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Beware the Flog

by Ivy Hastings

As the popularity of blogs has grown, especially in the context of [search engine marketing \(SEM\)](#), some advertisers thought they'd be clever and launch fake blogs (flogs) to promote their products. Users quickly find out that these blogs are staged attempts by advertising agencies to create positive viral buzz about their products, but more often than not, these shady tactics have the opposite effect.

Take Wal-mart for example. Wal-mart's ad agency decided it would be a good idea to launch a blog tracking a couple traveling across the United States. At each stop, they raved about the Wal-marts they had visited. Problem was, they were hired writers who were being paid to praise Wal-mart.

Soon after the flog launched the jig was up. Suspicious users (because what smart user is not suspicious about what they read on the Web?) figured out quickly that it was all a sham. The result was obviously a massive amount of negative PR for Wal-mart.

So what can we as online marketers learn from Wal-mart's fiasco? Simple. The worst thing you can do on the Web is try to trick users. Instead of helping your cause, you'll lose customers forever, fulfilling an advertiser's worst nightmare. It seems simple, but surprisingly, many companies keep thinking they can pull a fast one on us. Soon, however, the game runs out and they look foolish for their attempts to influence us with less than factual accounts.

So before you decide to be sneaky and clever, think twice about launching a flog. Your users will find you out no matter what measures you take to cover up the scam. Instead, do like Target does and allow users to rate products. If you're putting out a great product, users will do your PR for you, by rating your products positively, and then telling two friends and so on and so on and so on. That's viral marketing at its very essence.

Ivy Hastings is a Project Manager at Fusionbox, a full-service [Denver interactive agency](#) specializing in [web design](#), development, and [search engine marketing](#). A graduate of UC Berkeley, Ivy has published many articles about Internet Marketing and Web Design and Development Best Practices. She currently sits on the Board of Directors for Arts Street, a local non-profit that teaches at-risk youth the craft and business of the Arts. Ivy can be reached at her Fusionbox email: ihastings@fusionbox.com or at 303.952.7490.