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The relationship between food bloggers and public relations professionals

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The Relationship Between Food Bloggers and Public Relations Professionals

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Science

by Hannah Michelle Cox

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Abstract

Blogs, a relatively new medium in the Internet sphere, offer public relations professionals another outlet to communicate with influential opinion leaders. Food is a popular blogging topic and an outlet public relations professionals with food clients use. Public relations professionals use blogs as a form of strategic research, a medium to share content, and a method to communicate with readers. The working relationship between bloggers and public relations professionals can help both entities succeed. This qualitative interview study examines the method, outcome and value of the relationship between food bloggers and public relations professionals. The study found that food bloggers want personalized emails that show the public relations professional has read their blog and understands the mission and purpose of the site. Food bloggers want entertaining and amusing partnerships that will benefit readers. The bloggers will reach out to public relations professionals from well-known brands or to professionals with whom they have developed prior relationships.

Introduction

Weblogs, typically called blogs, are online websites with posts listed in reverse chronological order. Blogs are a form of social communication where the writer and reader are connected through the writing and reading of blogs (Nardi, 2004). A myriad of blog types exist, including personal, technology, car, parent, food, and beauty to name a few. Most blogs focus on one topic and explore a variety of issues within that topic.

Public relations professionals use blogs to research trends, disseminate information, and connect with influencers (Kent, 2008). Public relations professionals spend a large portion of their day monitoring trends, finding key influencers and researching possible pitches. Blogs serve as an efficient and effective method for research (Kent, 2008; Porter, Sweester & Chung, 2009). Because professionals, opinion leaders, and experts frequent issue blogs on a regular basis, blogs offer excellent opportunities for public relations strategies (Kent, 2008). Influential bloggers are capable of discussing key issues because they are more knowledgeable or experienced with an issue and more interested in learning about it (Jin & Liu, 2010). Blogs provide public relations practitioners a forum to conduct research, disseminate information, and communicate with opinion leaders.

Within the last 10 years a variety of research has been conducted about the uses for blogs. Research examines blog writers, readers, growth, popularity, and uses and gratifications. Public relations research studies how practitioners use blogs, the importance of blogs for brands, and how to communicate with bloggers. However, little research has examined how public relations practitioners specifically interact with particular industries. Little research explores the food blogging industry and its relationship with public relations. Examining the public relations-blogger interaction will further the current knowledge research base. Understanding how

bloggers and public relations professionals interact can provide insight into the importance of blogs to a brand's growth and development. Blogs provide another medium for earned media coverage and understanding how public relations practitioners successfully achieve placement can help the public relations industry develop.

Literature Review

Blogs

Blogs act as a form of social communication where the writer and reader are connected through the writing and reading of blogs (Nardi, 2004). Nearly 90% of blogs include archives of posts that are ordered and shown chronologically (Xifra & Huertas, 2008). Blogs are entymematic in nature, and allow users to create their own experiences through clicking links, commenting and reblogging (Kent, 2008; Kaye, 2010). Entymematic in nature, blogs allow users to create their own experience through reading, commenting, and sharing posts (Kent, 2008). Weblogs have increased in popularity due to the entymematic (Kent, 1998) and interactive nature, and the ability to fulfill people's needs for convenient, entertaining information.

Blog writers and readers vary in demographics, characteristics and involvement. Most weblogs are written by one individual and began as a method to communicate with family and friends (Efimova & Grudin, 2007; Nardi, 2004). Bloggers tend to match the profile of heavy Internet users who are part of Generation X or Y (Lee et al, 2006; Segev, Villar, & Fiske, (2012). When looking at blogger age and gender, female bloggers under 17 years old represented 63% of bloggers. For bloggers 17 years old and over, females represented 47% of bloggers (Koppel, 2006). Equal numbers of men and women read blogs (Porter, Sweester & Chung, 2009). Two-thirds of bloggers spent under eight hours per week blogging, and 17% of bloggers spent more than 16 hours per week blogging (Steyn, Salehi-Sangari, Pitt, Parent & Berthron, 2010).

