



*Helping Organizations
Take the Next Step*

Do you know your iPod from Your IM?

By Lisa Toller

Webinars, podcasts, instant messaging, viral distribution, blogs, social bookmarking, MySpace, Facebook, You Tube, Web 2.0 – do you feel like you've landed on a different planet? I do, and it's inhabited by beings half my age, all speaking a strange language. If we're going to survive in this strange, new world of nano-second communications, we had better get up to speed and pronto.

I confess that I'm the last holdout in my office to instant message. While the rest of my colleagues are communicating at the speed of light, I'm still sending email and making phone calls. True, it's not like I'm using snail mail or the fax machine, but the dinosaur jokes are getting old. So, if you are ready like I am to step out of the Jurassic era, here are a few of the latest communications tools and how people are using them.

Virtual reality: how to be in two places at once

Jonathan Fanton, the head of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in Chicago, is taking communications to a different dimension—a virtual one. He runs meetings in Second Life, the online world. As Jonathan MacFound, his "avatar," or digital character, he has led discussions on topics such as civil liberties and the role that grant makers can play in using virtual interaction to promote social change.

While many consider virtual worlds "play," the MacArthur Foundation is serious about exploring their potential for engaging young adults and educating people about philanthropy. Last June MacArthur made a \$550,000 grant to the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy to help it promote virtual conversations about education, human rights, migration, and other topics — and about how foundations can remedy social problems.

So many choices, so little time

There was once a very simple set of choices, and the news media was the target," says Bruce Trachtenberg, executive director of the Communications Network, "whereas today anyone with a computer is your audience."

To help cut through the clutter, nonprofit communications experts offer the following advice:

- **Get to know your peers.**
- **Know your audience.**
- **Hire staff members with different skills.**
- **Have a plan.**
- **Think beyond the communications department.**
- **Be honest about efforts that failed.**

"It used to be if you tried something new, it had better work out perfectly or you looked stupid," says Marc Fest, vice president of communications at the Knight Foundation. "Now it's the other way around: If you don't make enough mistakes, it shows you don't experiment enough."

Write like a blogger

Seth Godin is one of my favorite marketers. He is a worldwide bestselling author and a sought-after speaker. His blog is one of the most popular blogs in the world. I've read and re-read his book, "Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable", until the pages are dog-eared and littered with Sticky Notes. Get the book. Enough said.

Godin says this about how to use blogging techniques in your writing:

You can improve your writing (your business writing, your ad writing, your thank you notes, and your essays) if you start thinking like a blogger:

1. *Use headlines.* I use them all the time now. Not just boring ones that announce your purpose, but interesting or puzzling or engaging headlines. Headlines are perfect for engaging busy readers.
2. *Realize that people have choices.* With 80 million other blogs to choose from, I know you could leave at any moment. So that makes blog writing shorter and faster and more exciting.
3. *Drip, drip, drip.* Bloggers don't have to say everything at once. We can add a new idea every day, piling on a thesis over time.
4. *It's okay if you leave.* Bloggers aren't afraid to include links or distractions in their writing, because we know you'll come back if what we had to say was interesting.
5. *Interactivity is a great shortcut.* Your readers care about someone's opinion even more than yours... their own. So reading your email or your comments or your trackbacks (your choice) makes it easy to stay relevant.
6. *Gimmicks aren't as useful as insight.* If you're going to blog successfully for months or years, sooner or later you need to actually say something. Same goes for your writing.
7. *Don't be afraid of lists.* People like lists.
8. *Show up.* Not writing is not a useful way of expressing your ideas. Waiting for perfect is a lousy strategy.
9. *Say it.* Don't hide, don't embellish.

Our favorite blogs

NewLevel Group has compiled a list of our favorite blogs and has begun to post comments on some of them. This is one of the easiest and fastest ways to seed your organization's name throughout the internet and drive traffic to your site. So, what are you waiting for? Get online and start blogging!

<http://discussionleader.harvardbusiness.org/quelch/>

<http://sethgodin.typepad.com/>

<http://www.madetostick.com/blog/>

<http://worldchanging.com>

<http://davidsuzuki.org/blog>

<http://marketinggreen.wordpress.com/>

<http://blog.fastcompany.com>

<http://www.ssireview.org/opinion/>

<http://www.robertegger.org/blog/?cat=1>

<http://pndblog.typepad.com/pndblog/>

<http://tacticalphilanthropy.com/>

Lisa Toller, Principal and Senior Marketing Consultant with NewLevel Group, LLC, works with businesses and nonprofits to help them develop and maintain strong brands that last. She can be reached at (707) 255-5555 x 103 or ltoller@newlevelgroup.com.