

**Embracing Blogs:
A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet**

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This white paper delivers a concrete plan for how dance companies can create and promote Internet marketing campaigns that increase audience sizes, generate more revenue, get more press coverage, create more knowledgeable audiences, and inspire greater enthusiasm for all forms of dance.

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

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Doug Fox is an Internet consultant, web developer, marketer and speaker. He helps dance companies, studios, educators, presenters and service organizations leverage digital technologies to expand audiences, create new and enhanced revenue streams, build diverse distribution channels and introduce innovative works.

Speaking Program

Doug Fox conducts presentations and workshops about the themes and strategies covered in this white paper. This speaking program, also titled “Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet,” is intended for non-technical audiences and features extensive hands-on demonstrations. Audience participants leave with a clear understanding of the latest technologies and a concrete game-plan for enhancing their Internet marketing initiatives.

Download White Paper

To download a copy of this white paper, “Embracing Blogs,” you can visit the following page on the Great Dance website: <http://greatdance.com/embracingblogs/>

Great Dance Weblog

Doug Fox writes the Great Dance Weblog which offers news, insight and analysis about dance, the Internet, technology, weblogs and related topics. The Great Dance Weblog is available at the following address: <http://greatdance.com/danceblog/>

Dance and Technology Resource Guide

The Dance and Technology Resource Guide features over 200 links to a wide range of dance companies, performances, installations and people who are leveraging the Internet, software and emerging technologies to create new types of performances. This resource guide is available at the following address: <http://greatdance.com/danceblog/dancetechresource.php>

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Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

Table of Contents

Objectives	4
Weblogs Defined.....	4
Blogging Popularity Explained.....	4
1) Low Cost	5
2) Bypass Traditional Intermediaries	5
3) Speak with Your Own Voice.....	5
Setting-Up a Weblog.....	6
1) Create a Weblog	6
2) Design Your Weblog	7
3) Decide Who Will Contribute.....	7
4) Develop Your Blogging Voice	7
5) Add Pictures	8
6) Be Community Oriented	8
7) Consistency is Important.....	10
8) Contributor Profiles	10
Key Blogging Strategies.....	11
1) Promoting Your Performances	11
2) Beyond the Playbill.....	11
3) Extended, Participatory Performances	12
4) Adding Educational Value	14
Cutting-Edge Technologies Enhance Blogging.....	15
1) Audio Podcasting.....	15
2) Video Podcasting.....	16
3) Mobile Blogging (Moblogging)	17
4) A New Era for Mobile Devices	18
Revenue Generation	19
1) Fund Raising Opportunities.....	19
2) Sponsorship Revenue.....	20
Marketing and Promoting Your Blog.....	20
1) Use Existing Marketing Resources	21
2) Create and Promote Banner Ads.....	21
3) Add a Blogroll	21
4) Create an Email Update	21
5) Add Web Address to Multimedia Content	21
6) Take Advantage of Viral Marketing	22
7) Notify Blog Indexes.....	22
8) Submit Your Videos to Search Engines	23
Achieving Your Objectives	23
1) Larger Audiences	23
2) More Revenue	24
3) More Press Coverage	24
4) More Knowledgeable Audiences.....	24
5) More Interest in Dance.....	24

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

Objectives

The purpose of this white paper is to offer a practical blueprint that describes how dance companies can use the Internet and related online technologies to enhance their marketing and promotional efforts.

This blueprint focuses specifically on the value and importance of weblogs (also known as blogs) as an invaluable tool for helping dance companies achieve the following objectives:

- Increasing the size of dance audiences
- Generating more donations and sponsorship revenue
- Getting more coverage in the press and other media outlets
- Creating more knowledgeable audiences, and
- Inspiring greater interest in and enthusiasm for all forms of dance

Weblogs Defined

Weblogs are characterized by their immediacy, directness and ease of use. A blogger can post a message to the web in a matter of minutes from any computer with an Internet connection.

Specifically, a weblog is a software program that resides on a computer that is connected to the Internet. A weblog is a type of content management software program that makes it easy for users with limited or no technical expertise to publish information to the public web for anybody to read.

Here are the typical steps you would follow to add a message to your blog:

- 1) Open a web browser on your computer such as Microsoft Internet Explorer
- 2) Enter the web address where the blog software is located (Example: <<http://www.my-blog.com/adminpanel>>).
- 3) Enter your username and password
- 4) Type the text you wish to publish
- 5) Click on a "Publish" (or similarly named) button, and
- 6) Text is instantly available for anybody on the web to read

Blogging Popularity Explained

Before getting to the nuts and bolts of how to use blogs to promote your upcoming dance performances, let's first consider three main reasons that explain why blogs are so popular.

