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## Souls of the Borg

*“[Corporations] cannot commit treason, nor be outlawed, nor excommunicate[d], for they have no souls.”*

—Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634)

**W**e live in a time when most people don't trust big companies. Headlines gush with tales of malfeasance, abuse, and old-fashioned plunder, but that's just part of the problem. There's a general perception that large companies are run by slick lawyers and book-fixing accountants who oversee armies of obedient, drone-like employees. Companies are perceived as monoliths without souls. In short, we see no humanity.

For a very long time, Microsoft has been among the first companies you think of when this picture is drawn. Often perceived as predatory and heartless, Microsoft has a reputation for ruthlessly rolling over competitors, wrestling in courtrooms against government prosecutors, and exposing its customers to security flaws and frustrating glitches. To see how people express their views on Microsoft, check it out with any search engine. When we conducted a Google search, “Evil Empire + Microsoft” brought up 471,000 responses. The words “Microsoft sucks” delivered a whopping 669,000 responses, and “Microsoft + Borg” generated more than a quarter-million returns.

In reality, Microsoft is not a monolith, but rather an organization composed of more than 56,000 individuals, most having little or no idea what sins were committed in the past, or by whom. A great many of these employees weren't

there at the time the controversies occurred, and if they were, they served too far down the ladder to be in on the secrets. And well-documented Microsoft product flaws may be amplified by the fact that just about everyone uses some Microsoft products. Still, the company unquestionably has been hurt by these dents in its reputation. Some talented people simply refuse to work there, and many of those who do work there admit that they have sometimes been demoralized by all the negativity.

In recent years, Microsoft has made serious efforts to improve its public image. Walter Mossberg, author of the influential *Wall Street Journal* Personal Technology column, observes:

*Since the end of the anti-trust trial, Microsoft has been on a massive charm offensive. It has methodically settled lawsuit after lawsuit with rivals and governments. It has reached out to all sorts of constituencies. [Chairman] Bill Gates himself has become calmer, less publicly combative, since leaving the CEO post. His charitable foundation has taken off in a very public way. And the company has allowed numerous employees to show a human face by blogging. All of this has improved their image.*

Our informal research bears this out as well. Wherever we've looked, we've found a recent diminution of animosity toward the company. Examining those Google results closely shows that recent negative articles and postings are on a downcurve. Publications are covering Microsoft from a more neutral standpoint, and respected magazines such as *Fortune* and *The Economist* have recently sung tunes of at least faint praise. In addition, product launches such as MSN Spaces (Microsoft's free blogging service) have been received with less general skepticism in the technical community.

Even the oft-demonized Gates seems to be enjoying slightly friendlier receptions. In late September 2004, the chairman addressed a half-dozen Silicon Valley venues and seemed more comfortable than during past visits. Media observers expressed surprise and even disappointment that most audience questions were polite. The few audience challenges addressed security flaws and Linux server issues rather than the usual ethical diatribes. Another anecdotal piece is that the five-year-old "Evil Empire Blog" shut down in January 2005. Its author maintained it was because mainstream media were covering the issue so well. Others noted the blog's readership was in decline.

Even Mitch Kapor, chairman of the Open Source Application Foundation (OSAF) and long outspoken in his distaste for Microsoft, seems to have mellowed. Speaking at a May 2004 conference, he told an interviewer, “Singing songs about the Evil Empire may still be fun, but they’re merely tunes for aging hippies.” Other long-time nemeses, such as Apple CEO Steve Jobs, Sun Microsystems co-founder Scott McNealy, and Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, for varying business and legal reasons, have collectively sat down and shut up.

In addition to such anecdotal evidence, Microsoft has hard evidence: surveys showing that customers are viewing the company in more trusting terms, according to a survey Microsoft conducted of visitors to its Channel 9 blog.

Press observers see a change in what they hear from readers as well. *PC Magazine* editor-in-chief Michael J. Miller told us, “I think many people, particularly in Silicon Valley, have softened their views towards Microsoft. There are probably a lot of reasons for this, including Microsoft’s larger presence in the Valley, more outreach to the industry, and the post-Internet bust economy.”

But a growing number of Microsoft-watchers and people at mid-level desks inside Microsoft think there’s another factor—blogging. And the people actually doing it are downright certain that they are making a difference.

