Jack Felton Golden Ruler Award
"Ed's B:log: Measuring Dialogue in Employee Communications"
American Express

Executive Summary
"Good enough" stopped being good enough a long time ago in employee communications. Today, given our unstable times, employee communications need to be great. Communications need to help drive rational and emotional commitment among employees. But how do we take the measurement of employee communications from "good enough" to "great?" How does a leader know if his or her communications are achieving relevance and impact among employees? How does a corporate communicator use results to refine strategy and optimize messages?

In 2008, Ed Gilligan, vice chairman of American Express Company, challenged his employee communications team to answer these questions. In response, we launched "Ed's B:log" -- the first intranet based blog for an executive at American Express. We also developed a four-step methodology for measuring its impact: engagement, retention, satisfaction, and relevance. The team researched and applied best practices and insights from brand advertising, customer servicing, linguistics, and social media. By measuring click-thru rates, unaided and aided awareness, willingness to act, satisfaction, word and theme resonance, and circles of influence, the team was able to provide a cohesive and integrated view of how a senior executive's internal blog was performing and connecting with employees worldwide.

This robust methodology created a virtuous cycle of testing, learning and improvement for American Express. The potential significance and application of this methodology goes beyond employee communications. It provides important insights on tracking, analyzing, and improving online dialogue for all areas of communications.

Introduction
In an effort to do something different, something more compelling, and something more measurable, we decided to launch the first intranet-based blog for an executive at American Express in January 2008. Simply called "Ed's B:log," the blog tapped into Ed's authentic voice by blending storytelling, business messages, and low cost-media. It also facilitated two-way communication with employees across 140 markets worldwide.

To date, Ed has posted 19 blogs. That's roughly a new blog every four-to-five weeks. The results have been outstanding – leading Ed to say to his employee communications team: "I haven't had this depth of connection with employees since 9/11." But wanting more than positive feedback, his employee communications team set out to measure and substantiate Ed's positive experience with his blog by providing key metrics and measuring impact over time.

Objectives
The core goals for Ed's B:log were to create a non-traditional communications platform, to increase the frequency and quality of employee dialogue with Ed, and to measure its

impact holistically. Our measurement methodology used a four-part framework: engagement, retention, satisfaction, and relevance. By measuring click-thru rates, unaided and aided awareness, willingness to act, satisfaction, word and theme resonance, and circles of influence, the team was able to provide a cohesive and integrated view of how Ed's B:log was performing against these goals.

The Employee Experience with Ed's B:log
Before we describe in detail our measurement methodology for Ed's B:log, it's important to describe how employees access and experience Ed's B:log. Every time Ed updates his blog, he sends a broadcast email introducing the new blog topic to the employee population. Employees need to click on that email to open our corporate intranet browser and access Ed's B:log. Within the copy of every blog, Ed invites employees to send him a personal email in response – "telling him what's on their minds, giving him advice, agreeing or disagreeing with his points of view, or just staying connected to him." This is a hotlink to Ed's email address – and more importantly – it's an invitation for continued dialogue; it's not a mandate. On average, several hundred employees (60% unique, 40% repeat) act on this invitation and they send Ed an email about his newest blog topic. Ed then personally responds to each of these employees (not Ed's executive assistant or any member of his communications team, but Ed himself). Often Ed's response may be no more than a sentence or two. But we know from research that employees view this type of personal email from a senior leader -- and the access it represents -- as both a surprise and a "wow experience." People who experience a positive surprise will undoubtedly discuss it with others. In fact, our research suggests that on average a person will discuss a positive surprise with at least six other people. All of this means that Ed's B:log communicates key messages, creates opportunities for dialogue and personal exchange among employees and Ed, and provides the employee communications team with several different ways to measure impact and success.

Measurement Methodology
Our methodology needed to answer four basic questions to prove impact.
• Engagement: Are employees reading Ed's B:log?
• Retention: Are employees remembering what they are reading in Ed's B:log?
• Satisfaction: Are employees satisfied with Ed's B:log?
• Relevance: Are employees finding Ed's B:log meaningful?
To do so, we adapted best practices and insights from brand advertising, customer servicing, linguistics, and social media to identify and track key metrics for each question. This methodology also enabled us to set baselines and measure improvement over time.

Message Engagement: Given that Ed's B:log is built within American Express's corporate intranet, we are able to use click-thru rates to determine how many employees actually went online to read Ed's B:log. Gone are the days of sending a broadcast corporate memo and wondering how many employees actually ever read it. Now, we could measure readership of an individual blog and track adoption of the blog as a new communication strategy over time. We were also able to analyze click-thru rates by geography, business unit, and job level to help us improve our segmentation and targeting

efforts. Moreover, by comparing our click-thru rates to external benchmarks, we were able to assess our relative performance.