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1) Low Cost

Blogging is less expensive than any other communications medium ever created. For as little as \$5.00 per month or in some case for free, you can create a blog that has the same potential as any other blog to reach millions of Internet users.

In the traditional media world of TV, radio and newspapers, it costs millions of dollars simply to create a new media outlet. And if you want to advertise through these media channels, you can quickly spend thousands of dollars or more within days, weeks or months to reach your target audience.

2) Bypass Traditional Intermediaries

For too long, the arts world has been at the mercy of critics and media outlets. The challenge has always been how to grab the attention of 1) critics - and hope they write/say something positive, and 2) traditional media outlets in order to get as much pre-event coverage as possible.

But as large media outlets have become both more concentrated and obsessed with the bottom-line, it has become increasingly difficult to get the type of coverage arts organizations would like and desperately need.

Here's where blogging comes into the picture and the rescue: If the traditional media won't cover you the way you want to be covered, then create your own low-cost, direct communications channel. Through your blog, you can say what you want in the manner in which you want to say it. If local media outlets cover your performances so much the better, but if they don't, it's no longer a big deal. You can publish your own blog and build your own audience.

3) Speak with Your Own Voice

In the end, one of the most compelling characteristic of blogs is that dance companies can now communicate with their own audiences in their own voice.

If you visit just about any website for a dance company, you'll notice that there is usually very little descriptive information about upcoming performances. And if you do find such background information, it is usually in the form of an antiseptic press release that does not do justice to the dance piece, the choreographers or the dancers.

The beauty of weblogs is that dance companies (artistic directors, choreographers, dancers and others) can offer first person detailed accounts of any and all aspects of upcoming performances. In other words, you can write, "I think that...", "I feel that..." or "My goal is

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

to...” Using “I” or “we” is powerful, especially when it’s used by creative people to share their ideas and insights directly with their own audiences.

Setting-Up a Weblog

Here are the initial steps to follow to get your weblog up and running:

1) Create a Weblog

There are two ways to create a blog: a) you can use a hosted weblog application or b) you can install a weblog software program on your own server.

The easier, non-technical approach is to use a hosted weblog application. With a hosted service, you can create an initial blog within minutes. You visit the website for the application provider, create an account, and then sign-in to design and use your blog. If there is a monthly charge for your blog, you are usually offered the first month for free so you can experiment with the service and cancel your account if you wish.

The two most popular hosted weblog applications are:

- Blogger: <http://www.blogger.com>

- TypePad: <http://www.typepad.com>

I prefer TypePad – it has more features and flexibility. But it doesn’t cost anything to experiment with either application.

The second option is to install weblog software on your own web server. For example, Movabletype <<http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/>> is the most popular weblog software program. (Movabletype is owned by Six Degrees – the same company that offers the TypePad service listed right above. The TypePad hosted service and the Movabletype software program are very similar.)

If you purchase the Movabletype software, notice that there is different pricing for commercial entities and not-for-profit organizations.

If you have technical expertise or work with a web developer, it is preferable that you purchase a weblog software program and install it on your own server. You’ll have more control over your weblog and it will be easier to customize it to your liking.

But, if you don’t have access to technical expertise and you don’t want to pay for such expertise, then a hosted solution is easier and cheaper.

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2) Design Your Weblog

Next, you'll want to design the look and feel for your weblog. This means that you'll want to add your logo and graphics, choose colors, design your navigation system, standardize typefaces and font sizes, and create page layouts.

All of the hosted blogging services include an assortment of pre-created templates from which you can choose. Some of these ready-to-use designs and layouts are adequate, but they are not very creative and they definitely will not be unique to your weblog.

So in the beginning, you can choose the least annoying of these existing templates and get to work publishing your blog. But, I strongly recommend that dance companies work with a professional designer to create an attractive, customized design. In the end, you are selling art and creativity. Your blog should be a positive extension of your dance company and should reflect your vision and artistic sensibilities.

3) Decide Who Will Contribute

The more people from your dance company who post messages to your blog the better. If three people from your organization each commit to post messages three times per week, you will be providing extensive content to your audience. Plus, by spreading out the responsibility, no one person has to spend too much time devoted to updating your blog.

Preferably each person who posts to your blog will represent different voices. For example, you may have a choreographer, artistic director, dancer, costume designer, set designer or others making contributions.

4) Develop Your Blogging Voice

In the "Blogging Popularity Explained" section above, I pointed out the value of speaking in the first person when publishing messages to your blog. I want to elaborate on this idea here in a more concrete way.

When writing promotional copy for brochures, ads or email campaigns, you almost never write in the first person, the style is professional, and the message is almost always delivered in an upbeat, humorless and respectful manner.

