

**The Publicity Club of New York presents
WEBLOGS: WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW AS PR PROS
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I'm sorry, I'm bringing my Blackberry up here but I'm not actually going to check email during the address, I just don't have a watch. Not that I wouldn't, I am actually that tactless and rude.

I'm just going to talk a little bit about being pitched in different capacities because as Peter said, my job history is comprises both print and blogging work. Until November I was the front-of-the-book editor and writer at *New York Magazine* primarily editing their gossip column, "Intelligencer". And prior to that I was founding editor of Gawker and I was freelancing on the side for a variety of places including "Page Six", so I've been pitched as the blogger behind Gawker and also as a writer at "Page Six" and as an editor for *New York Magazine* and now at mediabistro and all four are totally different experiences.

Gawker was probably in existence for about four months before we really started getting pitches from PR people and when we did, initially people didn't really know what to do with the site. We were getting a wide variety of things that really had nothing to do with what Gawker was covering. It was mostly a New York/Manhattan gossip blog, it was essentially covering everything the *New York Observer* does and I was getting pitches for barbecue festivals in Chicago. Which while I'm sure are interesting and fantastic, were not particularly relevant to what we were doing. The upside was that they were all delivered by email and they weren't that terribly intrusive. So if you're editing a blog you're deleting stuff which is a little bit annoying because you start to view that stuff as SPAM.

But it's definitely different from being at "Page Six" where the phone is ringing off the hook and people are just pitching you things incessantly that are possibly not relevant, it's a little more irritating because then you actually have to spend some time on the phone with people explaining to them why it's not relevant and you can't get a lot of work done. To go back to that, when I was freelancing at "Page Six" the phone was ringing all the time and most of the items were relevant because at that point a lot of the writers at "Page Six" got so sick of getting irrelevant pitches that they started treating PR people like telemarketers. They were sending in things that weren't relevant and writers were saying, "Sorry, I don't have time for you," and slamming the phone down. Initially it struck me as incredibly rude and the more I experienced it myself the more I realized that if you didn't do that you'd spend all day explaining why barbecue festivals in Chicago were not relevant to "Page Six".

At *New York Magazine* it was a little bit better, because it was more of a niche audience. But I was in a different position, I was editing the gossip column but I was also doing front-of-the-book. A really good publicist will find an angle for pretty much anything and figure out a way to make it relevant to the front-of-the-book, but you're still getting phone calls and emails constantly and you're not necessarily getting anything relevant. One thing that's particularly telling is that the fax machine for the "Intel" column is right next to the garbage can and sometimes given the volume of stuff that we get and the percentage of it that's relevant, they could easily dispense with the table next to it and just let everything fall directly in.

But also, the *New York* experience was kind of unique because I was also for a short while authoring a blog for *New York* and so there was a little bit of *New York* trying to figure out how the website interacts with the print publication and "Is it important?" and "Should it be important?" and "What are we covering there that we need to cover in print?" and "Does any of this cannibalize anything else?" The blog I was writing was very similar in tone to Gawker, not necessarily intentionally, but because it was my voice and that's how I write. So I would be covering events for the magazine and occasionally if I thought something really wasn't going to work for the "Intel" column because "Intelligencer" tends to be very tight, newsy items, I would write it up and put it on the blog.

The way publicists tend to, or in my experience, the way PR people tend to look at blogs is that they're not as important as print and so the willingness to tolerate bad coverage on a blog

seems to be higher even though in my experience from writing for print and blogging it's much more difficult to place items on blogs because they do tend to be written by people who have a point of view and they're essentially opinion columns. So when you're pitching a blogger you're asking for their unvarnished opinion. They don't need news items in the same way that print people do. One anecdote that kind of illustrates this: Last year I watched the Oscars at *Entertainment Weekly's* Oscar party which I was supposed to be covering for *New York Magazine* and I got seated at a table with Regis Philbin and Liza Minelli and Star Jones and the woman, the *Survivor* woman who's on *The View*, I don't even remember her last name, and the whole dinner was just incredibly surreal and bizarre. But I didn't feel like anything that happened would have been good for the "Intel" item so I wrote the whole thing up as an 800-word column and stuck it up on the blog and one of the publicists from *EW* called me and said, "That was hilarious but if that would have been in the magazine my boss would have been really pissed."

To me, the website gets probably an equal amount of traffic as the magazine, traffic in terms of unique users versus subscription readers for the magazine, so at least in terms of volume you're talking about a similar audience. Although I would wager that the web audience is probably a little bit younger. But you're not talking about, in terms of people seeing your product, there's not really a material difference.

And I'll just close up with a little bit about mediabistro. mediabistro is essentially a trade publication but online, with a gossip component now which we only recently added because we're trying to figure out how to expand into the news without significantly escalating our cost basis. We thought blogs would be the best way to do that. So now it's a combination of getting pitched the same way I was at *New York* where people are pitching me but as an editor-in-chief and as part time blogger on the *Fishbowl New York* blog. The pitches tend to be pretty much the same and I'm not sure if it's just because mediabistro is a web property, but my inclination is that is probably true. And they're a little bit more targeted because you'd have to be out of your mind to send a barbecue festival in Chicago pitch to mediabistro. It's actually been a little bit of a blessing to be doing something niche enough that the branding is very clear and we're not getting irrelevant stuff.

So that's mine.