## People, Not Borg

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XML team program manager Joshua Allen acknowledged there were many factors involved in the apparent shift in perception, but he felt that “Blogging unquestionably has had the most impact.” Allen was Microsoft’s first blogger. His current blog, *Better Living Through Software*,<sup>1</sup> began in 2000, at about the time the accusations and assaults against Microsoft were at an apex. Governments wanted to dismember the company, and an “Anything But Microsoft” movement was gaining momentum. He recalled a lot of internal angst at the time: “We were afraid to get out there and just talk with people. We were worried about getting the company in trouble with bad publicity.” Allen didn’t ask for permission from his superiors or Legal or PR. He just started posting to his blog because “I wanted to say that I am a Microsoft person and you can talk with me.”

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.netcrucible.com/blog/default.aspx>

“I knew better than to do something stupid in public and I thought I would make a good test case,” he recalled. Allen thought that if he started blogging, fellow employees might follow and “we’d show that we were real people, not the Borg.” He thought the company’s culture would be conducive to blogging. Like other Microsoft bloggers we interviewed, he cited CEO Steve Ballmer as consistently encouraging Microsoft employees to talk with customers whenever and wherever possible.

In less than a month, his boss received the first internal e-mail demanding Allen be fired. Such e-mails would continue regularly.

In time, a few associates close to Allen started blogging as well, then a few more. When the number reached about 15, Legal started worrying and muttering about risk. The bloggers, according to Allen, began walking on eggshells. “Everyone was worried someone would do something stupid and the whole thing would fall down. The legal people kept worrying and contemplating guidelines.”

As of March 2005, there were more than 1,500 active bloggers at Microsoft. “Legal is still worrying,” shrugged Allen, but “we haven’t had anyone do something so incredibly stupid that it required a blogging policy and none has ever been issued.”

While the legal folk fretted about risk, some customers waxed enthusiastic, many not even realizing they were visiting something called a blog. The customers were more interested in the two-way conversation that was taking place than in how it was happening. They were happy that a real person inside Microsoft was talking with them and was listening and responding.

The conversations begat more conversations. People like Dave Winer, father of blogging technology; Doc Searls, co-author of blogging’s bible *The Cluetrain Manifesto*; and Tim O’Reilly, founder and CEO of O’Reilly Media, all started pointing to Allen’s blog. The fact that a Microsoft guy was blogging was sufficiently newsworthy for Winer to point his readers to Allen five times in 2000. Allen recalled he got traffic just from people curious to see what the Evil Empire was up to. “Other bloggers would link, saying, ‘This is what the Borg is thinking,’” Allen said.

But Winer, long-considered one of Microsoft’s harshest critics, repeatedly asked why *more* people at Microsoft didn’t blog. Each time he asked, a few more people would start blogging. Allen felt that as numbers rose, it revealed a company of diverse individuals that was “more like herding cats than the

Borg. People could see for themselves that there were camps and trends within the company.”

Looking back, Allen said, “I think Microsoft has experienced a vast softening of its image. People, including journalists, have a lot more information about Microsoft now.” Perhaps more significant, he thinks, has been the impact on employee morale and the company’s ability to attract new talent.

But management remains far from unanimous on the benefits and liabilities of employee blogging, and it may turn out that the lack of a blogging policy may prolong ambivalence. While some senior executives advocate actions that would get bloggers to sit down and shut up, other executives protect the backs of the bloggers and encourage them. Although Chairman Bill Gates may have issued no internal dictums, he is on the record as seeing the value and inevitability of business blogging. In September 2005 he thanked co-author Scoble for blogging and his work on Channel 9. “You are letting people have a sense of the people here. You’re building a connection. People feel more a part of this. Maybe they’ll tell us how we can better improve our products,” Gates said during an exclusive interview.

Tony Perkins, CEO and publisher of *AlwaysOn*, the *blogazine of innovation*, reported in the hard copy version of *AlwaysOn* on comments Gates made at dinner in the chairman’s Lake Washington home in Seattle. According to Perkins, Gates commented that “Blogging makes it very easy to communicate. It gets away from drawbacks of e-mail and the drawbacks of a web site. Eventually, most businesses will use blogs to communicate with customers, suppliers, and employees, because it’s two-way and more satisfying.”

Perkins added, “Gates knows that the referral power of the blogosphere is also exploding, and marketing and PR executives must embrace this reality or risk losing control of their messages.” Both Gates’s comment to Perkins and Scoble seem to indicate that Gates is not contemplating a blogging shutdown or questioning its strategic value.

Allen politely implies a narrow view in the company’s anti-blogging constituency: “Personally, I think [Microsoft’s blogging opponents] are well-intentioned, but they worry too much and they underestimate the power of word of mouth.”

