

Blogging as a Tool in the Biotechnology Industry

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Mutt & Jeff



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutt_and_Jeff

The idea of an emerging biotech firm adopting a web-based communication tool such as blogging, may seem as unlikely as the relationship between the two presenters; the optimist, Howard Oliver of *What If What Next* and the cynic, Dr. Jeffrey Charuk of *Larial Proteomics* - self-proclaimed Mutt and Jeff. These two fellows demonstrated that the synthesis of marketing and science can be facilitated by adding a blogging function to the “commercialization toolkit” that biotech firms use to help bring their scientific research mainstream.

Jeffrey Charuk considers himself a survivor in the biotech industry. He is a scientist turned entrepreneur who admits that his most significant learning (at a realistic level) occurred during the commercialization of his research. Jeff discovered that dysfunctional bio-products existed in the industry. Worse yet, they were the wrong products and to top it off there was unwillingness in the industry to correct either situation. Simply, the demand for these products didn't seem to warrant the efforts required to initiate a recall.

In marketing terms, Jeff recognized a pain. He found a solution to a problem, and knew that a market for his solution existed. There was one major problem - he didn't know where that market was or how to access it. Howard Oliver, with his nautical sense, PR expertise, and experience with “new media” had a solution for Jeff's marketing dilemma – blogging.

A blog is a web-based software application that has been used to accelerate social networking and media relations. It has evolved from personal journaling (MySpace) and online journalism to becoming a part of major corporate initiatives. The development of blogging is representative of the transition that is occurring from the traditional, static design philosophies of Web 1.0 to the more social and interactive design philosophies of [Web 2.0](#).

Jeff is a scientist who looks at things in terms of metrics, forecasting, and deliverables. Howard's suggestion of posting a technical blog was a big stretch for him. Despite this and still eager to find his market, Jeff posted a blog as bait. Emails started arriving and contacts were made. Jeff discovered who was in the field and began approaching them. Use of a more traditional website alone would not have afforded this function of drawing people in.

According to Howard, feedback is what enables you to move forward. For an early stage biotech firm there is often no one out there to try out your product or service. Jeff needed feedback and found that blogging was the vehicle to obtain it. Blogging not only allowed him to deliver his datasets quickly and easily over the Internet, it connected him to a much wider and unexpected audience. Because he was open to the journey that blogging takes you on, the feedback Jeff received resulted in other solutions being brought back to him. Howard describes this aspect of blogging as a game of pitch and catch.

It is best to think of blogging in terms of its benefits and not so much the technology or a precise definition. As Howard discussed, blogging offers a number of other advantages including:

- bringing your personality online
- getting a better Google ranking
- creating an impression of momentum by publishing milestones, interviews, articles
- creating a corporate culture
- taking you outside of the local community
- generating traffic to your website
- developing client relationships by starting a dialogue
- making you more focused
- offering you flexibility of functions – posting, reviewing, adding, removing comments or data

Jeff cautioned us about the dark side of blogging:

- the legality – issues of copyright, IP, publishing results opposed to interpretations of results
- the potential for overexposure - blogging can make you look larger than you really are
- and the fact you may become a target of angst – he cautioned that any publicity is not necessarily good publicity.

According to Brooke Gordon, a workshop participant and partner of [Liquidesign](#), the key to a successful blog is its content. In the design process it is essential to define the purpose of a blog at the outset, taking into consideration the audience, stakeholders, and legal implications. Jeff found that delivering his content honestly and with focus worked well. His intention for his blog was not to make sales but to find the market. After all, he knew that “you can't make sales without a hungry customer.”

The way we use computers and the Internet is changing dramatically. Howard encouraged us to set sail, as Jeff did, and to be open to the journey that blogging will take us on. He speculated that blogging may go the way of the Beanie Babies, but said that when a company like [Coca-Cola](#) invests heavily in this new reality to engage its 55,000 employees, you are forced to take notice.

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