Smith (2010) introduced the Evolution of the Blogger theory with three phases. During the introduction phase, bloggers typically begin writing with a personal purpose and explore

media and blog possibilities. Bloggers will then advance to the second community membership phase where bloggers become fascinated by site traffic and expand beyond original intents. Some bloggers remain at the second phase forever, but more popular bloggers advance to the third phase of autonomy. Once bloggers reach autonomy they continue to express increased ownership of their blog content. Bloggers tend to match the profile of heavy Internet users and the blog serves as a method to communicate with friends and family^[1].

Both writers and readers use blogs for convenience, entertainment, sharing opinions, and seeking information. People read blogs for information seeking (Kaye, 2005; Jin & Liu, 2010; Segev et al., 2012), convenience (Kaye, 2005), personal fulfillment (Kaye, 2005; Segev et al., 2012), political and social surveillance (Kaye, 2005; Jin & Liu, 2010), expression and affiliation (Kaye, 2005), emotional support (Jin & Liu, 2010), and issue relevance (Jin & Liu, 2010). The more blog users were motivated by entertainment and social belonging, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their blog use. Bloggers wrote for entertainment, leadership communication, and convenience (Segev et al., 2012). Other studies found that bloggers used their blogs to update others, share opinions, think through writing, connect with communities, and relieve emotional tensions (Nardi, 2004; Smith, 2010). Nine motivations for people's blog use exist: convenient information seeking, anti-traditional media sentiment, expression/affiliation, guidance/opinion seeking, blog ambiance, personal fulfillment, political debate, variety of opinion, and specific inquiry (Kaye, 2010).

Within the last decade, food blogging has become an integral part of the Web. As food blogs increase in popularity, wide ranges of blogs have emerged. Some offer restaurant reviews, others provide a forum for delicious, mouth-watering food, while others provide recipes to be prepared at home. The first food blog was created on July 2, 1997, when Jim Leff and Bob

Okumura created Chowhound, an online forum to discuss food in New York (Suthivarakom, 2011). In January 2007, Sarah Gim created Tastepotting, a forum in which users could submit food photos for the blog (Suthivarakom, 2011). Tastepotting began the trend for interactive food blogging. In July 2009 food writers Amanda Hesser and Merrill Stubbs created Food 52, a cookbook based on community contributions (Suthivarakom, 2011). Foodspotting, a site dedicated to sharing food photos, launched less than a year later (Suthivarakom, 2011). Foodgawker, a food blog which also developed a mobile app, features mouth-watering food photos and recipes submitted by bloggers all over the world. Some food blogs feature bloggers with a unique personality while others aggregate recipes from a variety of sources.

Public relations professionals for food brands can use blogs to promote food products, cookware, and recipes using their products. For nonprofit campaigns, public relations professionals can communicate with food bloggers about key nutrition or health initiatives to be featured on blogs. Food blogs continue to gain traction online with more and more blogs appearing everyday with unique niches for all types of foodies.

Public Relations Professional Blog Use

Public relations professionals use blogs for strategic research and to disseminate organizational information. Blogs assist public relations professionals with issue monitoring, trend research and information aggregation (Kent, 2008; Porter, Sweester & Chung, 2009). Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds aggregate information for public relations professionals to efficiently sift through blogs in an organized fashion (Kent, 2008). The nature of blogs allows practitioners to search blog archives for information on a campaign or crisis (Kent, 2008). Blogs also provide content such as interviews, opinions, and links to further research efforts (Kent,

2008). Porter, L., Sweester, K., & Chung, D. (2009). found that public relations professionals believe blogs are important, but are not yet integrating blogs into their public relations strategies. The delay may be because practitioners are waiting for broad acceptance from the general population. Practitioners also implement organizational blogs for product development, thought leadership and promotion (Lee, Hwang, & Lee, 2006). Most organizational blogs have a top-down blogging management style and fall into one of the following categories: newsletters, promotions, executive, group, or employee (Lee et al., 2006). Some organizational blogs discuss issues within the public relations and communications industry while public relations blogs written by individuals provide commentary on advertising, television, or other aspects within the field (Xifra & Huertas, 2008). Public relations professionals write more than three-fourths of blogs (Xifra & Huertas, 2008). Most public relations professionals use blogs for strategic research efforts while some use blogs to comment on industry news and events.

