

COMMERCIAL USE OF BLOGS IN POLAND IN THE LIGHT OF OWN RESEARCH

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Abstract

Background. The changes in the process of communication that have been observed in recent years have forced companies to look for alternative solutions enabling them to reach a customer. A contemporary consumer does expect to get reliable opinions, recommendations and relations based on mutual trust. Therefore, using external blogs in a commercial way is an area of growing interest.

Research aims. The aim of the article is to determine the level and specificity of cooperation between companies/brands and bloggers in the process of communication with a client.

Methodology. The article was prepared on the basis of literature review and the authors' own research. The conducted research comprised of 412 blogs and was carried out by means of an internet questionnaire, which was related to the objective and research subject. The research was conducted in the period between 29.10.2013 - 12.11.2013. The obtained results were supplemented with the opinions of bloggers participating in the quantitative research.

Key findings. Blogs have a huge marketing potential. However, for the process of communication with a client to be effective, all aspects of cooperation between a company/brand and a blogger must be precisely determined, especially when non-standard actions are concerned.

Keywords: Communication, Blog, Brand, Interactive media

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

We are living in a so-called, conversation economy or conversation age where brands must conduct a continuous dialogue – contact communities, constantly interact in multi-faceted relations (Jurkiewicz, Majewska, Sołtysińska, 2012, p. 21). The development of IT technology and its widespread applications to a wide range of modern business areas determine the character and form of a conducted process of communication. One-way messages have ceased to be fully effective and the client awaits not only information but facts. What seems of crucial importance here is an interaction that offers a possibility of building and retaining relations with current and potential customers.

With the excess of information on the web, people require a tool to make sense of it all. Social media is that mechanism (Qualman, 2013, p. 8).

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A contemporary customer who is bombarded with information and stimuli is getting more and more resistant to them, therefore they concentrate their attention on those stimuli which can surprise them by a different than previously used, form and content. Opportunities of that kind are offered by blogs which, while using the best aspects of mass marketing, change communication from a one-way message into a two-way flow of information – a dialogue (Wright, 2007, p. 2). Their readers regard the information included there as one of the very few available forms of real, authentic communication (Scott, 2009, p. 215).

The aim of the article is to determine a range of using blogs for commercial purposes, with a special focus on forms of cooperation between a company/brand and bloggers. The first part of the paper presents – on the basis of academic literature – conditions for using blogs in promotional activities. Special attention was drawn to the causes behind an increase in blogs' popularity and the consequences of their use in the process of communication with clients.

The subsequent part thereafter depicts the results of our own research illustrating the character and conditions for cooperation between companies/brands within the Polish blogosphere, with a special focus on factors influencing the undertaking of cooperation with a specific company/brand and a basis for rewards and forms of blogger's remuneration. The authors have also discussed a problem with the reliability of promotional activities conducted by means of blogs and presented bloggers' opinions concerning the future of blogs from a commercial perspective.

Modern marketing has become a more complex issue than a mere corporate website that provides information and enables a customer to place an order. It also involves online advertising, internet communicators, search engines and blogs (Świerczyńska-Kaczor, 2012, p. 13). The Internet revolution that we observed at the turn of 20 and 21st century introduced the Internet to enterprises, offering the possibility for using the web to gain a competitive advantage in the market (Maciejowski, 2003, p. 9). There are numerous indications that blogs can become a crucial tool in this process.

Indications for Using Blogs in Promotional Activities

The Internet has dramatically changed the face of the modern world in every aspect of social and economic life. The pace of changes of qualitative character is proving extremely dynamic and serious, and their consequences are sometimes compared to Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, Copernicus' discoveries or the industrial revolution (Wiktor, 2013, p. 253).

The process of communication is, therefore, determined by the dynamics of technological development, its potential and the conditions which were created thanks to it. Communication in the hypermedia computer environment takes advantage of a set of various instruments of



a specific character arising from the conditions of the web environment, technological properties and its constant development (Wiktor, 2013, p. 262).

Although usage of blogs has become more popular as a separate idea for business, their intense usage is also one of the tools for building deeper relations with customers and creating the image of professionalism (Gregor & Gotwald, 2013, p. 44).

A blog is generally defined as a website that functions as an online journal and is composed of posts made by its author and commentaries of readers. Blogs are usually published by people who prefer sharing their personal reflections and experiences on websites to hiding them in traditional diaries (Mazurek, 2008, p. 15). The word "blog" is a construction of the words "web" and "log". Blogs have developed considerably since the word was first used about a website in 1997, but the basic sense of a blog being some kind of log, kept on the Web, remains (Rettberg, 2014, p. 30).

