Some thoughts about comments

Right off the bat let me say I think having open but moderated comments on websites and blogs is the way to go. In the past year, several leading blogs have decided to go the no-comment route, arguing that discussions will occur on social media. That's fine, but part of having a blog is being social, and to me, social means allowing comments.

This morning I read this piece on consumer advocate Christopher Elliot's site, in which he describes how he will deal with comments (especially snarky or inappropriate ones). Basically, his team (don't we all wish we had a team, but I digress) will moderate all comments and flag inappropriate ones. If someone is flagged, he/she will be informed and eventually be disallowed from commenting on the site. Seems very fair to me.

Yesterday, Mark Schaefer on his {grow} blog wrote a post entitled "I don't know my online audience and neither do you." His point, with which I most definitely agree, is that you can't rely on social media actions and presence to really know who your audience is. There are many customers and potential customers who are just not active on social media, but may be actively doing business or thinking of doing business with you. They may be talking about you (gasp!) in person or emailing (gasp!) links but (the idea of it!) not sharing on social media. He says we can only identify about two percent of who it is that is sharing our content.

He writes:

> *Pick any blogger who has been around for awhile (SIC) and ask them what percent of their audience comments on the blog – they'll say it is about 2 percent.*

Basically, the issue of commenting boils down to motivation.

Only very motivated people are going to comment on your blog. In Elliot’s case, many of those are motivated by a desire to be unpleasant or controversial. In Schaefer’s example, only a small percentage of a total audience takes the step of commenting.

It’s important to recognize that all a comment indicates is that a motivated person has decided to interact with you on your blog (whether for good or for bad). By allowing it, you are encouraging interaction. By moderating comments, you are encouraging good behavior. By depending on getting comments, on the other hand, you are falling into a perceived popularity trap.

A blog won’t rise or fall on the number of comments that are on it, but rather on the actions that you want readers to take. Perhaps you want your readers to think about doing business with you. Or perhaps you want readers to think of you as an authority in a subject area. Whatever your goal is, try to figure out how to measure it. Your comments alone won’t do it.

You are, of course, welcome to comment on this subject.

UPDATE February 9, 2015:

Just came across this article, about Tablet Magazine, and a trial scheme to ask people to pay to comment. Should cut down on the crazy comments, but could also backfire by creating an obstacle to legitimate commenters.