Blogs and social media have changed public relations, creating the industry into a more instantaneous two-way communication model. The ability for publics and organizations to send messages back and forth instantaneously encourages a two-way communication model (Wright & Hanson, 2008). More than 60% of public relations professionals agree that blogs and social media have changed their organization's communication strategies, and more than 80% of practitioners believe blogs and social media force organizations to rapidly respond to issues (Wright & Hanson, 2008). Social media and blogs have become accepted among public relations professionals with more than half believing that blogs and social media have enhanced public relations (Wright & Hanson, 2008). However, with all the blogs and social media sites currently available, practitioners must determine which sites are the most influential (Jin & Liu, 2010). Public relations practitioners must monitor both official organization blogs and external blogs

created by third-party influencers (Jin & Liu, 2010). Blogs can affect media coverage based on the issues brought to the forefront that can then be picked up by journalists (Jin & Liu, 2010). Blogs and social media have created a new outlet for public relations professionals to communicate with organizational publics.

Blogs offer a variety of strengths including the ability to connect with experts and share content with publics. A main purpose of blogs is to connect people who share common interests. Blogs allow public relations practitioners to directly connect with experts, professionals, and opinion leaders about a particular issue (Kent, 2008). Connecting with experts provides an additional opportunity for public relations professionals to conduct research and interact with publics through bloggers who are often subject matter experts. Another strength to blogs is the ability to share an issue when practitioners manage blogs (Kent, 2008). Blogs give public relations professionals the ability to reach loyal publics and share messages with people who are already interested in the topic or issue (Kent, 2008). The dialogic nature of blogs allows all entities including organizations, groups and individuals to interact with each other further emphasizing the two-way model of communication. The ability to connect and identify with publics helps organizations create trust.

However, blogs have some weaknesses as well. Blogs are perceived as less credible than traditional media and are prone to human error (Wright & Hanson, 2008; Kent, 2008). Some blogs do not have the same publishing standards as traditional media, so some content may reflect personal opinion and content may not always be accurate. Visitors to blog websites tend to reflect organizational fanatics rather than the general population (Kent, 2008). Public relations professionals are less likely to meet new publics on blogs as they are to further relationships with current publics. Public relations practitioners can face ethical issues for posting anonymously on

blog threads or for not disclosing their relationship with the company (Kent, 2008). If public relations professionals are not transparent when participating in blogs, it can negatively affect the organization's efforts. Although blogs offer a variety of strengths, blogs also have weaknesses that can complicate a practitioner's efforts if not handled correctly.

Blogging and Public Relations

Bloggers tend to be opinion leaders who can alter the way an issue is perceived. Compared to blog readers, bloggers scored higher as opinion leaders (Segev et al., 2012). Blogs provide opinion leaders a vehicle for electronic word of mouth and space to disseminate communication (Segev et al., 2012). Opinion leaders use blogs to educate and share their perspectives on issues. Many times their views encompass a persuasive persona that can alter reader opinion (Segev et al, 2012).

Jin & Liu (2010) identify several types of bloggers and how and why they share information. Self-involvement bloggers want to have the inside-story to drive attention and leadership, so they express personal opinions about specific issues to help build leadership and authority. Issue-involvement bloggers have a positive or negative experience that drives him or her to write about the experience or organization. Influential bloggers have the ability to discuss issues because they are perceived as being more knowledgeable and more interested in learning about topical issues (Jin & Liu, 2010). When a blogger's information authority and information credibility are both high, the blogger has more influence on readers (Jin & Liu, 2010). A blogger's style, influence, and personality can alter how a particular issue or organization is viewed. Public relations practitioners should understand bloggers' opinion leader status and appear open and honest with pitches. Understanding the blogosphere and leveraging that

understanding to provide bloggers with what they want and need will help practitioners be successful with their strategic tactics (Segev et al., 2012). Bloggers like to be part of a unique community, and public relations practitioners should communicate with bloggers in a way to help achieve this community (Segev et al., 2012). Respecting bloggers as opinion leaders is one way to help achieve this sense of community (Segev et al., 2012).