A blog is a website with a reverse – in comparison to a traditional diary – sequence of events. Information presented there goes from the most current items to the older ones. A blog enables a two- and multi-step communication between its author (blogger) and readers. This is one of the communication channels that have helped create a new type of media – social media (Wiktor, 2013, p. 279).

Initially, blogs were used only for private purposes as an electronic counterpart of diaries or journals. Thanks to them bloggers could realize their passions, distinguish themselves from other Internet users and create their own unique image.

However, blogs are also a part of larger context. They are part of the history of communications and literacy, and emblematic of a shift from uni-directional mass media to participatory media, where viewers and readers become creators of media. Blogs are also part of the history of literature and writing (Rettberg, 2014, p. 1).

The increase of blogs' popularity among Internet users, and the emerging online services that enable the running of blogs as well as the gradual development of technology have offered new opportunities for presenting texts and images. All these factors have led to a change of a typical form and character of blogs. Nowadays the majority of them are specialized blogs dealing with a specific area (e.g. fashion blogs, food blogs, literary blogs, etc.) or blogs directed at niche problems. Another form of blogs that is gaining an increasing popularity, are the so-called video blogs because of their multimedia form of message. Pictures and films included in them provide additional emotions through picture and sound, not only by text. Blogs used to be filled with content, yet, they lacked pictures. A modern reader, however, expects much more, and texts without pictures virtually do not exist (Budek, 2012, p. 96).



It is difficult to unequivocally determine the number of blogs, which is related to the fact that their number is still growing. Not all of them, however, are run systematically and some emerge as a temporary fascination with authors who in a short time give up this form of activity. Blogs that are not modified, neglected or made from an automatically generated or copied content, lose value and disappear (Rouse & Garrett, 2010, p. 23). Moreover, not all blog portals systematically provide official information concerning a number of existing blogs and not all listed blogs are active. For example, Blog.onet.pl portal informs that it comprises 1 791 224 blogs, Blog.pl portal indicates 6 126 567 blogs, whereas Blox.pl portal estimates their number of blogs at the level of 353 769 blogs (data acquired on 11.04.2014).

What is currently needed and sought in a world of thousands of brands and companies, are opinions that enable us to make a buying decision in a more confident and rational way. And in such a case, as if it was some kind of “magic wand” involvement, bloggers emerge (Kotarbiński, 2013, p. 12). Faith that the contents presented by them are objective and supported by a blogger’s own experience, who is a consumer just like his/her readers, has undoubtedly contributed to the growing interest in blogs in a commercial dimension. The opinions included in blogs are becoming become more and more the basis for making buying decisions, confirming our choice or enabling us to find arguments which justify the choice from considered options. A blogger who talks about his/her experience and presents their own point of view, becomes an independent supporter of a shared message or even an advocate of a given brand.

That is why popular bloggers receive products before their official launch, test gadgets, cosmetics, even cars. A positive opinion expressed by one person can have a significant influence on a much bigger group (Przeździeń, 2012, p. 21).

The rise in blogs’ popularity have caused some bloggers to become became celebrities and widely recognized people whose blogs attract a lot of readers every day. On the other hand, a growing interest in a specific blog or blogger, when it comes to the evaluation of a company/brand, increases their level of attractiveness of mutual cooperation. We still live in the times in which a blogger’s popularity depends on his/her charisma. Contents are not always the most important factor as it is not enough just to write good text, what matters is an ability to sell it (Budek, 2012, p. 96).

Actions undertaken by means of blogs or video blogs do not have to be restricted to placing banner ads. They include sponsored texts, competitions, product tests, product placement, patronage or event coverage as well as presentations and lectures made by bloggers. For a price of an average advertisement in press a company can sign a cooperation contract with a huge number of bloggers, including the top ones (Budek, 2012, p. 101).



A blogger is a partner who is also concerned with building his/her own brand. They independently and single-handedly decide when, where and what opinions or pictures will be included. They have also a right to express their doubts or negative opinions about a given product or brand. The advantages of bloggers mentioned by advertisers include, among others: their credibility, opinion-making ability, knowledge on the topic they are writing about, commitment, flexibility and a stable group of loyal readers. Yet, while talking about bloggers' disadvantages, respondents pointed to their unpredictability, lack of creativity and lack of time, growing commercialization of the blogosphere and inflated prices as well as a lack of a formalized form of operations in the blogosphere (Hatalaska, 2013, p. 13).

Bloggers who use their blogs for commercial purposes can be divided into two categories: those for whom income from online activity is not a main source of earnings and those who make their living in this way. The difference is really crucial. For the first group their presence on the Internet is a hobby. Bloggers can afford to make more decisions, but they can get easily discouraged towards the companies who pester them while trying to initiate cooperation.

