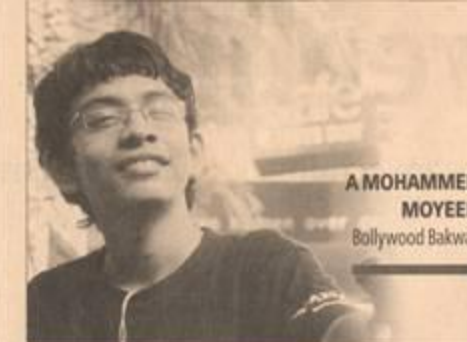




Pratik Mhatre
Nerve Endings
Firing Away



Maya Patel
Travelpod/
members/mayii



A MOHAMMED
MOYEEN
Bollywood Bakwas



ALAKA
YERAVADEKAR
alakaline.blogspot.com

The show without tickets

Hobby blogs, if managed well, can make you famous, spinning off real and virtual benefits
Jyoti Verma

IT'S eight in the evening, and Ganesh S is back to his hobby: number crunching. "In the season of IPOs, there is so much one has to do. Every day, after office, I spend four hours on my blog. Then there are the 10,000 regular visitors, who wait for me to answer their investment queries," says Ganesh, Sensex guru and the brain behind rupya.com. In his real life, he is an IT professional with a telecom company in Chennai.

Well, for those who prefer movies to stocks on a Sunday morning, Bollywoodbakwas.com is where you can find your kind of masala: juicy gossip and updates on Bollywood. The one-year-old Bollywood blog is one of the most visited blogs (around 2,500-3,000 hits daily, with around 500 people voting and companies placing advertisements fetching the blogger a few dollars) now. "Today, your blog, if packaged well, can make you earn a few hits, nice comments, advertisements and dollars, besides the usual recognition. All these when blogging is still a hobby," says blog guru Kiruba Shankar, CEO, Business Blogging Pvt Ltd.

There's much more that blogs talk about today. They are being used as online galleries by amateur painters, who send their paintings to those interested through a daily mailer. The blogs also let people bid for their paintings and invite sponsors. The same applies to music blogs, where one is allowed to listen to a tune or symphony and post comments. Internationally, companies track these blogs to find new talent. In India, however, they are just warming up to the concept. The usual hobby blogs, whether photography, creative writing, poetry, music, parenting, travel, painting, et al, are fetching the bloggers benefits they never imagined.

Though not getting the cash, software professional Maya Patel's travel blog has made her an achiever too. Today, when she googles her name, it leads her to the weekly section of a well-known Indian daily. "It is actually the interview I gave after the paper traced me through my blog. They were looking for details of some adventure sport I indulged in on my trip to Malaysia," she says.

The writing skills of US-based academician Pratik Mhatre (blog Nerve Endings Firing Away) have fetched him an offer to contribute to main-



stream publications like Tehelka back home. Sound engineer and musician Nihit Gupta's entry on MySpace is more professional. Today, his regular uploads are helping him get better at his passion. He is getting to know more about electronic music and interacting with other musicians through it. "I don't care whether my section is checked by Indians, or whether I am successful in the country." Rather, it is the high of being part of the virtual, but serious group of electronic musicians that has helped him hone his skills better. "Today, the comments I get are serious. There are no frills," says the 29-year-old, very clear about the benefits blogging has brought him.

The same applies to Alok Shukla, a photo blog-

ger settled in Dubai. Launching his blog last March, today his uploads have made him a seasoned shutterbug. Then there's the mother behind blogspot themadmomma. "Blogging is something that has originated from my love for parenting. I don't want a job to kill my interest. Today, I spend the time I want on the blog. I am my own boss," says the lady who has spurned offers to host parenting shows. Running a poetry blog, Alaka Yeravadekar, a cost accountant and writer based in Pune, has already acquired a set of fans. In terms of benefits, she looks forward to seeing her words in print in bookshops and in people's homes some day. "Otherwise, what is the measure of success for a poet or a writer? To be able to move, inspire others, bring joy,

make them think, present a different view of the world. I think through my blog, I have done that," says the blogger.

Corporates too are logging onto blogs to recognize the best hands and minds. Sulekha.com, through its contest Blog Print this March helped bloggers with the opportunity of getting their works published in print. "We have successfully taken the contest to over six newspapers and magazines in the last six months, with each publication offering the blogger a platform to showcase one genre of his writing. The marquee project of all these is the one on Penguin books, where 25 of the best blogs on Sulekha will be published in a Penguin book and marketed and distributed across the world. Each winner gets a cash prize from Sulekha, apart from getting their writing published," says Satya Prabhakar, CEO, Sulekha.com.

Sachin Bhatia has something to share too. "We at MakeMyTrip spawned an online travel community, a non-commercial venture, called oktatabyebye.com that is a meeting ground for travel enthusiasts who want to share travel stories, pictures, reviews of destinations and hotels, etc. We launched the portal with India's first online reality

Today the comments I get on my music blog are very serious. There are no frills

NIHIT GUPTA
MySpace/psychologixxx

show where one chosen person (among 10,000 applied!) was given Rs 50,000 to cover seven destinations in 15 days and 'blog the whole journey live," says the co-founder and CMO, oktatabyebye.com.

With companies passing on some benefits, blogger Amit Verma is gearing himself up for challenges. "My plan is to take the blogging technology to college students in small cities. I would also like to go against companies that have made blogging as earning machines or dating joints. Our team of techies are working on this and will come up with something interesting in March next year," he says.

With hobbies taking on a social slant, society too can expect to download some real benefits. Amen!

Blogs are not just about uploading photos and giving vent to your emotions. It's also about downloading benefits, whether it is free publicity or job offers