I'm not going to now say that the purpose of blogging is to be unprofessional and disrespectful. But I do want to make an important point. When writing traditional ad copy, you don't point out flaws, mistakes and challenges. You don't clown around and you sure don't make fun of yourself.

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

But blogs are different. When people read blogs, they have different expectations than when they read traditional ad copy. They expect to hear you speak in the first person, they prefer informality and they don't care for marketing hype.

So one of the first things you will want to do is decide what your blogging voice will be. How will you express yourself? What is permissible and not permissible? What topics will you cover? How informal will you be? To what extent will you share challenges that you confront as you rehearse dance pieces? And will you let yourself share your frustrations with your readers? You're sure to come up with your own questions. The point is to explore these types of questions before posting to your blog.

In the end, you may decide to keep things formal, serious and unblemished. There is no right or wrong approach. You simply want to consider the expectations of your audience and choose an approach with which you feel comfortable.

5) Add Pictures

If you don't have a digital camera, go buy one. Dance is a visual art form so there's no reason not to share pictures with your blog readers. Take pictures of rehearsals, dancers, venues and whatever else you think would be of interest. And then add these pictures along with your text messages to your blog.

You will want to create informal or formal guidelines about what types of pictures you will add to your blog. For example, not everybody will be comfortable having pictures taken of them during rehearsals and having these snapshots published to the web for all to see.

You may have to learn how to edit digital pictures. Just about all digital cameras come with easy to use picture editing software. Once you finish the editing process, you can then use your blog's picture tools to add these images to your posts.

To learn about digital cameras, you can visit Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/281052/ref=amb_center-3_99494501_10/102-8849617-6831305

To learn about photo editing software, you can visit the Digital Photography section of Downloads.com:

http://www.download.com/Digital-Photography/3150-2204_4-0.html?tag=nav_dir

6) Be Community Oriented

Blogging is a way both to reach out to your audience and to give your audience a voice.

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Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

If you visit a weblog, you'll usually see a link that reads "comments" at the end of every post. If you click on this link, you can both read comments and submit your own.

You'll want to turn your blog's comments feature on so that your readers can add their thoughts to your messages. This way, your blog visitors will be able to read your posts and any comments relating to these posts.

My recommendation is that you moderate all of the comments that are submitted to your blog before they are published. You want to review these comment submissions to ensure that the content of these messages is appropriate and to avoid comment spam. An example of comment spam is when somebody broadcasts a comment promoting a product or website (often highly inappropriate) to thousands of blogs. You don't want these types of messages to appear on your blog.

Trackbacks

Another important community-oriented tool is called "trackback". The best way to explain trackbacks is through an illustration:

Let's say that there are two imaginary blogs with the following titles:

- "Dancing in New York" (NY)
- "Dancing in DC" (DC)

In the NY blog, there is a new post that says the author just saw a great dance performance while visiting Washington, DC.

The owner of the DC blog reads this post on the NY blog. The owner of the DC blog then writes and posts a message to his blog saying that he attended the same performance that was written about in the NY blog.

Now, another person is reading the NY blog and comes across the post about the recent dance performance in DC. Wouldn't it be nice if this reader was somehow notified that there were other bloggers who also attended this event and shared their thoughts about the performance on their own blogs?

It sure would be nice and this is where trackbacks come into the picture.

When the publisher of the DC blog wrote about the dance performance, he could have sent a "ping" to the NY blog. (In this case, "ping" means that the NY blog was notified that another blogger wrote about a topic previously covered in the NY blog).

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

Once a ping is sent, this is what happens: A person is once again reading the NY blog. She comes across the entry about the DC performance. At the bottom of this post is a section called "Trackbacks". In this section, the reader sees a listing for all of the other blogs that have referenced this post in the NY blog. One of the trackback listings is for the post written about this dance performance in the DC blog. So the reader now clicks on the link for the DC blog and is taken directly to the related post on the DC blog which she can now read.

Trackbacks allow posts about the same topic across multiple weblogs to be connected to each other. This linking of ideas across the blogosphere is very powerful and makes it possible to share related news items and developments in a structured manner while still preserving the individuality of each blogger.

As with the comments feature, some blog software programs let you moderate trackbacks before they are listed in your posts. This moderation tool is very helpful because trackback spam continues to grow like crazy and is very annoying. You don't want links to weird sites listed in your trackback section.

7) Consistency is Important

Once your weblog is public, you'll want to ensure that members of your dance company contribute to your blog on an on-going basis so that your readers will come back to your blog again and again.

If you let your blog go idle for too long, your readers will quickly lose interest and will stop returning to your blog. They will thus stop learning about your upcoming performances and are less likely to attend.