People who make a living on Internet presence have developed standards of cooperation with companies and prepared their price lists (Hupa, 2012, p. 23).

Using blogs for commercial purposes enables the inclusion of them into wider marketing actions conducted by means of various channels in social media, such as social networks, content portals, discussions forums, etc. As a result an opinion presented by a blogger can have a wide-reaching impact on a specific group of readers (people who share e.g. some passions, interests, age, etc.). Customers perceive a brand as interesting when it tells something about them, reflects on who they are or who they would like to be. A brand is able to describe its own function in relation with a customer, as well as it is to personify their dreams and aspirations or, at least signal expected profits or applications (Fisk, 2009, p. 101).

A form that has become fairly popular is the running of a corporate blog that aims to evoke interest in offered products and to create its own company/brand image as an expert in a given field. As a result, a blog can include a lot of information concerning features of a product and/or a way of using it or conditions for its storage. A corporate blog is to facilitate contacts between a company/brand and its customers, especially in situations that are difficult for the customer. It often represents a mission and values of a given company, its stance toward different situations and events and finally, achievements and pro-social actions. As a result this tool is used to increase confidence in a given company/brand and its reliability. However, a lot of data point at the fact that corporate blogs enjoy less confidence and therefore, are less effective than private blogs used for



commercial purposes. Social campaigns running through blogs are an interaction with a living organism i.e. a social community gathered around an opinion leader and his/her personal brand (Ślipko, 2012, p. 23).

There is also a possibility of buying a blog that has an already gathered a loyal community. Although it poses an opportunity for obtaining an effective promotion tool in a short time, it does not guarantee the efficiency of using this blog in a strategy. Since it requires a systematic continuation of the blogger's activity and needs independence in presenting opinions.

Marketing Potential of Blogs

Modern social networks offer the opportunity to build new relationships in previously unheard of ways. Their viral nature makes these networks unique (Smith, 2010, p. 19). Blogs can achieve more than marketing. They can support a process of product development, PR, and even open new markets and opportunities (Wright, 2007, p. 41).

While evaluating a specific blog's attractiveness from the perspective of planned marketing actions, a lot of elements must be taken into consideration: the character and subject of presented texts, pictures, graphics, frequency of posts, reaction to readers' commentaries, website layout and existing links. A crucial element of evaluation is also an analysis of statistical data describing the level of interest in a blog in its community. The indicator that is most often monitored is traffic generated by a website, e.g. the number of clicks in a browser, number of visits, or the average time spent on a blog website. Moreover, an important factor is also the number of potential blog subscribers, the number of commentaries under each blogger's text as well as the level and range of interaction generated in a blog.

The absolute requirement for a blog to become an effective tool of communication and source of information is to run it with passion and commitment. The key to a blog's success should be "love what you do and do what you love". Readers and commentators will emerge from the group of people who share similar interests and views with an author and from opponents who will visit the blog to quarrel with its author and point out mistakes (Olszański, 2012, p. 255). It applies to the same extent to bloggers as well as to companies/brands cooperating with them.

Blogs definitely have a big marketing potential although their opponents claim that it is really difficult to unequivocally assess what influence they have on customers' buying decisions. What is more, the evaluation of achieved results is more like wishful thinking than based on genuine indicators.

However, taking into consideration unique features of blogs, they perfectly complement online communication conducted so far, by means of online services whose form, topics or convention, does not allow an organ-



ization to have a direct and uninhibited contact with the surrounding environment. Blogs can be successfully used to create an image, customer service, product promotion, communication facilitation and increase effectiveness of project management (Mazurek, 2008, p. 94).

METHOD

The aim of the conducted research was to evaluate the range and character of commercial use of blogs in the promotional activities of companies/brands. The most important point of the research was to determine bloggers' preferences towards products promoted by them as well as an identification of preferred forms of remuneration and ways of settlements of promotional activities. An important element of the research was also getting acquainted with bloggers' opinions as far as ethical aspects of conducted promotional activities as far as their blogs were concerned.

The research was conducted in the period between 29.10.2013 and 12.11.2013. It comprised a group of blogs regarded as the most recognizable and important ones in the Polish blogosphere in recent years. The compiled list comprised 412 blogs to which a request for participating in the research was sent. The basis for creating the data base was information included in the following reports: *Sotrender Fan Page Reports January-October 2013*, *Bloggers in Poland 2013: awareness - image - importance of blogs*, *BlogerStar 2013*, *Blog of the Year* in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Taking into consideration the subject and objective of the research the authors decided to take advantage of an online questionnaire technique. Eventually, the research included 96 out of previously mentioned 412 blogs, which accounted for 23.30%. The measurement instrument was a questionnaire. It comprised 22 questions and 5 of them were about demographics. They concerned sex, age, the education history of bloggers, the period of running a blog and the assessment of income obtained from it.

