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## On Business, and Blogging on the Road

By [CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT](#)

Hurricane Katrina was a defining moment for Rachel Gradwohl, a frequent business traveler. A consultant for a national accounting firm, Ms. Gradwohl blogged about being made homeless by the disaster in her Web journal, the Princess Diaries ([www.princess674.blogspot.com](http://www.princess674.blogspot.com)).

Ms. Gradwohl, now based in New York, says the public exposure that followed, which included an article in The [New York Times](#), made her more cautious about what she writes.

"After word got out about my blog, a lot of people from work started reading it," she said. "I felt as if I lost my anonymity."

She also had second thoughts about both her blog's title and her narrative technique, saying that they may have given the misleading impression that she lives the good life while on the road.

"When your boss is reading your blog, you say to yourself, 'Well, maybe I shouldn't write about staying at the Ritz-Carlton,' " she said.

Perhaps Ms. Gradwohl's experience helps explain why more business travelers don't blog. An Internet search for full-time business travelers who write Web logs produces astonishingly low numbers, considering the eight million Americans whom the Pew Internet and American Life Project say publish a blog.

But that appears to be changing. "Just wait," said Steve Broback, a business traveler in Woodinville, Wash., who edits the new blog InflightHQ ([www.inflightHQ.com](http://www.inflightHQ.com)) and is an organizer of a blog conference called the Blog Business Summit. "The rush is starting."

Mr. Broback, whose Web journal is sponsored by Connexion, [Boeing's](#) wireless division, writes about the plight of the road warrior and offers links to news for business travelers. And he expects a lot of company soon. "In a year or two we'll probably even have blogs focusing on vintage airport vending machines," he predicted.

Why haven't business travelers embraced blogging yet?

"It's probably a time issue," said Patrick Gray, whose blog ([www.patandmeg.com](http://www.patandmeg.com)) chronicles the almost nonstop travels of a management consultant. "The easy part is getting the blog set up and working on the templates. The hard part is finding the time to write for it."

That is no exaggeration. In one dispatch, Mr. Gray recounts a trip on which he lost track of time. He and a colleague argued about what day of the week it was. Only after checking his luggage to find out how many clean shirts remained did they agree that it was Wednesday.

"That posting got a lot of response from readers, because they could relate to forgetting the day of the week," he said.

But business travelers have other reasons for steering clear of blogging, according to Alex Halavais, a blogging specialist and an assistant professor of communications at the University at Buffalo who publishes a blog at [www.alex.halavais.net](http://www.alex.halavais.net). "Even a mention that you are in a particular city may sometimes be enough information for a competitor to surmise what is going on," he said.

As an example, "I have been especially circumspect in blogging about my recent job hunt," he said. "Some things are simply better to keep private, and these things often go hand-in-hand with business travel."

On the other hand, some business travelers let it all hang out. Consider "jenidallas day-to-day" ([www.jenidallas.typepad.com](http://www.jenidallas.typepad.com)), a widely read blog with a business travel theme, and one of only a few written by women. Much of the author's musings are personal, like her description of an upper respiratory infection, her account of Christmas shopping or her reaction to being propositioned on a business trip ("I am not sure whether to be flattered or annoyed," she wrote).

But for all her openness, she does want to keep one thing hidden from public view: her identity. Though she publishes a photo of herself on her site and is also a prolific contributor to the discussion forum FlyerTalk ([www.flyertalk.com](http://www.flyertalk.com)), where she posts her comments as "techgirl," she asked that her name be kept out of this article.

"I would not want my clients and others necessarily having a link between my name and my blog," she said.

Experts on personal Web journals predict that more business travelers are likely to hop on the blogging bandwagon, and for good reason: they are modern-day Marco Polos, eager to recount their latest adventures and reveal their latest discoveries.

"Business travelers really have a unique opportunity to reach out to locals to get expert advice on where to eat and what to do while in a particular city," said Kaye D. Trammell, an assistant professor at Louisiana State University who wrote her doctoral dissertation on blogging.

She says business travel is a "bloggable" subject, whether the topic is "rebuilding New Orleans or the ponderings of a consultant who sleeps in a new city every week."

Professor Trammell recently created an offshoot of her academic blog ([www.kaye.trammell.com/blog](http://www.kaye.trammell.com/blog)) to chronicle the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In one posting, she observed her students returning to an eerily quiet campus for the first time since the storm. "These displaced students," she wrote, "have lost nearly everything."

If there is such a thing as an established business travel blog, it probably belongs to Gary Leff, the chief financial officer of a university research center in the Washington, D.C. area. Mr. Leff's "View from the Wing" ([blogs.flyertalk.com/blogs/viewwing/](http://blogs.flyertalk.com/blogs/viewwing/)) focuses on award-related news interspersed with his personal observation about travel. He rips into the Westin Sydney in Australia, for example, for adding a \$1.30 fee to his bill as "a donation" to a United Nations charity, and says he is little mollified by the fact it removed the charge after he complained.

But unlike political bloggers, who tend to approach their Web journals with a strong ideological agenda,

Mr. Leff says he does not have a mission - except, maybe, to help others by pointing out some of the hazards and opportunities of the road. "Travel is a small niche in blogging," he said. "Award programs are just a small part of that niche. Some of the subjects I write about are only interesting to a small group of people."

Perhaps the group is not large, at least in comparison to the overall travel industry. But to the hotels, airlines and car rental companies, business travelers who are likely to read blogs such as Mr. Leff's are their best customers. And blogs have become the latest way to reach them. For example, Extended Stay Hotels, a Spartanburg, S.C., hotel chain, recently set up a blog called Road Warrior Tips ([www.roadwarriortips.com](http://www.roadwarriortips.com)). Several newspapers, including USA Today and The Los Angeles Times, now publish regular blogs about business travel on their Web sites.

Blogging specialists say that it is not a matter of if, but when, these business travel bloggers will start using their clout in a concerted way to change the travel industry.

And when that happens, says Professor Halavais, of the University of Buffalo, "the travel industry will need to adjust."

As for Ms. Gradwohl, in the future she expects to delve more into the routine frustrations of business travel than the highlights that led to some unwanted notoriety.

"I'm stuck at the airport a lot," she said.