8) Contributor Profiles

Before launching your blog, you'll want to create a page that features profiles of all the members of your dance company who will be contributing to your blog. This page of profiles should be accessible via a link located on the main page of your blog.

The brief profiles for each of your contributors will be more captivating and inviting if they are written in the first person. Essentially, you want to avoid the standard boilerplate marketing copy usually included in promotional materials.

Each profile should include a picture. It is preferable that you use casual snapshots as opposed to formal studio headshots. But, in the end, it's your choice and you definitely don't want to use unappealing pictures.

Key Blogging Strategies

Now that we have covered the basic steps involved in setting-up your blog, let's consider some of the many ways you can put your blog to work to engage your audiences in new and innovative ways:

1) Promoting Your Performances

The most important way you can use your blog is to share information about upcoming dance performances:

- Start posting messages as early as possible. This means that as soon as you have an inkling of an idea for a dance work or as soon as you start rehearsals, you can begin to add entries.
- If you're a choreographer, you can discuss what past performances or choreographers influenced you, what inspired the current piece and many other topics.
- As your piece evolves, you can share related news items, changes of focus, challenges, and other developments that you think would be of interest to your readers.
- Encourage your readers to add their comments to your posts.
- Share pictures of dancers and rehearsals on an on-going basis.

2) Beyond the Playbill

Question: When do audiences have access to write-ups about dance performances?

Answer: Either when they sit down a few minutes before a performance and read a write-up in the program guide, or in a review of a dance performance in a local newspaper or on the web.

In either case, these write-ups play only a limited role in building larger audiences. Only people who have entered the theater receive a program guide. And a dance piece has to be performed at least more than one night to benefit from positive reviews in newspapers. And there is only a benefit if a newspaper actually runs a review of a dance performance in the next day's edition – not always a likely occurrence given the limited amount of editorial space devoted to dance.

So the fundamental question for dance companies is how do you provide more extensive information about your dance performances to the general public during the weeks leading-up to the staging of your dance work? And how do you provide information that serves both an educational and a marketing purpose?

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

Here I'm not talking just about following the same approach as described immediately above in "Promoting Your Performances." I have a variation in mind.

As you get closer to your performance date, you'll have a clearer understanding of your final dance piece. What would you like audience members to know about your performance before they sit down in the theater? What questions would you like the audience to ponder as they watch your performance? And how would you like the audience to make a personal connection between the themes of your dance piece and their daily lives? I'm just throwing out possible questions to consider – they may or may not be relevant to your specific piece. The main point is to start with questions that you would like your audience members to address and contemplate prior to watching your performance.

Now during the days and weeks leading up to your performance, you can start posting message to your blog that provide answers to the questions that you think are most relevant. This way when audience members arrive at the venue, they will be much more knowledgeable about your work and have a clearer idea of how to think about your performance as it unfolds. And in addition to the educational value of this online pre-performance guide, your postings will attract the attention of more prospective audience members well before the publishing of reviews that may appear too late for many dance fans to attend your performance.

3) Extended, Participatory Performances

Now let's move beyond the first two strategies described above and ask a fundamental question about the nature of a dance performance, and the relationship between a dance company and its audience.

What would happen if you (choreographers, artistic directors, dancers) decided to relinquish some control over your final dance performance and encouraged your audience to play a minor or significant role in shaping the final work?

There are many ways to engage live audiences during a performance in order to create participatory improvisational works. But here I'm specifically considering how the Internet and blogs can be used to empower audiences to contribute to the structure of your final dance piece.

Before describing how you might use your blog to create an extended, participatory performance, you can visit the 2003 "Playing Grounds" blog <<http://www.playinggrounds.net/>> from Kate Sicchio. In this blog, which Sicchio created as part of an academic assignment, you'll see that video clips and descriptions were posted after each rehearsal and readers were asked to offer their thoughts and feedback. This online feedback was then evaluated and incorporated into the final dance piece. The end result was

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

that audience members who contributed to this multimedia rehearsal blog could then watch the formal performance and see how their feedback was incorporated into this piece. This type of audience involvement is sure to create a stronger connection between performers and audience members.

Nuts and Bolts of Participatory Performances

Let's say you want to use your blog to seek reader feedback that is incorporated into your final dance piece along the lines of the "Playing Grounds" weblog.

For starters, you'll probably need a digital video camera and a digital camera. Without videos and pictures, there is no way for readers of your blog to offer meaningful feedback and insight.

With your camcorder and camera, you can then start to take video clips and pictures of your rehearsals. You can post this multimedia content to your blog along with written messages that describe your videos and pictures. And you can ask readers to offer feedback and advice on specific topics and challenges.

Once readers submit their feedback, you can respond to these comments and explain to what extent you did or did not incorporate these ideas into your piece.