Depending on a blogger's experience level and influence, he or she views communication with public relations practitioners differently (Smith, 2010). If blogger is relatively new, he or she is often excited and honored to be contacted by an organization's representative; however, as their experience and success increases bloggers become less flattered and more selective (Smith, 2010). Practitioners need to have clear, honest communication with bloggers rather than crafted pitches (Smith, 2010; Yand & Lin, 2009). Bloggers prefer to have open, sincere interactions with public relations professionals (Yand & Lin, 2009). When contacting bloggers, public relations practitioners should use message delivery techniques that include entertainment or amusement (Segev et al., 2012). Bloggers preferred to be contacted by email or through online blog comments (Steyn et al, 2007). When connecting with public relations professionals a blogger had never interacted with before, 77.6% of bloggers preferred to be sent the press release before the introduction (Steyn et al., 2007). Bloggers were most interested in posts where public relations professionals provided video content (Steyn et al., 2007). Public relations practitioners must communicate and pitch to bloggers in a slightly different form than journalists. Bloggers prefer open, honest communication that has not been crafted and refined.

Without editors and a formal publishing process, bloggers have the autonomy to determine the content included in their blogs. Bloggers use three methods for content ideas: self, readers, and public relations practitioners (Smith, 2010). Bloggers enjoy having the autonomy

and flexibility to discuss what they want on the blog. However, bloggers also consult readers on their interests and opinions. Bloggers have mixed opinions about accepting content ideas from public relations professionals (Smith, 2010). Some bloggers appreciate ideas from public relations people, but others prefer to use their own ideas. The most preferred method to receive content was through emailed press releases followed by email interviews or discussions (Steyn et al., 2007). Bloggers' least preferred mediums of communication were instant messaging and social networking invitations (Steyn et al, 2007). Offering exclusive information where bloggers were the first to know helped create a close, successful relationship between public relations professionals and bloggers (Segev et al, 2012). Bloggers use a variety of sources for website content, and many accept content from public relations professionals if approached appropriately.

Because of the growing importance of blogs as influential opinion leaders, public relations professionals are determining how they can approach this relatively new medium. Public relations professionals are using blogs as a form of strategic research, medium to share content, and method to communicate with bloggers. Understanding the relationship between bloggers and public relations professionals is important to further cultivating the working relationship to help both entities succeed. Although research has been conducted about public relations professionals and bloggers, little industry-specific research on these relationships currently exists, specifically in regards to the food industry. This study will explore four research questions based on the public relations–blogger relationship.

1. What methods do public relations professionals use to build relationships with food bloggers?

2. What methods do food bloggers use to build relationships with public relations professionals?
3. What are the outcomes of the public relations professional and blogger relationship?
4. Do food bloggers value a relationship with public relations professionals?

Method

Sampling

Two populations were examined: public relations professionals and food bloggers. Three public relations professionals were interviewed for an average of 34 minutes. Two food bloggers were interviewed for an average of 32 minutes. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit professionals to interview. A university alumni base was the beginning for the snowball sampling technique. All interviewees had to meet several criteria. For public relations professionals, interviewees needed to have at least one food client he or she had worked on within the last 12 months, and he or she must have reached out to a food blogger on behalf of his or her client or work in-house for a food brand during the last 12 months. The food bloggers needed to currently be writing for a food blog that received at least 500 unique monthly visitors to the website. The food blogger must have communicated with public relations professional for his or her blog at least once within the last year.

Instrumentation

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interview consisted of 10 questions that were composed prior to the interview. Follow-up questions were asked based on the conversation flow. All questions were directly tied to the research questions posed prior to interviewing. Questions asked about public relations professional and blogger communication tactics and outcomes, the value of the relationship, and the type of content provided. Some questions included the following:

1. For both: What mediums do you use to reach out to PR professionals/food bloggers? Which do you find to work the best/worst?