Obtained quantitative results were complemented with additional information from bloggers participating in quantitative research. They were asked about the most popular forms of promotion used by means of their blogs, a preferred way of establishing relations with a certain company/brand. Bloggers were also asked to answer questions concerning the time they devoted every day to run their blogs and the method of their promotion. The authors also asked about situations in which bloggers might decide to take part in social advertisement.

The general value of the presented results were limited because of a relatively small research sample. The research was the first stage in the process of the analysis of the Polish blogosphere and will definitely be a subject of further and deeper studies and analyses in this field.



RESULTS

Conditions for Cooperation Between Bloggers and Brands

Among the 96 blogs taking part in the research, 54 participate in commercial activities while cooperating with companies/brands. They were, first of all, blogs which were active for less than 3 years (41%) and those that have run for a period between 3 and 5 years (39%). 70% of blogs participating in the research are not treated by their authors as a major source of income. In the examined sample women constituted a prevailing number (55% of respondents) as well as people at the age ranging from 25 to 36 (52%) possessing a higher education degree (85%).

Bloggers participating in the research in the vast majority (87%) promote only the products that are congruous with their blog profile. It refers to subject matters discussed in the blog as well as the target group. Promoting products that are in no way connected with the blog specificity can prove to be ineffective from a point of view of marketing activities. What is more, in the case of the blog itself, it can discourage readers and provoke their disapproval or even garner harsh criticism. Undoubtedly, a rigorous selection of promotion proposals by means of a blog facilitates mutual cooperation as well as builds a blogger and blog's image associated with particular brands. At the same time nearly 13% of bloggers do not apply this restriction while choosing goods and services to be promoted in their blog.

In the majority of cases an initiative of undertaking cooperation between a company or brand and a blogger was initiated on the advertiser's side. Companies send their offers and bloggers make a final decision on whether they want to start such cooperation. There are, however, some bloggers who undertake steps directed at attracting companies by a possibility of image activities realized through their blogs. It applies mostly to less popular blogs or those just starting to participate in commercial activities.

Bloggers do not confine themselves to promoting only luxurious brands of products. One can find information about everyday items which are of good quality and in a blogger's opinion, worth recommending. Their choice is determined by a topic discussed in a blog and its reader's profile.

A strength of my blog is its involved, intelligent community who appreciate quality and clever ideas. There is no room for any taboo as well as no trash, censorship and far-reaching compromises. Your product does not need to be luxurious: it is enough to be very good and worth recommending (Tattva.pl).

Among the products that were most often promoted through examined blogs were first of all, household appliances (18.6%), cosmetics (14.4%) and clothes (10.3%). Respondents also pointed at other products and services



promoted by means of their blog. They mostly included: jewellery, sports equipment, tourist services, products' for kids, cars and services connected with motorization as well as kitchen accessories, decorations and kitchen equipment (Figure 1).

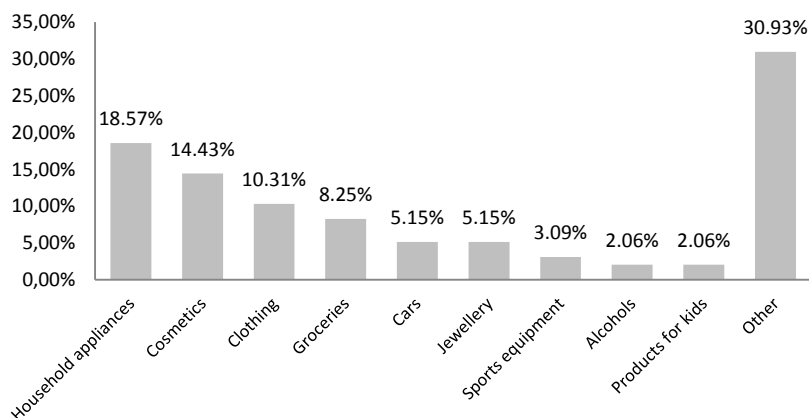


Figure 1. Products Most Often Promoted via Blogs

Source: Own research.