For example, you might post two short video clips side-by-side that show alternative approaches to part of your dance piece. A reader could then post a message that says she prefers the first video with an explanation of why it is more suitable for the dance work. You could then post a public message in response that shares your thoughts on the readers comment. If you agree that the first video is better, you might post a new video a few days later showing your company practicing this preferred version in preparation for the performance.

By describing above the likely steps you would follow to create an extended participatory dance event, it becomes clear that the way a dance company goes about rehearsing and preparing for such a performance is different than for a traditional performance:

- You have to be willing to take pictures and videos of your rehearsals
- You will inevitably expose weaknesses and mistakes that would normally not be shared in a public manner
- Dancers won't look their best and might not be wearing makeup
- You need the technical equipment and know-how to create and upload videos and pictures

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

- It may be a challenge to get a large enough online audience to contribute feedback and comments as your piece evolves, and

- You need to devote the extra time to create this extended, participatory performance

Even with these potential drawbacks in mind (and they are all worth seriously considering before moving forward), one of the key opportunities of launching a participatory performance is that you may reach significantly larger audiences than ever before. The Internet, at its core, is about community and interaction. If you can find meaningful ways to engage your audience in your dance pieces, you have the potential to create loyal audiences that will feel a very unique connection to your performances and your dance company.

Consider how an audience member might feel if he sat in the audience after contributing to the evolution of your dance piece over the past three weeks? I think that there is a high probability that this audience member would be completely absorbed in your performance. He is no longer a passive spectator, but, in a sense, owns a piece of what unravels on stage.

If you do pursue such an interactive work, it is probably best to start with a very accessible dance piece that will appeal to a large section of the general public.

4) Adding Educational Value

Which choreographers and dancers influenced your upcoming dance work? How have these choreographers and dancers influenced you?

If, say, you're a modern dance company, how does your style and approach to dance compare (or not compare) to other modern dance companies who have performed similar works or styles over the past four or five decades?

Do you think it would be beneficial to share the answers to these questions with your audience before the staging of your dance work? Would it be even better if you could share these answers through an engaging multimedia presentation in a way that appealed to both long-time dance fans and newcomers to dance?

By once again using digital video and photography, it is no longer difficult to provide the answers to these and other questions in a fun, dynamic manner appropriate for audiences with all levels of exposure to dance.

Let's say for instance that you wanted to show the historical development or influences that contributed to a specific section of a dance work you will soon be performing.

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

One possibility is that you take a brief section of your performance and film it four different ways. In the first video, of say, 2 minutes, you film this portion of your piece exactly how it will be performed by your dance company. But in the other three video clips, you perform this segment to show how it might have been performed differently in each of the three preceding decades.

You can even add pictures that supplement each of these four video clips. Just for illustration purposes, let's say that what distinguishes the approach of each decade is the location of the left forearm. The pictures you take could highlight what exactly the position of the left forearm is in each succeeding decade.

Now when your blog visitors access this video and picture content, they can very quickly develop a concrete notion of how specific styles of dance evolved over time. And more importantly, when they watch your performance, they will see your style as part of a historical progression and not just an event that takes place in a vacuum.

Once you create this type of educational multimedia content, you can use it with many different audiences. It's perfect for visitors who access your website so that they can get an inside look at your upcoming performance and it's also an ideal teaching tool when you make presentations at schools or to young dancers.

Cutting-Edge Technologies Enhance Blogging

1) Audio Podcasting

Podcasting has recently become a huge phenomenon on the web. So before discussing potential podcasting applications for the dance world, I'll first describe what it is and discuss its importance.

When somebody refers to a podcast, they usually mean any audio program that can be accessed by visiting a weblog. Podcasts can be either spoken word programs such as interviews or commentary, or programs that consist of musical selections.

The word "podcasting" derives from Apple's popular iPod <<http://www.apple.com/ipod/>> music player that works in tandem with the iTunes software to let users download songs to their iPods. But instead of just being a consumer of digital music, people realized that they could create their own audio programs that could also be transferred to iPods. The creators of these audio programs are called "podcasters" and the programs are referred to as "podcasts."

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

Podcasting is important because audio content - especially engaging audio content - can be very compelling and represents one more way that you can reach out to and communicate with your audience.

There are a number of possible applications for dance companies who wish to add audio podcasts to their blogs.

For starters, you can add audio messages to your blog to achieve the same or similar objectives as when you add text messages. So for just about all of the suggestions in this white paper about how to use your blog to promote dance performances, you can add audio messages instead of or in addition to text messages.

In addition, you can conduct audio interviews with dancers, choreographers and others involved in creating and contributing to your dance performances. You can create audio listener guides that introduce audience members to each performance. And you can create audio testimonials or audience reviews by interviewing people after your performances and adding these testimonials and reviews to your blog.