2. For food bloggers: What type of content do you like PR professionals to provide for your blog? (for example, company/PR professional responses to blogger content, products to review, product announcements, corporate news announcements)
3. For public relations professionals: How has working with a food blogger affected your client? Do you think that working with food bloggers helps to promote your client?

Data Collection

All interviews were recorded using an iPhone 5. Afterwards, all interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Recording the interviews ensured that all information was captured accurately and allowed for the best analysis techniques.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, the conversations were analyzed using the constant comparative method for key themes (Boeije, 2002). The key themes were sorted into groups such as blogger perception of public relations professionals, use of blogger content, case studies, and compensation. From there the groups were analyzed further and broken down within the subgroups to find how many participants provided the same results and where differences occurred. At that point, the data was analyzed based on the research questions.

Results and Discussion

Five interviews with food bloggers and public relations professionals revealed that public relations professionals positively regard bloggers and view them as an important source when planning media relations strategies. Food bloggers enjoyed connecting with public relations professionals when public relations professionals created personal messages that reflected their knowledge of the blog. The analysis revealed four major themes: Methods public relations professionals use to build relationships with food bloggers, Methods food bloggers use to build relationships with public relations professionals, Outcomes of the public relations professional and food blogger relationship, and Food bloggers value relationship with public relations professionals. In the following each theme will be presented including participants' voices.

Methods public relations professionals use to build relationships with food bloggers

All interview respondents agreed that email was the best medium to build relationships between public relations professionals and food bloggers. Since bloggers are constantly online writing content and answering reader questions, email was their preferred medium of contact. One public relations professional and one food blogger mentioned that social media was another way of reaching food bloggers. Another public relations professional at a midsize agency with 20 years of experience said that if the public relations professional knows the bloggers well that they can call them. However, a public relations professional with two years of experience said that generally bloggers are confused if they are called without any context.

A public relations professional at a midsize agency said that she generally identified bloggers with the help of online platforms such as Group High and Vocus. After identifying key bloggers for a campaign or brand, generally an email would be sent to the blogger. All the

bloggers interviewed as well as several public relations professionals expressed that public relations professionals should be familiar with the blog prior to contacting food bloggers. The bloggers were willing to work with public relations professionals if they sent a personalized email with the correct names of the bloggers and had an understanding of the blog. Public relations professionals needed to show the value added beyond just a news release. Showing the blogger how the relationship can benefit both parties will help develop a stronger connection.

One food blogger said the following about developing successful relationships:

I think it's essential to get noticed, as a PR professional by a food blogger, at least from our perspective, is to develop a personal relationship, understand our audience and our mission and what we're trying to achieve, and then see if your product or service aligns with us.

For blogger outreach, a public relations professional with two years of experience said that creating a targeted list of bloggers is more successful:

If you're working with bloggers, it's really important to create relationships and really target your outreach. I don't necessarily think reaching out to a list of 300 media contacts, whether media or bloggers, is as effective as really targeting, researching, and sending individual emails to say 50 contacts that you really looked into, know what they cover, and can comment on something they've written recently. It's better to send a really targeted email where you know this is something that they would be interested in.

Another public relations professional expressed that the industry needs to offer something creative and different from the competition to capture the attention of food bloggers. If a public relations professional can provide an 'exclusive' interview with content not given to other outlets then bloggers will be more receptive to outreach.

All food bloggers and public relations professionals said that they have relationships, or are working to form relationships, with bloggers and / or public relations professionals. Food bloggers were more willing to create a relationship if the public relations professional understood their blog and how their brand could fit within the blog's mission. One of the best methods to creating a relationship was working at several events or industry meetings together. The in-person bonding experience created a foundation to a successful working relationship.

