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## Blogs surface in fast casual

by [Fred Minnick](#) \* • 26 Mar 2006

The old adage, "Everybody's doing it," applies to blogging. According to Technorati data, 70,000 new blogs surface daily and in the average day, there are 700,000 new blog posts.

Technorati monitors 31.2 million blogs, 500 of which are foodservice-related. The restaurant-related sites vary from "Chocolate and Zucchini" to "The Burrito Blog" to "Starbucks Gossip." These sites are to be taken seriously, said Patrick Galvin, founder of Galvin Communications.



**“ Smart companies are definitely tracking blogs that cover their company and industry. ”**

— *Kevin Dugan,*  
*Strategic Public Relations*  
*blog*

"More consumers are finding restaurant blogs because the major search engines Google, MSN and Yahoo! oftentimes rank blogs higher than Web sites," Galvin said. "People are becoming more interested on where their food comes from and how it is prepared and blogs provide a great way to do this."

So, if a consumer were to search, "Baja Fresh Review," he or she might stumble upon The Burrito Blog:

"My biggest complaint about Baja is their pre-fabricated menu items. See, you're not encouraged to go up and order a burrito and spec out its contents. They want you to get the Ultimo, the Fajita Burrito, the Baja or something like that, kind of like Taco Bell," according to the Burrito Blog.

In the Burrito Blog, the author reviews and photographs nearly every burrito chain in the fast-casual segment. The Burrito Blog has been featured in the Washington Post and according to Technorati, The Burrito Blog is the top-ranked burrito blog in the Internet.

Then there's Chipotlefan.com, a site that features nutritional information and Chipotle recipes. Created two years ago by Matt Silverman, a 20-year-old college student, the site receives about 2,000 unique visitors a day. Through Yahoo! advertisements and Google AdSense, the George Washington University sophomore receives a nice "side" income from



"I started this site because I love Chipotle," Silverman said, "and there wasn't any type of nutritional data available on the Web."

When Silverman approached Chipotle about adding nutritional data on a Web site, the popular chain responded in his favor, providing him a spreadsheet of ingredients and nutritional data as well as giving him photos.

"It's really flattering having customers write about us like that," said Chris Arnold, Chipotle spokesperson. "The way we look at it is: It's much better to be cooperative with 'fan' sites than being standoffish. If they're going to write about us, we want to make sure they have accurate information."

### Success across the board



Chipotle, in its first public financial report, turned in a fourth-quarter profit. The company said fourth-quarter net income was \$4.3 million compared to last year's loss of \$3.7 million. Chipotle's financial success is not lost on Silverman. He's a shareholder.

"I do feel I help promote them," he said. "I've had visitors tell me that just by browsing the site has made them crave Chipotle. And if you Google 'Chipotle,' my site comes up second."

Silverman has added a message board and even started a "burrito-ingredient matching service." The discussion boards include talks on: "Chipotle's rising stock" and "Qdoba or Chipotle?." At last count,

Silverman said he had 20,000 signed up for his message boards.

"What makes Chipotle so unique that it gets its own fan site? Well, they don't make changes to the menu frequently and they have a great product," Silverman said.

A Starbucks fan has taken a different approach in promoting his favorite coffee brand. Simply known as "Winter," the author of StarbucksEveryWhere.net plans to visit every Starbucks in the world. As of March 16, he had visited 5,467 North American stores and 306 international. He writes:

"I've been trying to visit every Starbucks in the world. Why? Well, I'm not obsessed, if that's what you're thinking. No, my reason is simply to do something completely different."

Winter's pursuit has led to the making of "Starbucking," a documentary that will be featured at the Omaha Film Festival (March 23-26) and the Sonoma Valley Film Festival (April 5-9). That's essentially free publicity for Starbucks generated through a happy customer.

But the major companies are treating highly rated blogs the same as media outlets. When creating media plans, they're including blogs on potential advertiser lists and story pitches.

"Smart companies are definitely tracking blogs that cover their company and industry," said Kevin Dugan, author of the Strategic Public Relations blog. "Not to mention employees blogging about the company."

### Employee blogs

Many restaurants ask employees to sign confidentiality agreements that prohibit workers from blogging about employers, said Ted Demopoulos, author of Blogging for Business (Kaplan Business).



"Anybody can be a publisher on the Internet," Demopoulos said. "That means a lot more information is on the Internet, which means there is more opportunity and more risk."

To alleviate some of the risk, like proprietary information or negative publicity, employers will fire workers for blogging, Demopoulos said. But that's not typical in the restaurant industry. An entry-level restaurant employee is more likely to complain about his or her boss, he said, and nobody will care.

*Not only are consumers blogging about your restaurant, so are employees. Some restaurants require employees to sign a contract of confidentiality.*

“With blogs, you get a certain amount of complainers and that’s all they do. They complain about their job or what they ate for breakfast,” he said. “If they are saying horrible things all the time, people tend to take what they read from that blog with a grain of salt.”

As for regulating employees’ blogging privileges, that’s not been an issue

for Chipotle.

“It’s not come up, so we don’t have a policy,” Arnold said. “We have a very popular Web presence of our own and that’s been a huge tool for us and has really helped build our brand.”

Starbucks has not implemented employee-blog regulations either. Starbucks spokesperson Alan Hilowitz said blogs are just another way to express opinion in a free country.

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