What does Microsoft’s experience have to teach other businesses? According to Allen, “Your whole company won’t collapse if you do this and your customers will love you.”

## Gates in the Way

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Lenn Pryor joined Microsoft impressed with the company's technology accomplishments. When he came on board in 1998, as a tech evangelist he hadn't realized the full scope of the company's worldwide unpopularity.

"The first thing I learned when I visited customers was that people were not always happy to see you," he said. "What got in the way of my relationships was the fact that I worked for Microsoft. The two people who represented the company—Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer—got in my way." He felt he had been painted into the corner by being associated with "two of the wealthiest people on the planet."

Pryor would have this recurring experience. He'd go out to dinner with a customer. They'd be having a pleasant enough time; then the customer would become quiet and pensive for a while, then blurt out: "You know, Lenn, I'm really surprised that you're such a nice guy. I didn't expect you to be." Pryor would ask, "Well, why not?" And the customer would say, "Because you're Microsoft and Microsoft is fundamentally evil. You just don't seem evil, so you're either really good at concealing it or I've read you guys wrong."

These experiences bothered Pryor. Because he represented Microsoft, customers seemed certain he could not be trusted. He stewed over this dilemma for years.

A brief interlude in Microsoft hating occurred for one week every two years in the form of Microsoft's Professional Developer's Conference (PDC). Around 6,000 developers would mingle with 2,000 Microsoft people. They'd see previews of new technology, share ideas, eat pizza, drink, joke, show each other family photos, and generally bond. "We were actually everyone's friend. We became human in our customers' eyes and they became human in ours. All the misconceptions went away," recalled Pryor.

But when the event ended, so did the magic. Pryor knew that unless he thought of some way to sustain the good feelings, they would dissipate: "We'd be Microsoft again, the evil guys." It had been a long week. He had an emotional hangover and drove home with a cold. A few days later, he was taking a long shower to shake off a Nyquil-induced haze. That's when the epiphany hit him.

At PDC, there had been a human connection. Microsoft employees saw and heard the customers as more than just statistics, and customers saw Microsoft representatives as real people. If Pryor could somehow bring this humanizing factor into everyday life, Microsoft's customer relationships might forever

change. What Microsoft needed, Pryor realized, was some form of open channel that would humanize Microsoft, a daunting challenge if ever there was one. Maybe, Pryor thought, he could create a form of reality TV inside Microsoft that he could distribute to people using the Internet. He'd bring a camera inside Microsoft to show the developers and tech gurus exactly as they are, when and where they work. He would keep the footage raw, with no editing, no marketing polish, and certainly no slick commentator in a suit with a suntan.

This idea had been kicking around Microsoft for a while. Now, it would become Channel 9, the quirky, impromptu video blog—and the only official company blog. The name is derived from the United Airlines (UA) open audio channel, on which passengers can listen to pilots during take-offs, flights, and landings. Pryor knew it well, because *that* Channel 9 had helped cure him of his fear of flying: “I had this terrible relationship with United Airlines and its product. I was scared to death of their product even though I had to use it for business and no one was doing anything about making me feel better about them or their product. Sound familiar?” Pryor asked, smiling impishly at his own metaphor. Pryor said he cured his fear of flying by learning about the life of a pilot: “The more I could understand him, the more I could feel that his best interests were my best interests. I don't think there's any better way to describe how people feel about Microsoft than how people feel who are afraid to fly.”

Microsoft, Pryor and the Channel 9 team decided, should build its own Channel 9. His idea was to “just share our lives with people and then they'll see we're human and they'll trust us.” He envisioned that Channel 9 would redefine evangelism. Historically, evangelists have extolled the virtues of their company products by spreading the word about features and benefits. Pryor wanted to shift the focus from products to relationships.

Pryor and co-worker Jeff Sandquist presented this idea to their boss, Vic Gundotra, general manager for Platform Evangelism, who thought the idea of having some guy walking around with a video camera filming people in hallways and cubicles and having them talk about their jobs and their lives sounded a bit crazy. But he liked the idea and told them to go for it. They agreed the project should start low-key, certainly without marketing hoopla. They also knew there would be people at Microsoft who would oppose it. Gundotra would provide the air cover and his significant support.

