BLOGGING IN BRUSSELS
WHAT EUROPEAN COMMUNICATORS ARE LEARNING FROM WASHINGTON, DC

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Political blogging has quickly become ingrained in Washington, DC's media culture. Some US political bloggers have achieved a level of influence, visibility and editorial quality on par with their traditional mainstream print counterparts. Now it is catching on in Brussels.

In the past decade, blogging has given anyone with a computer the potential to control a news cycle. With minimal barriers to entry, there are many influential voices in DC's blogging ecosystem, and the key challenge of navigating the blogosphere is understanding how, when and with whom to engage.

American bloggers include those in traditional media organizations as well as independent voices. Blogging originated outside of traditional journalism, but the lines have blurred, particularly with the emergence of mainstream media bloggers. With more people getting their news online, journalists must increase output to 'feed the beast.' Online readers are hungry for something new and news organizations are hungry for more page views, so bloggers have a constant need for fresh information and sources, providing businesses with a new opportunity to communicate.

Today it is much easier to get coverage of company news than it ever was, and an editor may not even see an item before a blogger posts it online. Publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes* magazine, *The Washington Post* and the *Financial Times* are accepting a wider range of content.

With more channels of communication, readers want quality news fast and preferably in real time. Given these pressures, journalists are asking for information on Twitter and Facebook. Others use subscription services such as 'Help a Reporter Out.' This creates an opportunity for communications professionals to become valued sources and to place news items. This is already happening in the US, where media and business professionals follow journalists on Twitter and 'befriend' them on Facebook.

As the culture of political blogging in Brussels matures, we will see the same trends. Brussels already has a lively blogosphere and some blogging journalists have carved out a reputation as great sources of insider information, shedding light on decision-making dynamics that evolve behind closed doors. Jean Quatremer of *Libération* is one of the best known.

It is significant that those bloggers with most credibility in Brussels work for established, traditional media and focus on complex regulatory and institutional developments for a specialized audience. And the EU blogosphere is transient – several well-read blogs have disappeared as fast as they appeared. These are probably among the reasons why a more ingrained EU blogging culture has yet to emerge.

But, if the ever-improving quality, consistency and sectoral diversification of EU blogging is anything to go by, this will change. Some European institutions are already warming to social media, and those that do not currently acknowledge bloggers, including those who operate independently of traditional media, may soon have to take notice.

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