The interviews showed that public relations professionals use email and social media to build relationships with food bloggers. Public relations professionals need to send food bloggers a personalized email that shows they are familiar with the website rather than sending a generic, impersonalized email that could be sent to hundreds of other bloggers. With traditional media, public relations professionals are used to sending a press release to the media, and if the release is newsworthy the journalist will call back. This research is contrary to other research suggesting that bloggers would like to be sent a press release prior to introduction (Steyn et al., 2007). Relationships developed after several interactions and with public relations professionals who took the time to understand the blog's purpose.

After speaking with public relations professionals from a range of brands and companies and hearing their interactions with food bloggers, it appears that the brand contacting the public relations professional can determine the success of the outreach. If a public relations professional contacts a food blogger on behalf of a name brand, household company, it may be more successful in achieving coverage than a company that is not as well known.

Methods food bloggers use to build relationships with public relations professionals

Public relations professionals most often initiate the relationship between the two parties. The public relations professionals want food bloggers to discuss their clients' brands and to share messages with readers and social media following. Although public relations professionals usually initiate the connection, both food bloggers interviewed said that they do connect with select public relations professionals. One food blogger said that she initiates the connection with brands when looking for content or partnerships:

We have formed some relationships with some of the various PR professionals who have reached out to us in the past. It helps us, especially if we like the brand...we'll reach out to their PR person and ask if they have anything going on because we're looking for some content. We look at it as they scratch our back, so we'll scratch theirs. It's not very often that we reach out to them, but we do on occasion especially when we're looking for partnerships for events. That's probably the most likely time for us to reach out to PR professionals.

Another food blogger said that she connects with a few food brands that she has an interest in working with:

A few times I have written brands I choose to work with, and I have just started with the contact form on their site, as that's all I know. Sometimes the website will have their public relations company listed, which I find very helpful.

The same food blogger said she generally did not have relationships with public relations professionals because she finds that they mostly want to publicize their brands. She wants to work with companies who fit within her brand and have a true understanding of her blog. Many times public relations professionals contact her, and they clearly do not understand what type of content she posts on her blog.

All public relations professionals interviewed said that food bloggers will reach out to them on occasion. An in-house public relations professional from a consumer product goods company said that food bloggers often want to work with her brand and reached out to her company regularly via social media and the press room page on the website. She said that bloggers sometimes talk about the brand organically and then send links to her department. A public relations professional at a midsize agency said that food bloggers would reach out to her via email because they often did not want to talk on the phone. Another public relations professional said that food bloggers would respond to pitches via email.

Bloggers have power among media sources, so public relations professionals are in a position where they are asking bloggers to talk about their clients. Bloggers do not necessarily need public relations professionals, and public relations professionals are reaching out to successful bloggers regularly. Public relations professionals and food bloggers used the same mediums (email, social media, online website forms) to contact each other and build relationships. The relationship went two ways between bloggers and public relations professionals; however, it was generally public relations professionals who would initiate the connection. The most successful relationships came after the two parties worked together at industry events, and when public relations professionals understood a blog's mission.

Outcomes of the public relations professional and food blogger relationship

Numerous outcomes from the public relations professional and food blogger relationship are evident, including third party credibility, content for both parties to use, products to review, knowledge of products, and partnerships. Compensation is another key factor in the relationships between public relations professionals and food bloggers.

Because bloggers, like journalists, are perceived to be unbiased sources they have credibility amongst a brand's publics. The informal nature of bloggers makes readers perceive the bloggers as friends who happen to be experts on their subject. For those reasons, bloggers have third party credibility that is appealing to public relations professionals. If a blogger discusses a brand in a positive manner, it can drive successful results for brands and companies. One public relations professional directly mentioned this in the interview:

...When looking at new media – bloggers definitely have a voice and they're very much a part of the fold. If you look at anyone's Facebook or Twitter feed you can see that people are sharing bloggers' posts and such. People look at a blog post with the same lens as they do with the traditional media. The amount of trust that people give bloggers is really extraordinary.

