

**Digital IBMer:  
IBM 'server chick' Elisabeth Stahl uses social media to set the record straight**

(Long form article written for an executive byline)

By Elisabeth Stahl

I knew that it was a sign that I'd come into my own in the world of social media when I had one of the most well known storage bloggers external to IBM comment on a post of mine, and refer to me as a "server chick." It might not have flattered some, but for me it affirmed that I was having a growing and positive impact on how people viewed IBM's products and capabilities.

As chief technical strategist and executive IT specialist, I focus on systems performance and benchmarking across IBM platforms for the Systems and Technology Group. Basically, I make sure we highlight how great our servers and storage perform, so we can let our clients know that our products are really the ones they should be looking at, and the ones they should buy.

From papers to blogs and tweets

Before social media, I would write "one-way" technical papers as my primary means of communication to clients. But as the competition increased and the use of social media in business blossomed, I realized that I needed another outlet to tell the IBM story.

And now there's probably not a day that goes by that I'm not writing a blog entry, a paper, even a tweet, because of social networking. It all started when my manager came back from a conference and said "I have a crazy idea." He asked if I ever thought about doing a blog. And I thought, yeah that is a crazy idea.

At the same time, I was starting to get very tired of our competitors saying things about IBM in their press releases and their blogs that just weren't true. So I looked into creating my own blog as a fast and more immediate way of setting the record straight. But, there were some bumps in the road.

First, despite having published some technical papers, I didn't like to write - one of the main reasons I chose math as my college major. Second, I wasn't quite sure how much time blogging would take away from accomplishing my day-to-day responsibilities. Third, I was also a bit nervous about writing for such a broad global audience, especially outside of the IBM firewall.

Knowing and following the IBM Social Computing Guidelines as well as the IBM Business Conduct Guidelines gave me the security net I needed to take the leap and begin blogging. IBM's Social Business@IBM and Expertise Locator web site and programs helped me get started in defining and developing my social presence - and deciding which social media channels to use.

*Stahl, p. 2*

My first blog entry was read by two people, primarily because I asked them to. Now, my entries are being read by hundreds as my contacts and social eminence have grown. I've developed new relationships worldwide with clients, with business partners and with IT analysts. Some are as far away as Nigeria and remote parts of China.

I'm also building a Twitter following. I tweet any item - a paper or an article - that I think might be of interest to my followers. And not what I've had for breakfast.

### **Building a reputation as a SME**

Not only am I convinced that my efforts are contributing to IBM's bottom line, but equally important, my own reputation as a subject matter expert, internally and externally. This has been a personal and professional bonus for me.

Here's advice for getting started:

- Make sure you understand the responsibilities that come with being an IBM blogger. Think about what it means to speak "on behalf of IBM." Always check IBM's Social Computing Guidelines when in doubt.
- Just do it! But make sure to take advantage of the resources available. The "Social Business@ IBM" Web site mentioned above, with its core education offerings, is a particularly good place to start. It's also important in the beginning to ask others for advice - that really gave me more confidence to take the first step.
- Realize it takes time. I remember the pressure I put on myself in the beginning to do a certain number of blog entries, for instance a couple of times a week, which I think is still a good idea when first establishing a presence. But now, I only blog when there's really something good to write about and I feel passionate about the subject.
- Be factual, honest and engaging. Your reputation is your brand. I ask myself three questions before posting an article: What would my clients say when reading this? What would my manager say when reading this? What would my mother say when reading this?

I've really come to love the writing. I love working with social media, telling a story and especially interacting externally with clients.

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