Blogs, due to their specific character allow us to differentiate marketing activities for the sake of specific companies/brands. It is difficult to indicate unequivocally which of them are currently most popular as their selection depends first of all on the expectations of a company/brand. Bloggers who often have influence on the selection of optimal tools, suggest those which will allow them to get to know a product or a brand well while complementing them with those that raise the level of attractiveness of conducted marketing activities. Among brands that have already started such a form of cooperation with bloggers are e.g.: Amica, Bosch, Delecta, Duka, Mąka Basia, Łowicz, Nikon, Orbis, Warka, Panasonic, Kamis, Prymat, Eterno, Philips, Braun, Tefal and many others.

The cost of marketing activities conducted in this way is diverse and most often calculated on an individual basis. However, some bloggers already have their price lists of standard solutions, and e.g.

A product shown on a list of ingredients in a written recipe and/or as an element of stylization in a photograph – PLN 2500 net for 1 article, while a product shown in a list of ingredients in a video recipe and exposed a few times during a film – PLN 2500 net for a video (PozytywnaKuchnia.pl);

A banner of dimensions 250x250 px placed in the right-hand column under my picture costs PLN 2000 net/a month (Mr Vintage);

A standard one-week competition (advertisement on a website, animation of competition progress on Facebook and Nasza Klasa, banner of dimensions 300x125 px on a main



website leading to a competition post and results announcement) costs PLN 5000 net (PozytywnaKuchnia.pl).

Kominek.pl website offers three price packages (starting from PLN 5000, from PLN 15000 and from PLN 50000), within which it offers specific activities connected with promoting a product or brand, depending on the level of engagement, character and conducted activities and time of cooperation. Prices are apparently approximate and a final amount is subject for negotiations.

However, it does not always mean that an offer of cooperation from a company/brand gains a blogger's approval (Figure 2). Nearly 91% of respondents rejected an offer of promoting products through their blogs and the most frequent reason was lack of consistency between promoted products/brands and a blog profile (30.7% of respondents). The bloggers dominating in this group were running their blogs for a period of 3 to 5 years. It can be related to previous negative experiences a blogger had with a given company/brand. Bloggers are also not interested in cooperating with a brand that is not very popular on the market or suggested activities require huge outlays of work in relation to the remuneration amount. They decisively refuse to promote brands that are negatively perceived on the market (23.6%), which results in the worry about a blogger's own image and blog credibility. What influenced a decision was also the amount of remuneration for using a blog, which was indicated by 23% of examined bloggers.

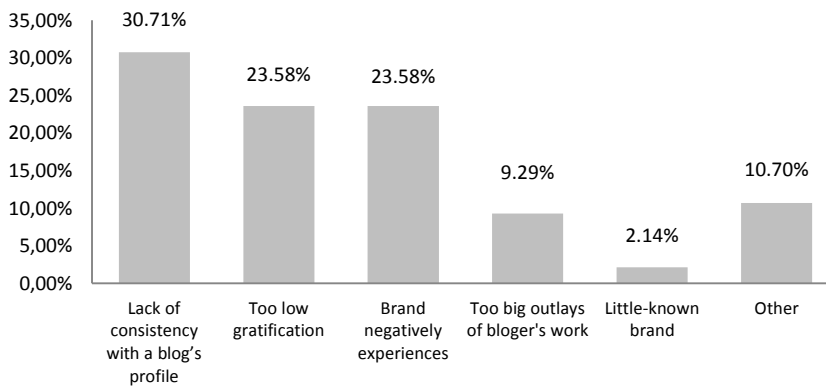


Figure 2. Causes for Which Respondents Would Refuse to Promote Products via Their Own Blogs

Source: Own research.

The most common form of rewards for a blogger is financial gratification, which was indicated by over 54% of examined blogs. This answer was selected by 84% of bloggers, for whom running a blog is a main



source of income. Another form of rewards are products of a certain brand promoted in a blog (27%) and other gifts, additional discounts for other products as well as a possibility of participating in trips or events (Figure 3).

