

## Building buzz through social media

*Early blog buzz builds the case for coverage in Financial Times*

Blogs can provide your organization with great coverage outside of the world of mainstream press, or they can provide a means to an end—that is, major coverage in print or broadcast media. S. Neil Vineberg, president of Vineberg Communications in Westhampton, N.Y., frequently works with bloggers to build buzz for his technology clients.

However, for MeCommerce ([mecommerce.goodstorm.com/](http://mecommerce.goodstorm.com/)), a service that allows owners of Web sites to easily sell books, CDs and DVDs direct from their sites and earn commissions on the sales, Vineberg saw the need for some high-profile business-media placements that would help the company attract some investor attention, and would attract some early adopters to the service.

“We wanted to do a soft launch,” Vineberg explains. The service was still in beta, or testing mode. “We didn’t want to attract a huge groundswell of users,” but just enough to get a bunch of testers signed up to use the service. In addition, in the summer of 2006 the company was trying to raise more venture capital funding, and therefore wanted to reach business influencers—but not with a big splashy PR campaign.

**News peg:** Vineberg decided that some well-placed blog postings would serve the purpose of attracting new users to the site, and hopefully, build some traction for a mainstream media pitch down the road. Making the pitch to the chosen blogger, Vineberg points out, requires some slightly different media relations tactics. In a way, he explains, you almost have to tone down the pitch.

“You have to have respect for the blogger—that they’re intelligent enough to decide whether the pitch is newsworthy,” he explains. “Bloggers can be more discriminating; they’re only responsible to themselves,” unlike a media contact at a mainstream outlet, who usually has to answer to editors and advertisers. For the most part, bloggers aren’t required to meet constant deadlines, Vineberg adds. They only have to post when they find news that appeals to them.

Vineberg decided that TechCrunch ([www.techcrunch.com](http://www.techcrunch.com)), a very popular blog that covers new Internet companies and services, was the best place to pitch MeCommerce and start the ball rolling on a soft launch. “We had gotten a placement with them five months before,” he says. “They take a really intelligent and thoughtful approach to the products they review. They’re a tastemaker.”

The rising influence of sites like TechCrunch is creating changes in pitching tactics, Vineberg says. “The guys who used to be the gatekeepers aren’t the gatekeepers any more,” he explains. “Your PR strategies have to be cross-platform, covering everything from YouTube to MySpace.”

**The pitch, Part 1:** Instead of pitching an exclusive as he might have done if he were pitching a print reporter, Vineberg simply e-mailed a note about the MeCommerce launch to his TechCrunch contact. “I don’t think bloggers want to hear about exclusives,” he says. “They don’t need to be first. We simply said, ‘we’d love you to take a look at this product.’”

The pitch, which was sent in June, was picked up right away by TechCrunch, and was posted the same month by blogger Marshall Kirkpatrick. Since TechCrunch is so influential, hundreds of other bloggers picked up the news and began writing their own reviews of the service. About 300 people signed up as beta testers of the service—exactly what MeCommerce needed to move forward with the service’s development.

**The pitch, Part 2:** Now that he had the buzz, Vineberg could move on to landing a standout business press placement. “I needed to work on the perception of the company,” he explains. He reached out to Eoin Callan, a reporter in the London bureau of the Financial Times who covers technology and retailing.

Vineberg built his pitch around the existing buzz from the blogging community about MeCommerce. “I sent the reporter links to three or four of the different blog posts about the product,” he says, which helped give the pitch credibility. “Now we had real users; we had bloggers using the product instead of just the industry analysts. I pitched him cold, but he saw the story right away.”

Callan wrote about MeCommerce just a few weeks later, including the company in a roundup about new revenue-generating tools for bloggers. On the strength of that placement, Rick Aristotle Munarriz, writer for “The Motley Fool” investing Web site, penned his own online article about the MeCommerce business model.

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