

# Writer's Block? IBM Researchers Have the Cure

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Bloggers afflicted with writer's block can take heart: IBM researchers have developed a topic generator that relies on the wisdom of online crowds for inspiration and feedback.

Nicknamed "Blog Muse," it solicits suggestions from a pool of prospective readers, proposes them to potential writers, alerts readers upon publication of the requested post, and encourages comment. Topic ideas can go viral and build audience interest ahead of publication, as prospective readers can see which suggested topics are the most popular. The tool can also generate topic suggestions automatically.

In an experiment involving more than 1,000 IBM employees who use [social media](#), IBM researchers from the company's Center for Social Software in Cambridge, MA found that Blog Muse helped stimulate the quality and quantity of blog posts. Proposed topics were six times more likely to be written about than topics without votes, receive twice as many comments, and earn three times as many high ratings.

The availability of social media tools, particularly within corporations, gives employees an opportunity to network and share expertise, insight and anecdotes with one another and with clients. But long-term [blogging](#) can prove daunting. Only three percent of employees typically begin blogging, and eighty-percent of those never post more than five entries. In the absence of reader comments and input, bloggers don't know if their posts are useful or compelling. Or, they may run out of ideas.

Writing about specific topics of interest is vital for corporate and journalist blogs in particular, as they can provide practical information about a technical issue, trend, or marketplace -- helping an employee perform better. In contrast, social, diary-like blogs are more open-ended and entertaining in their style.

When fully developed, Blog Muse can potentially be applied to other social media and [online communities](#) too -- anywhere where people need a mechanism for systematically requesting and providing content that isn't yet available. Using the tool, communities might generate specific bookmarks, photographs or multimedia by special request.

[A paper](#) authored by IBM Researchers Casey Dugan and Werner Geyer, reporting on the results of the pilot program, was delivered at the 2010 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work on February 10. Another paper on the topic was presented and published at ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, April 10 - 15.

Casey Dugan has also [posted a blog](#) on her findings.

Source: IBM

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