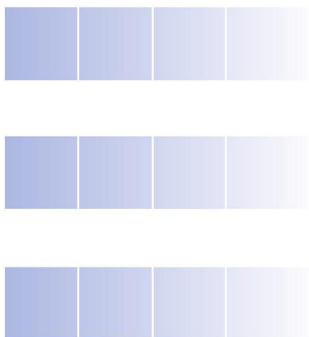
**Peter Andrews** What are some of the creative uses of blogs that you've seen? What is your advice to those people?

**Luis Suarez** Well, there are plenty of cases. I have seen blogs in BlogCentral used as online brainstorm tools, like HorizonWatch from Bill Chamberlin. Incredibly powerful how he has enabled his blog to get that community to experiment and try out blogging. Another creative use I have seen is how people use blogs as newsletters, walking away big time from the traditional newsletters you would get in (Lotus) Notes. See? One other reason to walk away from e-mail.

Also people use blogs to announcement conference call events that would initially have got a restricted coverage, but that thanks to those blog posts the attendance has been boosted tremendously.

People use blogs as well to gather input and feedback on how to improve IBM products. Cases like Dogear, Spectacular, Unified Meetings Experience are just a few. Through that feedback through blogs, they have been able to improve their products big time.

Blogs are also use to conduct online interviews where people get to ask questions and post answers. Or where people share the contents of an interview for a larger audience to digest.





**Peter Andrews** In your blogging life, have you had any surprises?

**Luis Suarez** Yes, the huge amount of incredibly talented people that are out there -- with some really good insights -- who share an incredible passion for their topics. It is amazing to see what people are able to blog about if you give them the tools and the option to do that. That is one of the reasons why I love BlogCentral a lot. There is such a diversity of topics, and you can spend the whole day hanging out there enjoying every minute of it.

Another surprise that I am surely glad I have been exposed to with blogs is the great amount of connections I have been able to make with blogs with folks completely outside of my immediate team / communities reach. If you want to get known out there, both inside and outside, there is nothing easier than getting that done through a blog. Yes, it takes time, perseverance, commitment and involvement, but if you stick to it long enough you will see it pay off big time before you know it. That is how I have been able to meet some of the most prominent knowledge management thought leaders outside of the corporate firewall. Without my blogs I would not have been able to make most of those connections.

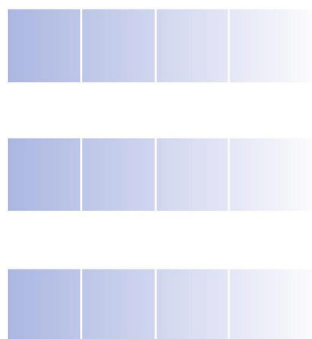
**Peter Andrews** On the other hand... Have you seen any blogging disasters? Any cautionary tales?

**Luis Suarez** Yes, plenty of them! Especially out there on the Internet where blogging has been going on for several years now. Mainly affecting the situation where some people are not comfortable with blogs and therefore they ignore them. And (they) suffer the consequences, thinking, what kind of power has got a blog from an individual blogger? (Forgetting about the fact that what really matters is the networking effect from the blogger and his / her social networks!).

Another situation where I have seen some blogging disasters is when people try to control the blogs and the messages those blogs send across. They all think that blogging is pretty much like any other way to communicate, pretty much like you would do on an e-mail, or regular Web site, or press release, etc. They do not realize that blogging is all about empowering knowledge workers to have a voice. Trying to control their messages is just bound to provoke more issues than to help out.

We need to realize that with blogging and social software in general, we are moving on into a more participatory society where everyone has got the opportunity to share what they know with others and collaborate. Sometimes you just cannot control the dialogue, you need to be part of it.

**Peter Andrews** Blogging, as with much of Web 2.0, is participatory, and possibly democratizing. Doesn't this in some ways threaten management?





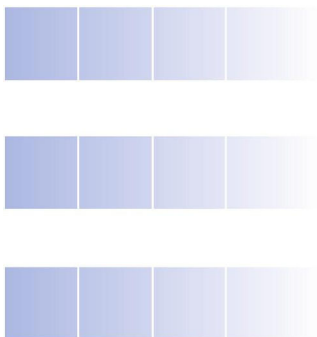
**Luis Suarez** Well, it would threaten some of that traditional management where command-and-control may have ruled for a while. Certainly for that kind of management you would notice how they see blogging as a menace. More than anything else because they haven't stopped to check out the kind of impact it is having on the workforce. It is helping people reach out to others, have a strong sense of belonging to the group, to the social network, empower them to share their knowledge and collaborate easier. Yes, I can see how some part of management would find that difficult to digest, but then again, isn't all of that what we envisioned for knowledge management way back?

However, things didn't work out that way, and partly because of that management that is afraid of blogging, of letting the message out, of breaking the hierarchies in whatever the fashion. Management needs to move into Management 2.0

I (have) a great chart that (is) rather nice and descriptive of where we are and where we need to go with management.

