

Carefully Executed B2B Blog Becomes a Powerful Tool in Demonstrating Apriso's Manufacturing Expertise

Company: Apriso
Agency: Gutenberg PR
Timeframe: Aug. 2010 - Present

When the **Apriso Corporation**, headquartered in Long Beach, Calif., was looking to establish itself as a thought leader in an ever-changing manufacturing industry, the creation of a corporate blog became integral to that strategy.

Apriso provides sophisticated consulting services and software solutions to manufacturers, and a blog provides an excellent forum for reaching a highly-targeted audience. In a rapidly changing taking place

in the industry, the Apriso team believed a blog would give them the opportunity to broadcast their expertise, enhance brand awareness and create a powerful tool to support the company's sales efforts.

Apriso also felt it had the expertise and knowledge to demonstrate to potential customers that it not only possessed more industry knowledge than their competitors (which includes the likes of SAP, Siemens and GE), but that it was an influen-



Image courtesy of Apriso

Playing within the ultra-competitive manufacturing industry, Apriso has seen solid success with its blog, which has steadily increased its number of page views while drawing more people to its Web site.

tial player in their industry as a whole.

While many companies have blogs, creating one that consistently delivers quality and useful content is a challenge. Apriso had to figure out what critical information customers and potential customers were not receiving, how it could capture that audience and how to effectively deliver that content to its targets.

To get the development process rolling, lay the foundation for the blog and to identify the type of content that would produce the most bang for the buck, Apriso brought Gutenberg PR on board, and both teams created the following objectives:

- Build thought leadership in the manufacturing industry
- Provide a community forum to discuss different facets of today's global manufacturing transformation
- Increase Web site traffic and visitors to apriso.com

GETTING STARTED

Apriso knew what it wanted to do, but there was just one problem: There was no one to manage it.

"The first thing I tried to do was learn how to do it. I'd never managed a blog before," says Gordon Benzie, director, public and analyst relations, Apriso. "I had to learn what worked

and what didn't. I realized you have to build a history (on your blog) before you try to raise more awareness."

Benzie and his team decided to create a platform for industry experts to be able to share their perspectives, experiences and best practices to the masses. To know exactly what the target readers were looking for, Apriso researched the type of content existing blogs were producing, who was reading that content and what type of impact it had on the industry. The research found that the content on competing sites was almost impossible to find due to a lack of promotion. This poor marketing opened the door for Apriso to gain a competitive advantage.

Apriso's next act—on a shoestring budget—was to produce content of sufficient quality and readability to be of genuine use to its target audience.

With the blog taking center stage in Apriso's content marketing efforts, there was no room for inconsistency. Each post had to provide meaningful content. To achieve that goal, a consistent format needed to be established. Everything from what topics would be discussed to how in-depth each subject would be covered needed to be established at the outset. The decision was made to create specific, targeted content aimed

5 TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR CORPORATE BLOG FOUND AND READ

As part of your company's business objectives, a corporate blog has been added to the must-do list as a vehicle for providing consumers and those in your industry with valuable information. How do you make sure that information can be found? Leah Beatty, search media manager at **Slingshot SEO, Inc.**, offers five steps in starting and publicizing your blog:

- 1. Answer the question, "What's my message?"** You must know what you represent before you can create any real connections with your audience. Targeting your message will help you connect with your audience and increase your opportunity for thought leadership.
- 2. Figure out who will care.** Do the things you're passionate about resonate with others? It's great to be passionate, but if no one is listening your message will be lost. Use a keyword research tool like Google Keyword Tool to discover what people are searching for that is relevant to your blog niche.
- 3. Create a social profile.** Choose one of the Big Four social platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+) used by your target audience and create your profile. Each network has different best practices; be sure to learn them.
- 4. Create content.** The key to ranking your blog lies with content. Don't box yourself into thinking content means words; photos, videos, graphics, podcasts, presentations and social updates all count as content. Stay organized by creating a content calendar. Plan your content a month in advance and tweak as necessary.
- 5. Update frequently.** Create compelling content that your audience will read and share. Content should interest your audience (so they will share it) and include a call to action. Remember to up-cycle and recycle content: the presentation you gave last month would make a great blog post series or white paper.

at those actually involved in manufacturing.

GETTING IT DONE

Once the structure and focus of the blog was established, the next step involved defining tactics to make the blog a success. It needed to cover a wide range of topics, and Apriso grew the team from a handful of generalists into a collection of over 20 bloggers, with each covering a specific area of expertise. An editing framework would provide clear direction for the editorial team on how to write effective blog entries.

Launched in August 2010, the Manufacturing Transformation Blog averages two to three posts a week. The blog provides nuts and bolts information of immediate and practical use to the target audience. Here are some typical headlines:

- Nanofibres—It Turns out that Size Matters
- My Lessons Learned from 5 Years of Assessing Manufacturing Operations
- Why Manufacturing Standards Matter

To gain an even greater audience, the Apriso blogging team secures guest blog appearances in industry leading Web sites and publications.

