

## [PR Primer: Chef Blogs For Fun And Profit](#)



I love [Lockwood](#) chef Phillip Foss's blog. Have I mentioned that before? I have probably mentioned it. Well now I am going to have to reset my RSS reader, because it's moved [to a new location](#), where it is much prettier and feels much more professional and, it must be noted, fills me with happiness by linking to MP Chicago in the sidebar.

As with all instances of change, this is an excellent opportunity for reflection. Reading Mike Gebert's [recent discussion](#) of brand-building in new media got me thinking, and the more I think about it the more I'm sure. Restaurateurs and PR people, take note: **Phillip Foss' blog is a phenomenal example of how to use the internet for good.**

Foss starting a blog thrust him — and Lockwood — into the somewhat rarefied club of internet-savvy chefs, all few of whom seem to follow the model set forth by [L.2O's](#) Laurent Gras: A picture of a plated dish, captioned by an entry that dissects its component ingredients, techniques, and origin story. But unlike the [L2O blog](#) (which is as restrained, formal, and beautiful as the restaurant itself) or Duffy's [blog](#) (which is updated with minimal frequency, and even less soul), Foss has been running roughshod over topics all over the map.

When MP Chicago discovered Foss's blog (thanks to my perhaps overly comprehensive set of Google alerts), I got really excited and [posted about it](#). I posted about it [a lot](#) — and the MenuPages posts often got [reblogged elsewhere](#).

It would be very easy for a restaurant PR person reading this to think "oh, it's easy, all I have to do now to get my client in good with the foodbloggers is set him up with a Typepad account and have him write some shit down." Please don't think that. This is where we turn back to Gebert's assessment of how to make a good viral video, which applies just as much to how to make a good chefblog:

Not to get all Seth Godin or Jeff Jarvis here, but it's really a textbook example of the old versus the new media playbook. Here's their tactical approach to getting viewers in a few Powerpoint-style bullets:

- Existing brand name
- Built-in subscriber base
- Magazine-style subject with proven audience appeal (how to videos with name chefs)

And they get a couple of hundred views. I have no name, no built-in base... But what I do have is:

- Personal approach that makes my stuff feel like it comes from a real person
- The determination to go out and schmooze for links all over the landscape (which paid off hugely this time)
- "Sticky" subjects (that is, the kind of subjects where you feel like telling somebody "Hey, check this out!" and putting it up on your site)

He's absolutely right — especially about the "personal approach" part. The L2O blog is interesting, but it feels like it was written by a robot. A brilliant, French robot, to be sure. But a robot nonetheless.

Additionally, though, keep this in mind: When people (like, say, my parents) ask me to explain this whole "blog" thing to them, I tell them that there are two reasons that someone will read a blog. The first is information: If you are the only source of information on a subject, people will read it no matter how bad your writing is. The second is style: If you're writing the same sort of stuff that other people are writing, people will read you if you say it better (or differently) than the rest of the herd.

Besides being personal in his writing and interacting with his readers (he's been known to [comment](#) on here once or twice), Foss also has both those two hooks down: He tells us what *really* goes on in the mind of a chef — for example, it is effing *frustrating* when Thomas Keller [beats him to the punch](#) on naming a dish. But he also tells us this stuff in a voice that feels human — relatable, crass, fallible, fun to hang out with.

Despite the fact that Lockwood (in the Palmer House Hilton) has a reputation for being kind of a stodgy, old-people-esque restaurant, Foss's uninhibited culinary musings (often [wildly profane](#)) and straight-talk discussions of the inspirations and origins of each dish are fun and interesting. Foss's writing is extremely human, extremely approachable, and — perhaps most importantly — his blog felt like *his blog*, not like step seven of a focus-grouped corporate marketing checklist.

Foss's unique voice serves to raise the restaurant's profile — and, for that matter, its cool factor — among bloggers. On Google Blogsearch, the phrase "Phillip Foss" appears 32 times between January 1, 2000 and September 1, 2008. The FossBlog was launched on September 2nd, and from then through today — not including this post — "Phillip Foss" gets **29** hits. This not even taking into account the fact that I persistently spell his name wrong, thus screwing up search results.

Plus there was the ultimate coup: the editors at *Time Out Chicago* [included](#) Foss in their "Night of the Round Table," a discussion of the triumvirate relationship among chefs, bloggers, and reviewers that resonated throughout the blogosphere. Foss wasn't included because he's a chef at a fancy restaurant — he was included because he's a chef at a fancy restaurant *who blogs*. Not just that — a chef who blogs really freaking well.

[The Pickled Tongue \(the new FossBlog\)](#) [Official Site]

[Five-Figure Media](#) [Sky Full of Bacon]

[Lockwood](#) [MenuPages]

[Lockwood](#) [Official Site]

[Photo via The Pickled Tongue]

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