Pryor would have to re-jigger his team. There was this guy, Robert Scoble, a relatively new hire who hadn't quite found his place at Microsoft yet. Pryor

had known Scoble previously. Winer had been Scoble's mentor and boss at Winer's UserLand a couple of years earlier. A prolific, passionate, and perhaps fanatical blogger, Scoble was posting up to 50 times a night on his personal Scobleizer<sup>2</sup> site.

Before going to Redmond, Scoble had been NEC's evangelist for the tablet PC. In that role, he had attended a developer's conference where he publicly advised Ballmer to "give Microsoft a more human face." (Ballmer rewarded the idea with an autographed dollar.) When NEC first shipped its acclaimed tablet PC, Scoble made certain two people in Redmond each got one of the first units to ship. One was Gates. The other was Gundotra, who would eventually hire him.

Scoble wasn't your typical Microsoft kind of guy, certainly not one you'd expect to find in the front office. Said Pryor, "Robert lets his flaws hang out on his sleeve. He's curious like a child and it's hard not to like and trust him." Scoble had already started his "Scobleizer," which was often critical of Microsoft, but Pryor noticed that while most Microsoft critics tried to climb up and get in your face, "Robert always came across in a way that made me want to listen. He'd say, 'You guys did something wrong. Let me tell you why it hurt me and why it hurts you and why I think you can do better.' Robert tells you a lot about himself. He puts himself on the line. He delivers criticism from his heart."

In fact, Pryor had first discussed the concept of bringing a video camera inside Microsoft the previous March, when Gundotra was recruiting Scoble away from NEC and into Microsoft. Gundotra had invited Scoble to a Sonics basketball game where Michael Jordan would make his last uniformed Seattle appearance. Turns out that Gundotra couldn't make the game, so at the last minute he asked Pryor to stand in for him. After Jordan's courtside introduction, the two never again glanced at the playing floor. Instead, they spent three hours brainstorming and germinating the video concept. Neither recalls who won the game, but both left feeling certain that, if the idea ever became a reality, Scoble would be the right guy to put behind the camera.

Scoble joined Microsoft shortly after that, but the video idea remained dormant until Pryor's shower stall revelation. Scoble became a Microsoft evangelist, and blogged at home every night. Six months passed before Pryor had his shower epiphany that the Microsoft video blog would emulate Channel 9. When he and Sandquist pitched Gundotra, Gundotra told them to make Scoble the interviewer.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scobleizer.com>

The team, which also consisted of two developers, Bryn Waibel and Charles Torre, and program manager Sandquist, envisioned a hybrid, real-time format, rich in communication and very two-way, with the audience's voice being as relevant as the video itself. Channel 9 would encourage real conversation, not just drive-by stuff, where people hurled inflammatory comments and moved on. "In my mind," Pryor recalled, "Microsoft could *start* the conversation, but it wouldn't work if Microsoft *controlled* the conversation."

Channel 9 began as a standard text blog. Pryor recalled, "I wanted everyone to have a face on the site, to eliminate anonymity. The video came soon after, with Scoble's voice being heard asking people about their jobs and projects. The viewers never saw Scoble, but they would hear him mutter an occasional 'Oh crap,' as he inadvertently walked into a wall he didn't see because he was looking through the lens. A Forum section allowed developers to debate issues of all sorts. A collaborative system called a wiki was added to let people inside and outside Microsoft work together on software. "We showed who we are and where we work. We said: 'Come look inside and see and hear our people, hear our thoughts and passions.'" And people did—approximately 2.5 million of them in the first six months.

When asked about the risk involved in a project as visible and open as Channel 9, Gundotra said the project was about increasing transparency, which "is not high risk unless you have something to hide." He thought Channel 9 would accurately portray "a bunch of optimistic geeks who think we can change the world for the better through the power of software. I didn't *agree* to do Channel 9—I was driving the creation, funding, and hiring of the team."

Said Pryor, "We used Channel 9 as a way to respond to customers. If people wanted to know something, we put up a video about it. If there was a new product coming out, we put up a video. We started responding to issues in real time. This was not a documentary. This was a new approach—an interactive video of real people talking about their work with customers."

Channel 9 has been generally recognized as among the most innovative forms of blogging or, for that matter, corporate communications. It was the first corporate video blog. It was the first to put the words and faces of customers on the front page, thus creating a form of "equal time" for those who either praise or admonish Microsoft. It was also the first to use wikis to allow a product team to collaborate with customers to improve products and upgrades. It uses RSS, the technology that enables syndication, on every page and was the first full corporate site to do so.