Depending on your approach, audio podcasts do not have to be difficult to create. If you use a service such as Audioblog <<http://www.audioblog.com>>, you can create podcasts and add them to your blog for only \$4.95 per month. And to post an audio message to your blog, you can pick-up your telephone, call a toll-free number (within the US), and then record and post your audio message automatically to your blog.

You can also make your podcasts available through Apple's iTunes. Many iPod users search the iTunes software to find podcasts covering hundreds of different topics.

2) Video Podcasting

Video podcasting is the same as audio podcasting except you deliver video clips instead of just audio. Once you record a video, you can add it to your blog.

For purposes of the dance world, video is definitely more compelling than audio-only messages. But creating digital video does require more technical expertise than creating audio posts.

To create video clips, you need a digital camcorder, a video editing software program, a computer that is powerful enough to edit video clips, a high-speed Internet connection for uploading your video files, and a way to host your videos.

Popular video editing software programs:

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- iMovie for Mac: <http://www.apple.com/ilife/imovie/>
- Final Cut Pro for Mac: <http://www.apple.com/finalcutstudio/finalcutpro/>
- Studio for PCs: <http://www.pinnaclesys.com/PublicSite/us/Home/>
- Adobe Premiere Pro for PCs: <http://www.adobe.com/products/premiere/main.html>

The Audioblog <<http://www.audioblog.com>> service listed above under the audio podcasting section also hosts video for your blogs.

There are a number of online services that will host your video clips for free or inexpensively:

- Ourmedia: <http://www.ourmedia.org/>
- Podlot.com: <http://podlot.com/>
- Podbus: <http://podbus.com/>

Even with the extra investment and learning curve, I strongly recommend that you add video clips to your blogs and website. Whether you show short clips of past performances, current rehearsals or interviews with participants, video is very enticing.

3) Mobile Blogging (Moblogging)

Another approach to adding text, pictures and audio clips to your blog is by using wireless mobile devices such as cell phones.

When you use mobile devices to post content to your blog you are doing what is called mobile blogging or moblogging.

An example of moblogging would be to use your cell phone to post an audio message to your blog. From a rehearsal, for example, you can call a service such as Audioblog (mentioned in the audio blogging section above) via a toll-free number, record a message and the audio message will be instantly posted to your blog for visitors to listen to.

Another example of moblogging would be to use a cell phone with a built-in camera to take pictures and have these images transmitted to your blog instantly. This is what Kristin Sloan, a member of the New York City Ballet, does with her blog, Thewinger <<http://phontographer.com/winger/>>. She takes pictures with her Sony mobile phone. As soon as she takes them, she can select the ones she likes and send them through wireless email to her blog.

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

In addition to needing a mobile phone with a built-in camera, you'll also have to subscribe to a web-based service that will forward your pictures to your blog. Flickr <<http://flickr.com/>> is probably the most popular service for this purpose.

You may decide to take pictures of rehearsals, performances, dancers and other people and activities. Whichever pictures you add via moblogging, my recommendation is that you don't post pictures without accompanying text descriptions. On many moblogged photo galleries, there are just a lot of photos without any descriptions. If there are no text annotations, you really don't get much of a sense of what you're looking at.

If you do add annotated pictures on a regular basis, you'll be creating yet another resource that will attract more people to your blog and, hopefully, to your performances.

4) A New Era for Mobile Devices

In the previous section on mobile blogging, the focus was on how you can use mobile devices to transmit text, pictures and audio messages to your blog.

But it's also important to keep in mind that consumers use similar wireless devices to enjoy the content published to blogs such as yours.

So while you want as many people as possible to visit your blog, you will also derive the same benefits if users can download your content to their handheld devices. Your audio and video podcasts are perfect, for example, for the owners of the popular iPods.

Earlier this year, Apple made it possible for iPod owners to download and listen to audio podcasts. So if you create an audio podcast as described above, your listeners can store these dance-related programs on their iPods and enjoy them at any time.

In addition, the newest version of the iPod player now plays back video on its little screen. This means that both audio and video clips can be stored on these portable devices. While the iPods aren't the only portable player available, their market penetration is very high. So as you consider how your multimedia content can be enjoyed by users on the road, the best place to start is with the iPods.

One of the most intriguing ideas for mobile-specific content is to create performance guides for hand-held devices. Before going to a performance, a person could download audio, video and pictures about your performance to their portable device. Then this digital program guide could be shared with friends and family before the curtain rises.

Revenue Generation

Now that we've explored how to implement an Internet strategy that will help to promote your dance performances and educate your audiences, we can now consider how your blogging endeavors can be leveraged to enhance your fundraising efforts, and sponsorship and advertising sales.