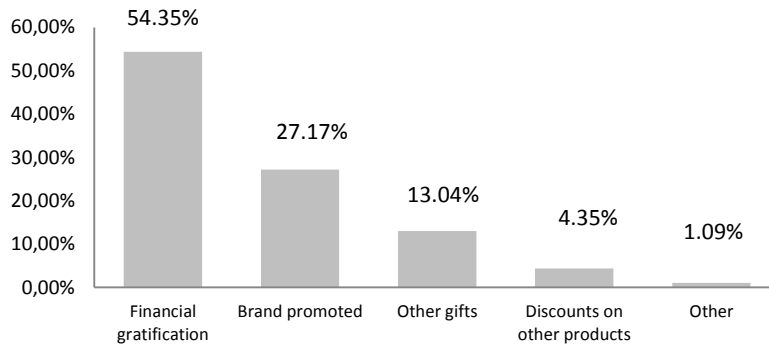


Figure 3. Most Common Forms of Gratification due to Blog's Commercial Use

Source: Own research

Bloggers participating in the research also declared the possibility of running promotional activities in their blogs without any rewards (almost 60%). This group, however, encompassed bloggers for whom blogs are an additional source of income. Such a form of cooperation is accepted by bloggers, only in exceptional situations and is always dependent on an individual evaluation. This may apply to some brands that a blogger perceives as very special and cooperation with them as a kind of honour. In practice, however, such situations occur really rarely. For 22% of the bloggers examined remarked that without any reward for conducting marketing activities for a certain company/brand means a lack of possibility of cooperation. Slightly more than 18% of respondents did not express any opinions on that issue.

Bloggers would also be prone to participate in promotional activities without any gratification in the case of advertising with a high social importance. However, the decision to participate in a social activity must guarantee a positive message and be interesting enough for a blogger to join. A crucial factor was a subjective opinion of a blogger that conducted actions will lead to changes in the promoted area. They must be also compliant with values cherished by a blogger and their lifestyle.

Bloggers taking part in the research claimed that a basic form of remuneration for running marketing activities is a one-time payment of the agreed amount after finishing a campaign, which was indicated by 59% of respondents (Figure 4). It can be assumed that such a solution creates a feeling of security for both parties of the contract (blogger-company/brand). Bloggers also link a form of reward with a character of

cooperation (one-time agreement, long-term agreement) or prefer solutions, in which remuneration is transferred after preparing the appropriate materials, but before their publication. The other solutions, such as remuneration paid every month during the marketing campaign, or depending on achieved results, are used sporadically. Usually a payment of remuneration is made on the basis of a bill related to a signed contract of commission or a VAT invoice.

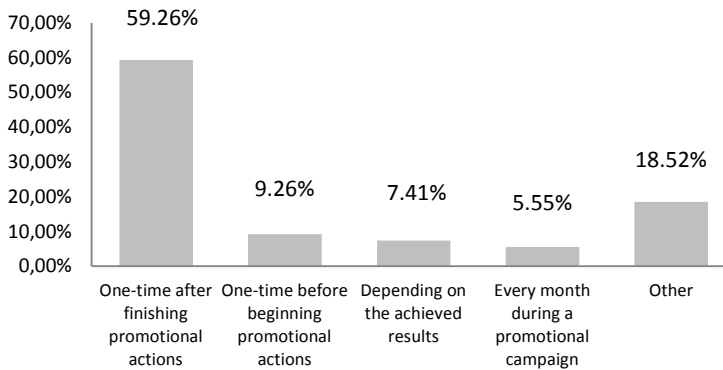


Figure 4. Most Common Forms of Remuneration Due to Promotional Actions Taken via Blog

Source: Own research.

The basis for calculating remuneration is through the number of views of the promotional contents, which was indicated by 46% of respondents. Very few respondents think that the basis of remuneration should be on the number of commentaries that appear and are moderated by the blogger (hardly 4%). None of the respondents pointed at the number of cited promotional contents. Bloggers participating in the research drew attention to other solutions applied by them, such as the power of influence a blog has on its target group, the number of activities undertaken by a blogger within a given campaign or the amount of work put into preparing a post and its publication.

The majority of bloggers that evaluate their remuneration for promotional activities as an average amount 27.8% and as a low amount 25.9%. Only 11% of respondents state that it is a very high amount. It can be assumed that it applies to a small group of the most popular blogs and bloggers. What seems interesting is that up to 18.5% perceive the value of this remuneration as very low. In a group of bloggers for whom blogs are a basic source of income, the level of remuneration was by the vast majority assessed as very high or high. However, bloggers who treat their blogs only as an additional source of income claimed that the amount for running commercial activities is average or small. It can be assumed that

the reason for that is a markedly low level of commercial use for the blog, which determines the level of the obtained income. It is definitely not the only factor that influences the level of income, which requires some further advanced research.

Credibility of Promotional Activities Conducted in the Blogosphere

Cooperation between bloggers and companies/brands often encounters numerous difficulties resulting from a lack of understanding. Their causes include mistakes made by marketing department employees who often make a wrong assumption that a blogger is only a transmitter of the promotional materials prepared by a company/brand. They do not allow for the possibility of a blogger presenting their own opinions and they expect a reprint of the promotional materials provided by them. They claim that if a blogger receives remuneration for cooperation with a certain company/brand, he/she should present only positive opinions, praising a given product.

There is also a group of commenters and terrorists who treat their blogs as a source of easy money or gadgets (Gadzinowski, 2012, p. 44).

