There goes the blogosphere

Jeff Browning, 2008-13-03

Blogs are a fascinating thing. When I was first turned onto them years ago, I had flashbacks to the early world wide web days. Remember? When it seemed that being able to hack HTML and use FTP to post a page enabled way too many folks to promote uninformed opinion? Sadly, I recall too many stories of people believing myth and innuendo because they "read something in print". Just as those days, a blog gives anyone incredible (and transformational) abilities to hang out their shingle and begin blogging. Some even make a living at it which I think is great.

However, I've lately begun to see too much snarling, negative innuendo, and criticism that is rarely grounded in fact. Recent coverage of the SXSW event have only highlighted this trend. The volume of posts I've seen recently where someone decides to attack another individual or company (don't even get me started about the blog phenomenon related to the wikipedia founder, TechCrunch, etc.) is mindboggling. But, I understand it happens for a reason. Sensationalism on TV and in print have always sold advertising. And, so it goes with blogging. While I've always liked to think that solid information and useful musings (and periodic goofiness) are of value to readers, I'm not so naive as to realize that is NOT the way to grow a blog readership (and eyeballs, which sell more ads or related services).

I guess all of this brings up an important point; one that neither I nor the team have ever felt necessary to make. We blog on DevCentral to provide useful updates, news about topics that are interesting, and insight into our technology as well as the types of people F5 is comprised of. While we're not perfect (no one is), we try to do our best to bring you regular posts that make life in the trenches a little more enjoyable. This is what we try to do. Only you can tell us if we're successful.

One thing we've avoided - somewhat intentionally but also because of who we are and what we stand for - is taking shots at other companies or people. Trust me - for every competitive vendor that publishes distorted or unrealistically obtained performance statistics that attempt to make us look bad, it's tempting to "blog about it". Why not? Isn't a blog a place where you can say what you want with impunity? Or, there was that time years ago when someone suggested we had cross-site scripting vulnerabilities on a site when their actual portrayal was clearly NOT an XSS issue (believe me - we know what they are. We spent more time talking about the mistaken assertion than we did writing the iRule that solved it). It was really tempting - because we work hard at what we do - to call out the B.S. for what it was and lay down the public law "'cause we had a blog". Not only would we be "right", we'd get a lot of eyeballs on the site too!

In all of these situations, we consistently agreed (usually very quickly with little discussion) that we're about something different. While we work hard to do things right most days, there will be days when we're wrong. For every deficiency we can call out in an attempt to make us look smart, it ultimately sullies our efforts because it sets us up to look even worse at those times when we're not the smartest on the block.

We're about being honest, upfront, direct, confident, yet humble. I'm very confident that we have some very smart people doing excellent work (here on DevCentral and in every area of F5) that will change the way IT works for the better. Our products and people speak for themselves. I don't (nor does anyone that I work with) clamor to be hyperbolic in order to get people to listen to us. Tactics like that only undermine the great effort and results of those working to solve difficult problems with F5 products every day.

So, getting back to my initial point: we're doing this on our terms - terms that for me demand we use this soapbox positively, even if a less controversial tone means fewer readers. Gaining an audience through negative posts seems cheap to me. I would rather help solve problems (or at least help find solutions) that make people's lives better through a positive approach. And, you know what? I encourage other bloggers to do the same. You have to right (which I fully support) to do whatever you want. You can make blogs about issues and solutions or sensationalism, take your pick. We choose, and have always chosen, issues.