1) Fund Raising Opportunities

If you visit websites for dance companies, you'll occasionally encounter promotional copy that encourages people to make tax-deductible donations. I don't know how successful these web-based solicitations are. But my guess is that unless a website visitor is already very familiar with the dance company and was already inclined to make a donation, the person is not likely to click a "Make a donation" button just because they are invited to do so.

The problem with most dance websites is that they are not very compelling, the content is limited and navigation is not intuitive. So potential donors who visit these websites are not likely to be inspired to make donations.

If, however, you implement the blogging game-plan described in this paper, you have a significantly better chance of raising online donations.

Consider what you would have created:

- Updated blog entries from different members of your dance company
- Engaging multimedia content in the form of pictures, audio and video
- Enhanced audience guides that introduce users to upcoming performances
- Extensive opportunities for audience participation and collaboration, and
- Compelling educational materials that provide audiences with historical background about the styles and traditions that influenced you

Your website will now have a very positive impact on all of your visitors. When people see a button that asks for a donation, you are likely to get a good number of contributions. Donations, even small ones, can add up very quickly. So if your enhanced website starts reaching out to thousands of more visitors than before, you have a significantly greater chance of raising more money.

2) Sponsorship Revenue

Your interactive multimedia weblog can also serve as a compelling platform for increasing financial support from sponsors and advertisers.

A major benefit of the multimedia tools described above is that they can be used both to promote your upcoming performances and also to provide innovative promotional opportunities for your sponsors.

Consider the types of benefits you currently offer sponsors. They might be recognized in promotional pieces, included in program guides, listed in email broadcasts, featured on banners, and given a text write-up with a logo on your website.

Essentially, sponsors don't usually receive an abundance of exposure, and the promotional value they do receive is not that exciting. By using the multimedia tools described in this paper, however, you can now deliver compelling promotion for all of your sponsors.

Here are some possible ideas for enhancing sponsorship promotion:

- Create a dedicated multimedia page for each major sponsor. This page can include a write-up about the sponsor along with multimedia content in the form of audio, video and pictures. You can conduct video interviews with sponsor representatives, for instance, and put these clips on the dedicated sponsorship page. Then on the home page of your blog, you can add links to this and other sponsorship pages.

- You can also provide advertisers with the opportunity to sponsor different pages of your blog with banner ads. This type of sponsorship should probably be done in a low-key manner along the lines of what National Public Radio does. Banner ads that are too splashy might not sit well with dance audiences. In addition, at the beginning of audio or video clips, you can include a brief sponsorship message to let listeners/viewers know who is helping to underwrite your performances.

Overall, the goal is to leverage your multimedia capabilities not just for your own promotional and educational objectives, but also to recognize the sponsors who help support your organization.

Marketing and Promoting Your Blog

Your weblog will not deliver the intended results unless you attract lots of visitors.

So once you launch your blog, here are a number of steps that you can take to drive large numbers of people to your website.

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

1) Use Existing Marketing Resources

First, you will want to promote your blog (and blog web address) in all of your current promotional materials including your website (if it has a different address than your blog), mailing pieces and postcards, display ads, email newsletters and press releases.

2) Create and Promote Banner Ads

Encourage other websites and blogs to promote your upcoming dance performances by having the publishers of these websites place your banner ad on their sites.

On the home page of your blog, you can add a link to a secondary page (also on your blog) that includes your banner ad in different sizes. Your banner ad might promote your dance company in general or a specific upcoming performance. Visitors to this page download this ad and place it on their websites with a link back to your blog.

3) Add a Blogroll

One of the most popular ways that bloggers generate traffic is by exchanging links with fellow bloggers. You can create what is called a blogroll by placing a list of links to other blogs on your site. When people visit your blog's home page, they can click on these links and visit these other blogs. Likewise, you can also encourage bloggers to link to you so that you can generate more traffic.

As a general rule, you want to create blogrolls that are more or less relevant to what you offer. So you probably won't exchange links with auto mechanics and exterminators.

4) Create an Email Update

When people visit your blog, you can encourage them to enter their email address to sign-up for an email notification that tells subscribers that new entries have been added to your blog. Actually, you can notify recipients at any time increment you wish. You might just send out one notification a week with a summary of all recent additions to your blog. The purpose of these notifications is to ensure that likely audience members and sponsors keep coming back to your blog for the latest news and developments.

5) Add Web Address to Multimedia Content

Make sure that you add your dance company name and web address to all of your multimedia materials. For instance, add a watermark with your name and web address to all of your pictures. And at the beginning of all audio and video files, make sure you say or write the name of your dance company and web address. The value of multimedia content is that your

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

blog visitors will share it with their friends and family members. But if you don't have identifying information at the beginning of this content, then people won't know what website to go to in order to learn more about you.