Such an approach very often discourages companies/brands to undertake any form of cooperation with a blogosphere, although a number of professionally run blogs is constantly increasing and their authors focus on reliability of contents and honesty toward their readers.

Situations like those lead to conflicts that are often made public in blogs and/or other social media, which as a result can weaken a company/brand image, the credibility of bloggers and readers' faith in the independence of expressed opinions. Therefore, all parties lose – brands, bloggers and customers. The ethical aspects of marketing activities conducted through blogs are a key element conditioning the character and range of cooperation between bloggers and specific brands. It is also a crucial factor of using blogs in a commercial way, determining the level of efficiency of such actions.

Nearly 82% of bloggers participating in the research test the products that are to be promoted in their blogs. While using these products every day, bloggers test the level of their usefulness and verify mainly those features that are the basis for the conducted marketing activities. While gaining experience in this process and sensing accompanying emotions they increase the credibility of the presented contents. Although the assessment emerging from this process is subjective as it is influenced by the blogger's own emotions related to a given brand or a product, the opinion-making potential is really high.



At the same time up to 81.5% of respondents promote goods or services without bothering to verify products or material submitted by a company for promotion. The group of bloggers who do it comprises of those running their blogs for a period shorter than 3 years (50%) as well as those for whom a blog is not a major source of income. In the vast majority, bloggers' actions in this field are limited only to cooperation with companies/brands, with whom they cooperated previously, often a few times, and they use their products every day. It cannot be excluded, however, that which has been pointed out by bloggers themselves, where in some cases decisions not to verify practical or aesthetic advantages of a given product can result from a lack of professionalism of a blogger, a lack of sufficient motivation to undertake actions or an unsatisfactory reward offered for doing it.

More than 70% of bloggers participating in the research show the weaknesses of the promoted products when they believe that they have an influence on the way or time of using a given product. As a result opinions presented in a blog have a multidimensional character and allow readers to obtain relatively sufficient information about a product or service.

At the same time, 9% of respondents did not want to inform readers about product weaknesses in a blog and one in five does not have a specific opinion on the issue. It refers first of all, similarly as before, to blogs run for less than 3 years and those which are not the main source of income. Bloggers make their decision concerning a potential presentation of weaknesses of promoted products or services dependent on the situation they are in. It can be assumed that factors influencing it are a brand of a given product (the better, the greater inclination to present only advantages of a product), the amount of reward as well as the level of blogger's work put into conducted promotional actions.

It is also clearly visible that the longer a blog is run, the more ethical the blogger's behaviour toward the readers becomes, presenting all advantages and disadvantages of promoted products, services or brands in a reliable and honest way. This is also the case when a blog is a major source of the blogger's income. If he/she were unreliable, it could result in a loss of some readers, and what follows is a loss of blog popularity. Eventually, such a blog would cease to be interesting for companies/brands and profits would decline for the blogger.

Nearly all respondents believe that using private blogs for image-building or sales activities of specific companies/brands does not show any negative influence for the way a blog or blogger are perceived. Their reliability does not suffer. What is more, if commercial actions are conducted in compliance with business ethics, the presented opinions are treated as a reliable and valuable source of information. Assuming that a blogger presents all elements of product promotion in a reliable and



honest way, his/her image as an expert can improve. Such opinions are often seen in blogs which have been run for the period between 3 to 5 years (48%). So, these are the bloggers who possess sufficient knowledge in the area of running a blog and specificity of marketing activities conducted through it. At the same time, they have not lost their motivation for this type of activity and/or have not been discouraged to undertake it.

Yet, every fifth respondent is convinced that such a form of activity negatively influences a way a blog and/or a blogger are perceived and the boom in commercial use of blogs definitely affects their independence. What is more, the possibility of earning money based on the presented contents can in some cases lead to malpractice or actions directed only at a blogger's self-promotion.

Available reports and expert opinions indicate that the marketing potential of the Polish blogosphere will be growing dynamically, which will be reflected not only in a bigger number of companies/brands using this tool, but also in a qualitative level of conducted research. A similar opinion was expressed by bloggers participating in the research.

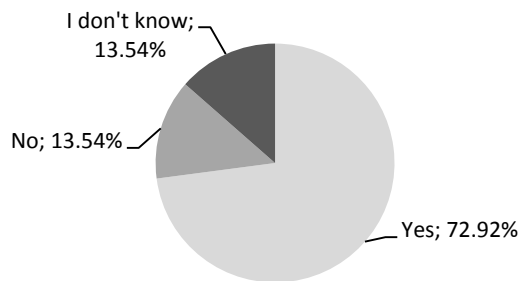


Figure 5. Respondents' Opinions on the Commercial Growth of Blogs' Use in the Nearest Year.