**Peter Andrews** Right.

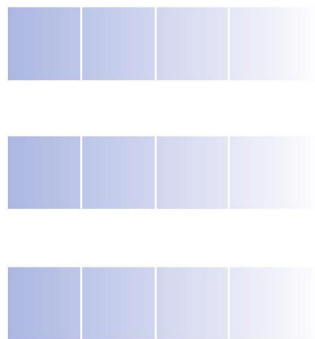
**Luis Suarez** As I said, most organizations use performance measurement to monitor, inspect, report, justify and to dispense rewards and punishments. This makes people become defensive and use the measurement data for self-serving purposes. No doubt, you also see that all the time. When measurement is used for learning and improvement, and when it is "socialized," the attitudes of people toward measurement change over time, and measurement becomes a powerful source of feedback.





Manager 1.0	Manager 2.0
Policies dictated by management and imposed on employees	All employees are asked to help with policy decisions and solutions
Pay for performance (merit-based) and tied to promotions	Pay is generous and fair, profit-sharing is the norm
Overall secrecy--less is revealed to employees at each level down the hierarchy	Employees are given as much information about the company as possible, including financial
"Healthy competition" among teams and individuals. Only the "best-performing" get bonuses and promotions	Employees and teams challenge themselves. If one person or team succeeds, everyone wins
Formal job description created by management. Changes to the description must be officially granted	Informal job role created by employee, tailored to their strengths and interests, and changes all the time
Emphasis on "teamwork" (but competitive internal practices often work against it)	Emphasis on "community"
Employees tightly controlled--responsibility without authority	Employees have autonomy, responsibility, and authority
External rewards and incentives as motivation	Intrinsic motivation to do really good work
Customer is king (but internal policies and process often hinder this)	Users are king, but not at the expense of employees
Performance appraisals conducted by supervisors	Continuous peer review... official "appraisals" irrelevant due to constant communication
Hierarchical structure	A Hollywood model
Hiring based on past performance and current skill set	Hiring based on curiosity, ability to learn, and passion
Deadlines imposed on those who do the work by those who don't	Deadlines agreed on and set by those doing the work
Employees often forced to learn new things and "change"	Employees create opportunities to learn and be challenged

Here is the link to the blog post I created on it:  
[http://blogs.tap.ibm.com/weblogs/page/luis\\_suarez@nl.ibm.com?entry=manager\\_1\\_0\\_vs\\_manager](http://blogs.tap.ibm.com/weblogs/page/luis_suarez@nl.ibm.com?entry=manager_1_0_vs_manager)



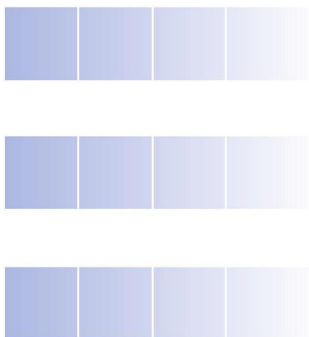


As you can see from that graphic, there needs to be a substantial change in management for social software to succeed behind the corporation.

**Peter Andrews** Why do companies need to accept the ethos of blogging? Can there be a compromise between current business culture and this emerging participatory culture?

**Luis Suarez** Companies should realize that they have got an incredibly amount of hidden talent behind the firewall that is just waiting for that golden opportunity to show it and demonstrate it effectively, not just with business, but also with their peers. It is the community spirit, that sense of belonging to something greater that inspires people to use social software, to blog, to participate. Content is no longer key. Relationships are. And we all know that relationships will help people stick around longer, will give them a stronger sense of being involved in the important decisions and will help them feel they are an integral part of their interactions with others.

The compromise needs to come from both parties. Knowledge workers using social software need to understand that not everyone is ready to make the change. That is why we need to keep on evangelizing about the benefits, the advantages, etc. We should not just focus on strong statements indicating that the only way forward is through that participatory culture. However, on the other hand the current business culture needs to reach the compromise that is willing to listen, to invest where it may need to, that it needs to react proactively on what knowledge workers are demanding more and more. Once that compromise from both parties comes along, we would be putting together something that we tried a few years ago, but that failed miserably all along: A balanced focus on tools, processes and...the people!





**Peter Andrews** Does anything about the blogosphere worry you?

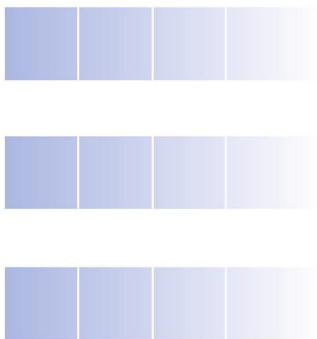
**Luis Suarez** NOT AT ALL! I think it is some very interesting times with blogging. To me blogging is everything about feeling the power to connect with other folks who share your passions, your insights, your knowledge, your everything. To me, it is probably one of the most refreshing changes that could happen behind the corporate firewall, because it will help us all move away from considering people as resources to consider them as human beings with their unique voices.

Perhaps the only thing that would worry me from the blogosphere is not allowing it to have a chance to show everyone the huge potential it has. And unless we all get to try it and blog we would never find out what we may have been missing all along.