The blogger-public relations professional relationship has resulted in content for both parties. Having content to share on social media and with publics has become a huge portion of both parties' jobs. Two public relations professionals discussed blogger recipe contests that their brands conducted within the last six months of the interview. Both contests encouraged food bloggers to create and submit a recipe using the company's product and the best recipe received a prize. The contest was a fun way to reach out to bloggers, but it also provided content that the public relations professionals could share externally on social media and internally with employees. Public relations professionals created or suggested content for bloggers, as well. One public relations professional said that her company creates infographics and prepared blog posts and social media content. Another public relations professional said that she often shares information about celebrity chefs opening restaurants, brand expansions, industry events, fundraisers, and anniversaries. She included that images are essential for sharing content with bloggers.

Product reviews are another outcome of a blogger-public relations professional relationship. However, the interviews reflected mixed feelings on product reviews. One food blogger was willing to do product reviews if it matched what the blog's purpose, was fun for the bloggers, and provided an element for readers.

We just had a PR company reach out to us... We just did a giveaway with them. We did a product review and then Sarah developed a recipe based on an experience she had at a local restaurant. Then we gave away gift cards. While that example doesn't apply to everything, it's pretty close. PR professionals usually tap into something like that whether it's a review of a product, book or dinner experience kind of review.

Another blogger was strongly against product reviews saying that it diluted her brand and that she did not want to just publicize a company's content. One public relations professional has had similar experiences with bloggers who do not want product reviews so she reaches out to bloggers to ask if they would like some product to review. Another public relations professional said that she sends products to bloggers and sometimes provides a small stipend to cover costs for an event that the blogger might have. Clearly, it depends on the food blogger, and it probably depends to some degree on the product that is being reviewed. Although some bloggers do not want to write about products on their blog, some will accept products from companies.

Bloggers have become trusted resources for readers, and popular blogs receive questions by the hundreds. Sometimes a blogger may not share information on their site, but a working knowledge of a company's product can be helpful when answering questions. One public relations professional said that she often sends information on how her food product is created and will take bloggers on press trips to see where the food is produced. A blogger said that having products on hand to sample can be beneficial for both her and the company:

Lots of [public relations] people send product, and I appreciate that. Even if I don't do reviews, it's nice for me to have heard of their brand and used their stuff because people write me emails ALL the time. I get asked about olive oil or equipment all the time, so even if I don't do a specific review, it behooves a brand to let me try things because it puts them on the forefront of my mind when I am answering questions to readers.

Although the company may not receive direct mention in terms of measurable content, sending products can still be beneficial for the company.

Bloggers often share content on social media in relation to brands. Bloggers have large social media followings, and sharing a brand's content on social media can have positive results for food companies. Two public relations professionals said that sometimes if a blogger will not post content on his or her blog, he or she might post on social media, which is also beneficial.

Partnerships are another outcome of the relationship. One food blogger said that she loves to do partnerships with brands as she and her fellow bloggers like to host local events. She likes to do something that is more fun than just a post on her blog.

The outcome for public relations professionals and bloggers can also be dependent on compensation. Many bloggers depend on their sites for their livelihood and charging for sponsored posts, or posts where the company pays to have their product discussed, has become commonplace. Most of the public relations professionals discussed how they have interacted with bloggers who want to be compensated for posts. One public relations professional said that from a public relations standpoint they will not do sponsored posts, but from a marketing or advertising perspective they are willing to spend some of their budget for coverage. Another public relations professional said that it depends on the content as to whether bloggers want to be compensated. For example, if a blog does mostly recipes and the brand wants the blog to share

an infographic, the brand will most likely need to pay for that to be posted. One problem she ran into is that bloggers want far more money for a post than they probably deserve based on readership. One blogger said that she will do reviews or articles on a brand's website, but if a brand wants her to discuss the brand on her blog then she will charge for it.

Rather than a public relations professional contacting an individual blog, the professional can also contact a blogger network, which is a group of blogs that are connected to each other and the networks are generally named based on topic and sometimes region. A public relations professional can work with the blogger network and determine a price and then provide a list of requirements. For example, a public relations professional and a blogger network can negotiate a deal for \$2,000 and for that price two blogs in the network with 100,000 to 250,000 unique monthly visitors will write posts. With the blogger network, the public relations professional is paying up front and knows what they will receive for their money. Compensation has become a key aspect in the outcomes and relationships between food bloggers and public relations professionals.