Source: Own research.

Nearly of them are certain that within the next year the role of blogs in promotional activities of companies/brands of various sectors will definitely increase. On the other hand, 13.5% of the examined bloggers claim that the big popularity of blogs is only a fad and soon an interest in the commercial use of blogs will stabilize. At the same time, 13.5% of bloggers did not express any opinion on the issue. The belief that the importance and role of blogs will be growing was shared by bloggers who have not cooperated with any company/brand for commercial purposes.

The growth in interest in the commercial use of blogs according to bloggers can, first of all, be the result of the possibility of running various campaigns simultaneously and adjusting them to the individual expecta-



tions of companies/brands at still relatively low costs which have been allocated for this purpose.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Today's communities are open more than ever to deeper interaction with brands. However, an important condition must be met: in exchange for the devoted time a brand must offer an appropriate added value – it must show an understanding of needs, help in a practical way and give valuable answers (Jurkiewicz, Majewska, & Sołtysińska, 2012, p. 21). As a result companies/brands are more often undertaking cooperation with bloggers. However, for the collective actions to be effective, a choice of a blog and/or blogger requires broad knowledge of the topics discussed in a blog, the reader's profile as well as indicators describing the range and popularity of a blog. What is more, not all companies/brands interested in cooperation will have a chance to exist in a blogosphere. Bloggers are inclined to refuse to cooperate with companies/brands which are not very popular, reliable and do not enjoy a positive opinion.

Bloggers who conduct marketing activities through their blogs expect rewards, usually in a financial form, although sometimes barter solutions are used. There is no sign of significant changes in the structure of forms of remuneration and ways of gratification for activities conducted in the blogosphere. The solutions which are preferred currently are positively evaluated and guarantee a feeling of security, both for bloggers and companies/brands cooperating with them.

The fact that blogs run by private people were included in commercial activities is by no means perceived as unethical. Although these activities are conducted for payment, the majority of bloggers reserve the right to test a given product before undertaking actions and to express a genuine, objective opinion on it.

It can be supposed that in the near future the level and range of using blogs as a promotion strategy of brands will be increasing. Undoubtedly, it will require a bigger than before diversification of undertaken actions and a growth in the number of non-standard campaigns.

The conducted research did not explain all aspects connected with the commercial use of blogs. Immense diversification of blog subjects (culinary, travel, fashion, technological, etc.), their diverse range and reasons for which a blogger decided to start running it, significantly determine opinions and results in the analysed area. In order to diagnose the marketing potential of the Polish blogosphere and its directions of further development, further research will be continued.

We are living in the beautiful times of the shaping of the blogosphere and social media. Everything is on the rise. We do not have any models because we are the first. The ma-



majority of bloggers do not use beautiful design, the majority of bloggers do not show an ability to create interesting contents, the majority of bloggers do not earn money. This is our weakness toward traditional media, but also an advantage over them. Where we are currently creating our history, the media already was a long time ago (Tomczyk, 2013, p. 367).

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KOMERCYJNE ZASTOSOWANIE BLOGÓW W POLSCE W ŚWIELE BADAŃ

Abstrakt

Tło badań. Obserwowane w ostatnich latach zmiany w procesie komunikacji zmusiły firmy/marki do poszukiwania alternatywnych rozwiązań pozwalających dotrzeć do klienta. Współczesny konsument coraz bardziej oczekuje wiarygodnych opinii, rekomendacji godnych zaufania i relacji opartych na wzajemnym zaufaniu. Z tego względu wzrasta zainteresowanie komercyjnym wykorzystaniem blogów zewnętrznych.

Cele badań. Celem artykułu jest określenie poziomu i specyfiki współpracy pomiędzy firmami/markami a blogerami w procesie komunikacji z klientem.

Metodyka. Artykuł powstał w oparciu o dostępną literaturę przedmiotu oraz badania własne autorów. Przeprowadzone badania objęły 412 blogów i zostały zrealizowane techniką ankiety internetowej, co wynikało z celu i problematyki badawczej. Badania przeprowadzono w okresie: 29.10.2013 r. – 12.11.2013 r. Uzyskane wyniki zostały wzbogacone opiniami blogerów uczestniczących w badaniach ilościowych.

Kluczowe wnioski. Blogi mają duży potencjał marketingowy. Jednakże aby proces komunikacji z klientem był efektywny wszystkie aspekty współpracy między firmą/marką a blogerem muszą zostać szczegółowo określone, zwłaszcza w zakresie działań niestandardowych.

Słowa kluczowe: Komunikacja, blog, marka, media interaktywne