It's open to speculation how Channel 9 will evolve. The Channel 9 conversation strayed one time from its usual technocentric bastion into politics. While some were concerned that Microsoft had lost control of the conversation, Pryor was elated. The conversational shift indicated that Channel 9 was no longer about Microsoft: "It's about the community. Maybe the future of this site is to turn the Channel 9 keys back to the community."

Although Pryor's background is in marketing, he eschews data mining and sees no value in surveys. But he does admit the company has data that shows Channel 9 has shifted perceptions of Microsoft from the negative to positive in less than six months. "There's no doubt we've moved the needle," he said, adding with apparent pride, "and we did it without so much as a press release."

Pryor expresses faith in the anecdotal evidence that perceptions of Microsoft have moved from a net negative to a net positive. He noted that blog polling site Technorati<sup>3</sup> reported nearly 1,300 other blogs linking to Channel 9 and that PubSub<sup>4</sup> rated Channel 9 in March 2005 at 5,877th of more than 8.5 million sites tracked at that time.

## But Where's the ROI?

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Pryor admitted that management support for blogging is "far from unanimous." On one hand, there's Scoble and a steadily increasing number of blogging employees, building what they call a "trust network" while simultaneously generating a steady flow of favorable media coverage. On the other, there are people whose job it is to reduce risk and control corporate message. Finally, there are those who believe in nothing that does not have a business model showing a return on investment (ROI) as a direct result of an effort.

But a great number of the people inside think the risk is paying off. They feel it in their everyday lives. "Today, Microsoft is building relationships, while six months ago we were losing them," Pryor stated flatly.

Still, he conceded that someday Scoble or another prominent blogger could stomp on the wrong foot and get himself fired: "If Robert goes, it will suck, but it's not about one guy anymore. You can't put the genie back in the bottle again. Once you establish that this is how you're going to communicate with customers, you cannot go back to the way it was."

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.technorati.com>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pubsub.com>

Pryor, who has since left the company, noted that bloggers have to respect the established turf. For example, bloggers almost never break hard news at Microsoft, nor do they launch products, although sometimes they've posted within minutes after an official announcement. But most day-to-day blogging focuses on supplementing information for customers. "Our job is not to be the place for the *New York Times* to find scoops." Still, he maintains, blogging gets good ink and lots of it, so it has to be good for attracting and retaining customers.

But the question that lingered in most people's minds: What about Gates and Ballmer? Gates gave tacit endorsement to blogging in his interviews with Scoble and Perkins in *AlwaysOn*. But then Ballmer's position became clear on July 7, 2005, during another exclusive interview with Scoble on Channel 9, when Scoble asked his CEO why he allowed blogging to happen at Microsoft.

"In the world of developers I don't think it would have mattered if I wanted to allow blogging to happen or not," Ballmer replied. "But I think it's been a great way for us to communicate to our customers—and for our customers, more importantly, to communicate with us. We trust our people to represent our company. That's what they are paid to do. If they didn't want to be here, they wouldn't be here. So in a sense you don't run any more risk letting someone express themselves on a blog than you do letting them go out and see a customer on their own. It just touches more people. Hey, if people need to be trained, we can do that, but I find that blogging is just a great way to have customer communications."

Sounds pretty definitive to us.

## Diversity and Fan Clubs

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Microsoft bloggers and their styles, topics, and frequency of postings are highly diverse. The number of visitors to a Microsoft blogger's site ranges from fewer than 10 per day to more than 10,000. Yet each links into the blogosphere, where each will be heard by those interested in the topic covered.

While Scoble may be Microsoft's best-known blogger, others have their admirers. Betsy Aoki, a community program manager, has a blog that has inspired a fan club.<sup>5</sup> When she investigated, she discovered it had only one member—Phil Weber, who wrote about Aoki with great admiration bordering on reverence. When they eventually met, Aoki thought it was an awkward

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.philweber.com/2004/07/08.htm>

encounter and that Weber would go away disappointed. But he didn't and he continues to be the leader of her fan club, which has since tripled to three members. We found abundant anecdotes like this in the business section of the blogosphere and find them indicative of how blogging puts a human face on companies.

Aoki's job is to keep the company's employee blogs running and to help employees blog effectively. "People come to me in varying states of blog readiness. They recognize blogging's power and the importance of the admonition 'blog smart.'" If there is a Microsoft blogging policy, it would be those two words: "Blog Smart." Employees sense that the longer they can keep an open blogging policy, the more unlikely it will be shut down. They argue that by blogging, they have an important competitive advantage over companies that don't allow it, such as Apple Computer.

