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### Akron Beacon Journal (OH)

March 14, 2005

**Section:** BUSINESS

**Edition:** 1 STAR

**Page:** D1

**Memo:**See main story: A new way to talk

### IMPORTANT POINTS

*Source: Barbara Payne, blogging expert and freelance writer*

Should your business jump on the blog bandwagon?  
If you do, customers will:

- + Feel special
- + Learn about your company in an authentic way -- from your salespeople.

Also, customers might:

- + Think of you instantly when someone needs a referral because they are so in touch with your company.
- + Become even more excited about your research and development process, and may be more willing to help test new products or services.
- + Complain less because they've learned about your business processes, and be more understanding about glitches in service or products.

Don't forget to:

- + Institute a review process to make trade secrets off-limits for blog content.
- + Create a clear policy to prevent employees from writing potentially negative content.
- + Remember that your salespeople are with customers every day. You have even less control over what they say in those situations than you do in a blog, so think trust.


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## Business

Posted on Mon, Mar 21, 2005  
**Blog with care**  
 Employee venting about a company may find an audience but lose a job

By Gina D. Smith  
 Beacon Journal staff writer

**IT'S TEMPORARY.**  
 With only a computer and an Internet connection, you can scream, analyze and whine about your problems to your hearts content. And if you're really good at it, you might attract an audience. That's especially nice if people, say your boss, never listen to you otherwise.

But be careful.  
 Sure, venting on a blog, a chat room or a message board is therapeutic. (Over-the-telephone depends on who you ask.) But saying or revealing too much on the Web, especially about your employer, can land you in a world of trouble.

Take Ellen Simonetti, who was a flight attendant before she posted suggestive photos of herself in uniform inside a Delta Air Lines jet. The airline fired Simonetti. Her blog, Queen of Sky, which she started as a form of therapy after her mother's death, crossed the line, Delta said.

Chances are, that's going to keep happening, said Gregg Lemley, a partner at the international law firm Bryan Cave LLP. More and more blogs are emerging every day, and at the same time, search engines are making it easier to find them.

Not only is it the employee's job to think before they post, but it's the company's job to develop policies to make expectations clear. Obviously, trade secrets should be off limits, Lemley said, and it's not unreasonable to expect workers not to defame their employer.

"Employers need to think long and hard about what they want to protect," the labor and employment attorney said.

For the most part, if you write something nasty about the company you work for, you can be fired. Private businesses have more leeway with that than public companies.

The only exceptions, under the National Labor Relations Act, are blogging about wages, benefits and the terms and conditions of employment.

"There's a difference between saying 'I hate my job, my employer sucks'... and writing something that is meant to foster communication among employees," Lemley said.

More often than not, companies are concerned with protecting their image, he said. A blog or random comment written in a chat room by an angry employee can really be harmful.

Roger Herman, a futurist with The Herman Group, said companies better get used to it.

"Venting (online) is increasing and it will continue until the economy picks up and people can move where they want to go," he said.

Employees, he added, aren't happy.

According to a recent survey by the Families and Work Institute, one in three American workers are chronically overworked and suffer from job-related stress.

More than half of the 1,063 workers surveyed said they are often handling too many tasks at the same time. Employees at companies that had gone through layoffs were more likely to be overworked - 42 percent compared to the 27 percent of those at companies where payrolls remained steady.

For those disgruntled employees, The Herman Group runs CorporateSuicideWatch.com so employees can spit out about their employers.

The Web site attracts people because, unlike a blog, the submissions are made anonymously. Plus, it still has the appeal of complaining on a broad scale, not just at the bar after work.

"We're safe," said Herman, a Northeast Ohio native.

Whether employees chose the risky way or the safe way, venting online can be therapeutic.

"I think the emotional expression of blogging is wonderful," said Dr. Sara Stein, medical director of Portage Path Behavioral Services.

Unlike bearing one's soul in a journal, blogging fulfills two needs of emotional health. First, is the emotional expression of writing down your true feelings, and second is the social support you get from having an audience. Bloggers assume they're getting positive feedback, she said.

But Dr. Moshe Torem, director of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine at Aron General, said going in search of feedback isn't always the way to mental health.

"Venting into space is like spitting into the wind," he said. "It could be harmful because the spit could be blown back into your face. That's where the Web comes in."

Besides the chance of being fired, complaining and soliciting advice from strange readers isn't the same thing as getting help from a professional.

"You don't even know who you're talking to on the other side," Torem said.

At the same time, venting just to vent can be harmful, too. It's easy to go off on a tangent into other problems, begin to feel like a victim, and then end up in a state of "analysis paralysis."

"There are people who, in and of itself, venting will make them feel terrible," he said.

Torem recommends starting a journal instead of a blog. The former is a dialogue with yourself, and if you need an audience, you can read it to someone you trust.

But for employees who decide to start a blog or enter a chat room anyway, both Torem and Stein advised caution.

Analyze why you are doing it in the first place, Stein said, and try not to post anything on the Web when you're hopping mad.

"If it's done out of anger, you need to be careful not to write down things impulsively," Stein said. "Don't try to hurt people."

"If you just want someone to tell you you're right," she continued, "call your friend."

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