Generally, food bloggers do not want news releases or product announcements. Bloggers are not journalists and want a more personalized message. One food blogger said that every once in a while there will be a good news release, but in general they do not fit with her blog's purpose and she will just delete them. She says that she always deletes the message when a public relations professional sends her a news release with no context or message. The public relations professionals said that they do not send press releases because bloggers do not want them. Product announcements are also not usually picked up because they do not align with the blogs' missions or purposes.

The outcomes of the public relations professional and the food blogger relationship include credibility, content, knowledge sharing, and social media posting. Public relations professionals have found that blogs offer the credibility and reach that they desire for their clients. For bloggers, public relations professionals have resources and money that are often desired for a successful, unique blog.

Food bloggers value relationship with public relations professionals

The bloggers interviewed report mixed feelings about public relations professionals. One blogger believes that public relations professionals want free publicity in exchange for sending just a bag of chips, and believes that publicizing companies would dilute her blog's brand. She said that she has a few relationships with public relations professionals, but most people who reach out to her clearly have not visited her blog and know nothing about it. Another blogger said that she sees the value in public relations professionals and has always enjoyed working with them. She too wants public relations professionals to contact her once they know her blog's mission and value:

We really like working with them [public relations professionals] and when the shoe fits, it really fits. Without PR professionals, we wouldn't get some of the great opportunities that we've had in the past, so we really enjoy working with them. It works especially well with the ones that get the process and get how to make the partnership a great one.

In contrast, public relations professionals see the value of bloggers in helping their clients achieve success. One public relations professional strongly believes that bloggers have been helpful to her consumer products good brand, and that the communications department has several bloggers that they continue to go back to because of their relationship. The publics find bloggers trustworthy, and bloggers have a voice in the media space.

Another public relations professional says that bloggers are overall helpful and effective, but that other public relations people have jaded some bloggers. As a result, bloggers can sometimes be sensitive and less receptive to outreach from public relations professionals. Overall, bloggers and public relations professionals do see value in their relationships with each other and believe that in the right context and with the right type of communication that both can help each other in the long run.

Public relations professionals have the funds and resources to provide excellent opportunities for food bloggers that may not be present without them. Companies will send products, host events, and fund sponsored posts all of which would not be available to bloggers without public relations professionals. Food bloggers have the trust and credibility that companies desire when looking for coverage and conversations about their products and services.

Limitations and Further Direction

The sample size for the interviews can be a limitation to the research. Because only a few food bloggers and public relations professionals were interviewed, their opinions may not reflect the majority of professionals and bloggers. The types of companies that the public relations professionals work for can change the types of outreach and the receptiveness of food bloggers.

Further research can look at steps to creating a better relationship between public relations professionals and food bloggers, the types of messages that work best with food bloggers, the type of partnerships and content that food bloggers want for their blogs, and the differences between types of food bloggers (i.e., food, fashion, parenting, technology, etc.).

Conclusion

Blogs have grown in popularity within the last decade, and a variety of blogs have started in myriad industries, including food, fashion, technology, news, automobile and many more. The public follows bloggers and listens to them with a great deal of trust. Public relations professionals have observed the credibility of bloggers and leveraged that trust to benefit their brands through connecting with them in similar ways to traditional media. Food bloggers and public relations professionals working with food companies have developed relationships. The most successful relationships occur when public relations professionals contact bloggers with a personal message after reviewing the blog and understanding the purpose and mission of the site. Food bloggers will then participate in recipe contests, review products and share company content. Food bloggers will at times reach out to food companies for partnerships and content for their blog. Both food bloggers and public relations professionals value their relationship with the other party and see the need for the other party. Public relations professionals and food bloggers need to continue to determine how they can create the best working relationship, but for now it is certain that they both need each other for a successful business.

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