**Peter Andrews** How will blogging transform society?

**Luis Suarez** It has already transformed society. What blogging has done for society is help democratize how we share information and knowledge with others, so that that the old motto "knowledge is power" is no longer seen as much relevant as "knowledge shared is power." More and more, people are using blogs to detail how different things are impacting their lives, and the fact you can share that with other people and learn from those experiences is going to help us all become smarter at what we do. Pulling the information is no longer enough, we need to give it some context, some sense into it all so that we can reuse it effectively and that is what blogging does and how it is shifting incredibly the way we interact. As an example, just the other day I read about a doctor in New York who blogs about his patients and has got his own practice on the Web using various social software tools, blogging one. Can you imagine seeing that five years ago?

**Peter Andrews** Does multimedia transform blogging in any essential ways?





**Luis Suarez** It surely does, that is why vlogging is so huge at the moment with a bunch of people exploring videoblogs and sharing content through their vodcasts -- something that until recently it was not possible. More and more, people are looking into video and other rich media options to help enhance the blogging experience. Examples like Scoble, Jeremiah Owyang, Stan Garfield, John C. Dvorak, etc., have been using multimedia for a while now and still going strong.

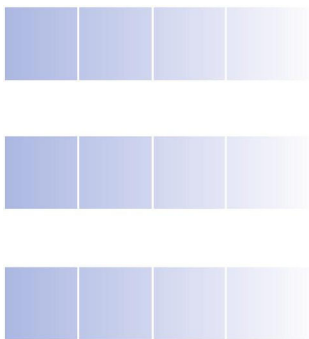
Nowadays, it is pretty easy to share that multimedia. Everyone has got a mobile with a camera, or a PC with a webcam. Just press a button and you are on... See that kind of impact with applications like YouTube, for instance. And how it was used just recently for the national U.S. debate with all of the candidates for the U.S. elections next year.

**Peter Andrews** How does it change the discourse? Does it open up new topics? Change the depth? Engage new participants with different perspectives from text bloggers?

**Luis Suarez** See that example I just mentioned above. Who would have thought that in politics people would be given an opportunity to ask their representatives, in front of the whole world, how they are going to rule their country. That debate was done through people asking questions on YouTube and the response was huge! Tremendous! So much so that plenty of the candidates are actually making use of social software to reach out to the people and connect with them further. And that is just an example of how social media is impacting politics.

**Peter Andrews** What do you see in the future for blogging and allied practices?

**Luis Suarez** I see a HUGE potential to change our lives, in such a way that it is going to help us out become much more responsible of who we are, who we connect with, what we want for our own future and our jobs by helping us find our spot with the rest of knowledge workers. It is going to make organizations and businesses much more dynamic and organic. The drivers would be the people and their knowledge, not the assets, not the resources we may have used in the past. It is finally going to help us all make the move successfully into the 21st Knowledge Economy as opposed to the Labor economy from the last century. People would be valued more for their knowledge and their connections with others than ever before. And the role of social software is going to be fundamental because, if anything, it is finally going to humanize large corporations and make them more what they should have been all along: human, personal. You and me.





**Peter Andrews** Any final messages for the readers?

**Luis Suarez** Well, perhaps the one last thing I can mention is to start a blog today! Don't underestimate the huge amount of talent, knowledge and experiences you all have. Share them with others, get busy, connect and build up further your relationships with your peers and let that networking effect build up further on you. Go and join the communities you are passionate about!

Technology to watch
Blogging
Social computing
Web 2.0

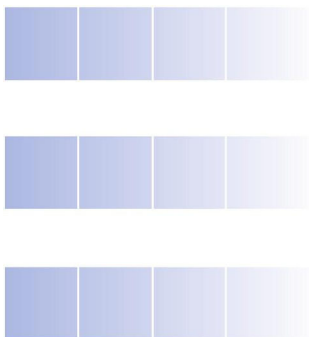
*Executive Technology Report* is a monthly publication intended as a heads-up on emerging technologies and business ideas. All the technological initiatives covered in *Executive Technology Report* have been extensively analyzed using a proprietary IBM methodology. This involves not only rating the technologies based on their functions and maturity, but also doing quantitative analysis of the social, user and business factors that are just as important to its ultimate adoption. From these data, the timing and importance of emerging technologies are determined. Barriers to adoption and hidden value are often revealed, and what is learned is viewed within the context of five technical themes that are driving change:

**Knowledge Management:** Capturing a company's collective expertise wherever it resides – databases, on paper, in people's minds – and distributing it to where it can yield big payoffs

**Pervasive Computing:** Combining communications technologies and an array of computing devices (including PDAs, laptops, pagers and servers) to allow users continual access to the data, communications and information services

**Realtime:** "A sense of ultracompressed time and foreshortened horizons, (a result of technology) compressing to zero the time it takes to get and use information, to learn, to make decisions, to initiate action, to deploy resources, to innovate" (Regis McKenna, *Real Time*, Harvard Business School Publishing, 1997.)

**Ease-of-Use:** Using user-centric design to make the experience with IT intuitive, less painful and possibly fun





**Deep Computing:** Using unprecedented processing power, advanced software and sophisticated algorithms to solve problems and derive knowledge from vast amounts of data

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