Message Retention: In advertising, unaided and aided awareness levels are well-established measurements to assess how likely an individual is to recall a brand or product. We adapted this methodology to assess employee awareness of Ed's B:log and their retention of its key messages. We periodically measured unaided and aided awareness through employee surveys. The results enabled us to know which messages were achieving break-thru for employees and where we needed to focus additional efforts to increase recall of key corporate messages. But as we know, awareness doesn't always mean action. We also went a step further. Similar to purchase intent in advertising, we created a metric for "willingness to act" – to gauge the likelihood that an employee would do, say, or try something different they were aware of a key message from Ed. Through employee surveys, interviews, and focus groups, we were able to measure what percent of the employee base changed their goals, their customer actions, and other behaviors to drive business performance. We were then able to correlate this "willingness to act" to actual business unit performance and customer feedback metrics.

Message Satisfaction: It's a widely accepted industry practice to use a 5-point Likert scale to assess customer satisfaction, we used a similar approach to understand how satisfied employees were with the blog. By comparing overall satisfaction, top 2-box and bottom 2-box scores collected from periodic surveys, we were able to identify areas for improvement. For example, if we saw a drop in satisfaction among employees in marketing, then we were able to advise Ed to dial-up or change his messaging to resonate more strongly with and for that employee segment.

Message Relevance: It's a given that the more relevant a message is to its audience, the more impact it will have. We measured message relevance word and theme resonance and circles of influence. In linguistics, word and theme resonance is a method of converting a body of text into a network of key words to help uncover themes, emotional states, and cognitive associations. Simply said, we first used Microsoft Excel, and then later, programmed subroutines, to complete textual analyses of responses to each blog. This gave us insight into the tone and depth of what employees were thinking and feeling. We calculated the ratio of negative to positive emotions so that we could assess how employee sentiment was changing over time. For example, we were able to compare employee sentiments at several critical points in time: October 2008 and March 2009. These analyses enabled us to detect clues for message enhancements, to identify emerging employee needs, and to help Ed tap into emotional hooks that would spur future response and dialogue. From the burgeoning field of social media, we know that connectivity (the number of connections an individual has within and across an online community) and social influence (respect and position within an online community) are two important metrics to understand the impact of word-of-mouth in a communications program. For Ed's B:log, we established a "circles of influence" metric to assess the overall impact of one-to-one email communications between Ed and employees. Particularly, our circles of influence metric calculated the leadership distance between Ed and the employee (e.g., band levels in reporting hierarchy) and the number of peers for

the employee. We used this to measure the number of incremental word-of-mouth conversations and leadership impressions among employees about Ed's B:log.

Evaluation of Success

Message Engagement: Ed's B:log has an average click-thru rate of 44% (an increase of 12% since launch.) On a relative basis, Ed's B:log far exceeds available external benchmarks of 21% and 15% for intranet based blogs at a global financial services firm and a global advertising firm respectively.

Message Retention: Unaided awareness and aided awareness levels were also high -- with 30% of employees naming Ed's B:log as a primary channel of communication on an unaided basis and 86% on an aided awareness basis. Key messages on average have 16% unaided awareness and 68% aided awareness. Again, on a relative basis when compared to a new product or brand launch, these awareness results are impressive. In terms of "willingness to act," we found that 65% of employees intended to take a different course of action (e.g., customer action, different goal, leadership action) based on their new awareness of a key message from Ed and 28% of those employees had already taken that action. This helped to prove the efficacy of our communications to Ed and his senior management team.

Message Satisfaction: 82% of employees were satisfied with Ed's B:log -- with 16% of employees expressing that they were "extremely or very" satisfied with Ed's B:log. Only 2% were detractors -- expressing their concern or dissatisfaction with Ed's B:log. We were also able to determine satisfaction by functional group (sales, marketing, operations), geography, band level, and gender. This segmentation of the results helped us to identify opportunities to increase satisfaction among some employee segments and to tap into other segments as highly satisfied advocates.

Message Relevance: By far the most outstanding result of Ed's B:log was the dialogue it created. On average per blog, a hundred employees sent Ed a direct email – to which Ed responded personally. Our word and theme resonance of responses showed an average ratio of 70% positive emotions to 20% negative emotions among employees. This analysis also showed the depth of employee sentiments. By comparing the occurrence of negative emotions expressed by employees in October 2008 to March 2009, we saw a decrease from 27% to 23%. This helped us to understand how Ed's messages were helping to restore employee positivism. Particularly, the analysis showed that although positivism was improving, some of the key words and trends were more intense and required more direct messaging from Ed in his blog. Measuring this type of pulse on employee sentiment enabled Ed to speak more directly to employee concerns and improve the relevance of his messages. As for our results in measuring circles of influence, we identified that on average Ed's email exchanges about his blogs were with employees who were five or more levels lower in band level than Ed and have 12 or more peers. Our measurement showed that employees were likely to mention a email exchange with Ed to at least 50% of their peers. This means that almost 12,000 employees to date have participated in a word-of-mouth conversation about Ed's B:log and his willingness

to communicate directly with employees. These conversations have translated into employees maintaining a high degree of trust in the company's leadership during unprecedented business conditions.

Contribution to Public Relations and Communications
Our measurement methodology helped to prove this impact and to enhance our employee communications. Through Ed's B:log, we have delivered outstanding employee engagement results and inspired a new richness of dialogue among employees and the vice chairman. Particularly, it is our hope that our progress in how to measure the relevance of social media in corporate environments, such as internal blogs, can help further innovation in the field of employee communications.