Thoroughly researched keywords—based on what terms Apriso's prospects are looking for online—helped set the plate for optimal reach of the blog. Benzie wouldn't reveal specific keywords for competitive reasons, but says that the search strategy extends to all of Apriso's Web properties.

Once it was established that people were actually reading Manufacturing Transformation and the content being produced was of genuine interest to Apriso's target audience, it became clear that the blog should immediately become the focal point of their social media activities. The company's Twitter, Facebook and

LinkedIn pages were synched to include links to the blog's posts. In the company e-mail newsletter, four popular posts of the week are included.

BLOG BENEFITS

As the blog's popularity has grown, other departments within Apriso have leveraged its power for their own needs. "It's been a good sales tool," Benzie says. "An account executive will call about someone who's asking about X, Y or Z, and I'll point them to literature on that topic. If it's already on the blog, that's perfect."

According to Tom Hennessey, VP marketing, Apriso, the blog has not only opened the door for increased PR and social media outreach, it has had some unexpected benefits, particularly internally.

"To continue leading the industry, we must always look for ways to be more innovative in how we run our business," says Hennessey. As with any organization, the challenge lies in getting everyone moving in the same direction toward a common goal, he says.

But that challenge appears to be met with the blog, as divisions across Apriso have worked toward a common goal—and experienced success.

"It feels really great when the team can point back to the exact moment a customer became interested in our unique value point by what

they read on the blog, and then turn to us to help them deliver that same value for their own organization," says Hennessey.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Doubts that surrounded the creation of the Manufacturing Transformation and worries about producing enough content on a weekly basis have subsided, says Benzie. One of the main goals has been accomplished: The blog provides a trove of posts that are meaningful and relevant to the targeted audience.

In addition, the blog provides Apriso a medium where it can further categorize its many messages. "It gives the control to the reader, no matter the number of messages, to view our capabilities and industry by simply reading by topic or subject matter expert," says Hennessey.

But what about that holy grail of social media measurement: ROI? Like most companies, Apriso is in the process of figuring it out. Because of the complexities of proving ROI, Benzie is hesitant to give the blog more credit than it deserves. But he does say that the Manufacturing Transformation Blog has played a part. "This strategy, combined with other campaigns and sales execution, has resulted in the company's 25%+ steady compounded annual growth over the past six years," says Benzie.

The data Apriso can directly attribute to the blog show that people have been reading it:

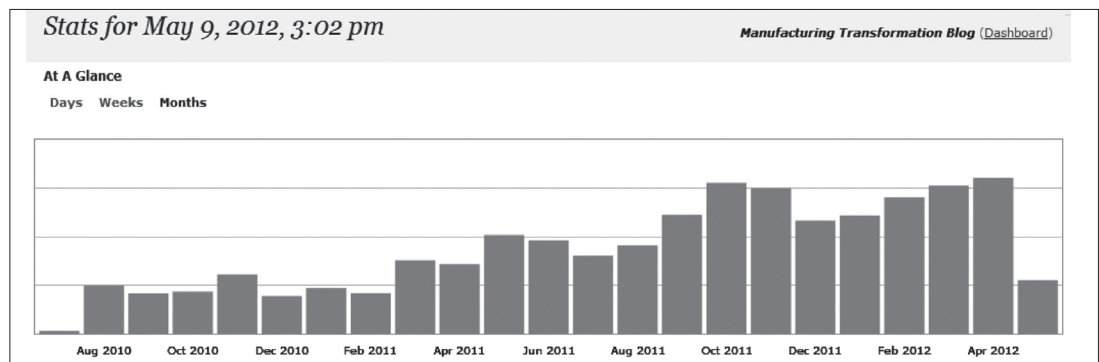
- The number of page views of the blog took off in 2011, tripling from January through October (see the chart).
- From January, 2011 to March 2012, monthly unique visitors to Apriso's Web site increased 65%.
- From an SEO perspective, Apriso went from not appearing on page one for searches on topics and keyword combinations critical to Apriso's business for most of 2011, to achieving a ranking of No. 2 or No. 3 on page 1 for those same terms.

In the end, solid ideas, objectives, strategies and execution of its plan helped solidify Apriso's Manufacturing Transformation Blog as a must-read—and an integral part of the company's marketing and communications mix. **PRN**

[Learn more about social media measurement—and ROI—at the PR News Social Media Measurement Conference on Oct. 2 in New York City (www.prnewsonline.com/socialmediameasureConference/).]

CONTACT:

Gordon Benzie, gordon.benzie@apriso.com; Tom Hennessey, tom.hennessey@apriso.com; Leah Beatty, leahbeatty@gmail.com.



Launched in August 2010, Apriso's Manufacturing Transformation Blog has steadily climbed in page views, tripling views from January to October 2011. Thanks to SEO efforts, the blog has also significantly improved its search ranking on Google.