6) Take Advantage of Viral Marketing

On the Internet the term "viral marketing" means word-of-mouth marketing. It's the process of encouraging your website visitors to tell their friends about your promotions and offerings. Whenever possible, encourage blog visitors or recipients of your email notifications to tell their friends about your upcoming performances. For example, at the bottom of each email notification you send, you might write, "Please forward this email to others who you think would be interested in our upcoming performance." It doesn't have to be fancy – all you have to do is encourage people to share.

Also, it's a good idea to add an "email a friend" form to your web pages – especially the ones with multimedia content. For example, if you've created a photo gallery as part of your blog, you can add an email a friend form that encourages visitors to send the link for this page to their friends. A user enters the email address for his or her friend, and the friend will receive a message with a link to your photo gallery.

7) Notify Blog Indexes

One of the beauties of weblogs is that the large search engines such as Google <<http://google.com>> and Yahoo <<http://yahoo.com>> index your posts very quickly. This means that if a person visits one of these popular search engines in as little as a day or less after you post a message to your blog, your new entry may appear in the results if your post matches the word or phrase the person is searching for.

The reason why your blog entries are quickly indexed is because search engines tend to favor blogs that are updated frequently as opposed to websites that may be out of date.

When you configure your weblog software, you can activate a feature that automatically notifies specialized search engines every time you add a new post.

Most weblog software programs notify the following three search engines:

- blo.gs: <http://blo.gs/>
- Technorati.com: <http://technorati.com/>
- Weblogs.com: <http://weblogs.com/>

Embracing Blogs: A New Blueprint for Promoting Dance on the Internet

The large search engines such as Google and Yahoo monitor these specialized search engines in order to index the latest weblog posts.

8) Submit Your Videos to Search Engines

If you add video to your blog, you'll want to ensure that your videos are indexed by the video search engines offered by Google and Yahoo:

- Google Video: <http://video.google.com>
- Yahoo Video Search: <http://video.yahoo.com>

The reason why this is important is that millions of people are beginning to use these video search engines to find video clips that relate to hundreds of different topics. Give these search engines a try by entering keywords that relate to dance.

There is no charge for having your videos listed on either of these search engines.

Achieving Your Objectives

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this white paper is to offer a practical blueprint to help your dance company leverage blogs and related Internet marketing tools to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase the size of dance audiences
- Generate more donations and sponsorship revenue
- Get more coverage in the press and other media outlets
- Create more knowledgeable audiences, and
- Inspire greater interest in and enthusiasm for all forms of dance

Let's consider how this Internet marketing plan achieves each of these objectives:

1) Larger Audiences

The underlying premise behind all of the recommendations in this paper is that by creating an interactive, multimedia weblog you will be able to build higher levels of enthusiasm for and interest in your next performance. You will communicate directly with your own audience and you will not be at the mercy of the press and other parties to promote your dance programs.

2) More Revenue

By building an engaging weblog that features compelling video clips, audio programs and digital pictures, you will create a new type of promotional platform that will offer greater value to your sponsors, and you will encourage more supporters to make donations to your dance company.

3) More Press Coverage

One of the positive aspects of implementing this Internet blueprint is that you will be less beholden to newspapers and other media outlets to cover and promote your performances. At the same time, by creating an interactive blogging experience, you will actually get more coverage by local newspapers who will be intrigued by your new online approach to communicating with your audience. Most importantly, this interest on behalf of the press is likely to get you coverage in local media outlets before the staging of your dance performances – this is the important point: coverage weeks before your performance is much more valuable than coverage after the curtain comes down.

4) More Knowledgeable Audiences

In the “Key Blogging Strategies” section of this white paper, four key action plans are described for delivering comprehensive information about your upcoming dance performances to the public. Whether you follow just one or all of these strategies, you will be creating a new type of better informed audience member who will have a much better understanding of and appreciation for your dance performances.

5) More Interest in Dance

Other than attending a dance performance, how can the non-dancing public develop an appreciation for dance and get excited about dance? The answer is that it’s very difficult. One can read reviews of dance performances but these articles are not usually written for non-dancers. One can visit online event calendars to learn about upcoming performances. But these event guides tend to have very brief, unhelpful descriptions of dance performances. Or one can go to the websites for dance companies or other dance-related websites to learn about performances. But once again, these sites provide very little background or details about the programs.

The blueprint described in this paper solves all of these challenges. By following it in whole or in part, you will be in a much better position to reach out to a larger public that does not know how to get their feet wet in the world of dance. You will provide compelling content and stories that will engage your blog visitors and you will inspire more people than ever before to attend your performances.