Said Aoki, "Customer complaints go straight to my inbox. They get responses. I exchange tons of e-mail, so customers [see that] they have an impact. You also see you have an impact yourself. You blog and someone comments. It makes your work at Microsoft much more ground level." She said her blog "is where I get to hear from other people and [this] lets me feel real about my job."

Aoki shared the view that businesses of all sizes and in all fields will have little choice but to blog moving forward: "First there were phone books, then web sites and [businesses] know that if they don't have [one], it works to their disadvantage. Blogs are just the next logical step."

Mike Torres is a lead program manager for MSN Spaces, Microsoft's highly consumerized blog authoring toolset, which garnered 10 million downloads before it was a half-year old. He said he used search services such as Technorati, Feedster, and PubSub to quickly find and respond to any comments for or against MSN Spaces. "It stops the rants," he said. "A lot of times when you do that, there's a 'Sorry—I didn't know you were listening' reply. One guy posted, 'Big retraction: I was wrong.' What happens is that if they know you're in the conversation, people get respectful. They may still criticize you, but they don't lie."

MSN Spaces has grassroots supporters. Torres said readers become self-appointed service advocates, posting tutorials and defenses for Spaces. Torres caused a minor stir early on when he posted "5 Things I Dislike about MSN Spaces"<sup>6</sup> to his personal blog: "Here was a member of the team ranting in

<sup>6</sup> [http://spaces.msn.com/members/mike/Blog/cns!1pG4qKNdtRA5Nl-UhvZI\\_1rQ!940.entry](http://spaces.msn.com/members/mike/Blog/cns!1pG4qKNdtRA5Nl-UhvZI_1rQ!940.entry)

public about how the product could be better. It showed that we don't just ship and walk away."

## Blogging for Recruits

Almost every Microsoft blogger we interviewed pointed to blogging's advantages as a recruiting tool. There are two HR blogs giving advice on applying to Microsoft and demystifying the process. For Channel 9 Scoble toted his camera around to show applicants what a typical recruiting day looked like. He even interviewed the shuttle bus driver.

Kim Cameron, in charge of Microsoft's identity strategy, sees blogging as improving cooperation inside the global organization, where one hand has at times been known to be oblivious to the other's activities. He said, "Blogging creates discussions with people from other teams who are building complementary or potentially competing technologies."

Blogging seems to be accelerating the rate of change at Microsoft. It was a game of inches gained slowly back in 1999 when Allen became the first Microsoft blogger. Today, the rate of new bloggers at the company and the number of posts increase daily. The bloggers are swimming up the corporate stream. Steven Sinofsky,<sup>7</sup> the vice president who oversees Office, started a blog, making him by title, the senior ranking blogger. The longer blogging is allowed to continue, the safer it seems in contrast to the lonely days that surrounded Allen when he first started. And, as Aoki observed, "now the more cautious people are stepping up."

So, ultimately, what does all this mean to Redmond? Do we mean to imply that employee-bloggers have persuaded the world to love Microsoft? Don't be silly. That day is still far off. And there is that nagging security issue. Observes the *Wall Street Journal's* influential Mossberg:

*Just as things were looking up for the company, a serious crisis hit the Windows world—the seemingly unstoppable plague of viruses, spyware and other security threats. Tens of millions of Microsoft customers, especially consumers and small businesses without IT staffs, have been hammered by the security mess, which has cost time, money and, too often, lost data and*

<sup>7</sup> <http://blogs.msdn.com/techtalk>

*productivity. Many are furious at Redmond for failing to protect them, for allowing its software to be so easily compromised. The company is responding with security initiatives and may eventually win back the trust of consumers. But, until then, I believe the security crisis has undone much of the good Microsoft did in improving its image—at least in the mainstream community, where most people don't read technology-oriented blogs or attend technology conferences or post their feelings on web pages that Google can search.*

This security issue, and a wildfire started by an open-source, free Internet browser named Firefox and most recently a hailstorm of innovative announcements from Google, which has emerged as its most threatening competitor, means the once-unstoppable software giant still has speed bumps in its road ahead, some of them significant. But the people we spoke with, who were generally at the middle of the company, are convinced that Microsoft has moved the needle toward humanizing a company so recently likened to the Borg. As Gundotra said, blogging has “allowed people to see who we really are. People know us through the lens of our employees.”

Our point is this: If blogging can do all this for Microsoft, think of what it can do for your company.