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## Jim Hoft

One of the remarkable things about the political blogosphere is the sheer diversity of backgrounds that its practitioners bring to it. Take, for instance, Jim Hoft, the author of the widely read conservative blog *Gateway Pundit*. Before he took up blogging, Hoft worked as a model and actor, participating in numerous television commercials and print ads as well as several television shows and films. In an earlier life (or so it seems), he researched microbes in the Mississippi River, having received a bachelor's degree in Biology from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa.

Like many other conservative bloggers, Hoft started blogging in the aftermath of the 2004 presidential election. He was inspired to do so by the scandal surrounding former *CBS News* Anchor Dan Rather's use of forged documents about President George W. Bush's service in the Texas Air National Guard. The scandal, which subsequently became known as Rathergate, is one of the most prominent examples of the power of political bloggers to effect changes within the mainstream news media establishment (Dan Rather resigned under duress and four top executives at *CBS News* were fired.)

Hoft is well-known, both within and outside the political blogosphere, for his blogging about various democracy movements around the world, including those in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Kyrgyzstan. He's a prominent member of the St. Louis Tea Party Coalition, appears regularly on television and radio talk shows, and his blogging and other political activities are often cited by other conservative luminaries like Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity.

While Hoft took up blogging because of his passion for politics, he's managed to convert that passion into a lucrative career. Since 2010, his blog has been hosted by *Right Network*, a new television network founded by Kelsey Grammar, which pays him for his efforts. But that's the result of all the hard work he puts into it: he spends at least 10 hours a day blogging.

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### **Why did you decide to take up blogging?**

I started blogging after the 2004 presidential election. It was a really exciting time, and I was looking for news sources where I could find more information. I'm a conservative, so I found a couple of blogs that were active at that time, like *Power Line* and *Little Green Footballs*.

When the Dan Rather story broke, it was exciting to follow the story and see how blogging worked. People with different kinds of expertise contributed and were able to break open the story. A little later on, Glenn Reynolds' book, *The Army of Davids*, came out, capturing what we were seeing.

### **So you wanted to be part of that larger blogging movement?**

Yes, it really excited me. I started to follow the blogs more closely and, after the election, I decided to start my own blog.

### **How was the experience when you first started out?**

I'm one of the few bloggers who started out with the *Blogger* software from *Google*, and I'm one of the few that has stayed with it. A lot of bloggers start with *Google's Blogger* or *Blogspot* and then move into a different format. But I stayed with *Blogger*. I've been very happy with it and have seen it get better over the years.

As with anything else on the Internet, there are so many more things you can do today that you couldn't do before. When I first started blogging, there was only one blog that had videos. It couldn't stay in business because it cost too much for the bandwidth. It's gone. Today, you don't even think about it. You slap videos on your blog all the time.

### **What has kept you going all these years?**

Let me answer you this way. Here I am, in St. Louis, Missouri, in the middle of the country, and it's just amazing to me that I can sit in my home and break so many stories. I see so many stories that aren't being reported from a conservative side. And that's something I really want to do, to get some of the other news out that isn't being reported in the mainstream news.

### **So you see yourself as a corrective to the mainstream media?**

Oh, definitely.

### **Do you also try to reach policy-makers with your blogging?**

I do. In fact, I've met quite a number of different politicians since I started blogging. During my first two or three years, I concentrated on the democratic movements around the world, like the Feeder Revolution in Lebanon, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, and the Iraqi election. The latter one was very moving to me. I was just amazed by the bravery of those people.

So I did a lot of blogging about various democratic movements and was actually invited to some events at the United Nations. I was also invited to Prague for a democracy convention where President Bush spoke. While I've met a lot of politicians, the people that impressed me the most were the dissidents. They don't enjoy the same freedoms that we enjoy. I was so impressed by their courage and their stories. Most of these people have amazing stories.

### **How many hours a day do you spend on blogging?**

I'm obviously putting more time into it than I did when I first started out. I spend at least 10 hours a day blogging. I started off slow, writing one or two posts a day. In 2005, I started getting attention and started putting up six or seven postings a day. Today, I generally put up 10 to 14 posts a day.

### **Where do you get inspiration from for all those postings?**

Like most bloggers, I have a few websites, my favorites, which I go to every day to get some good stories. They include: *Free Republic*, *Hot Air*, *Instapundit*, *Little Green Footballs*, and *Michelle Malkin*.

### **Aside from these major, conservative blogs, where else do you go on a regular basis?**

As I mentioned earlier, I've been interested in various democratic movements around the world. There have been several stories from Iran that I've reported on. So I follow some Iranian websites, and I've a couple of Iranian friends who're feeding me stories.

I've broken different stories that weren't positive towards the regime. They've actually written about me on the official Parliament website. To me, that was amazing. They weren't threatening me but called me a war monger. They weren't happy with what I was doing.

### **Who do you have in mind when you blog?**

I'm a conservative, so I expect to have a conservative audience. It always feels good to know that I'm read by people who I respect, like recently when I met David Limbaugh, Rush Limbaugh's brother, who's an author himself. I also understand, though, that with greater readership, I'm going to get some people on the left who just want to catch me make a mistake or something. So I've readers like that, too.

### **What do you do to retain readers?**

It's always helpful to develop personal relationships with your readers, so when I get really good comments, I'll move them up to the post itself.

I get a lot of emails, and I try to respond to a lot of them. I think that helps, too. When you promote your work, it's important not to spam 100 people. It impresses me when I know that what somebody wrote was just for me. If the email is just for me, I'd certainly give it more attention than if I noticed somebody spammed 100 people with something they wrote.

### **On that note, what makes for a high-quality political blog in your opinion?**

It'd definitely need to be continually updated throughout the day, although that's not as important on the weekend. Most blogs, including some of the bigger ones, don't put up as many posts on the weekend.

But if you want to be taken seriously, you have to have continually new material. That's the biggest thing. If you want to build your readership, you also have to share your information and reach out to other bloggers and promote your work. There are some excellent bloggers out there with terrific skills who people don't know about because they're not reaching out to other blogs.

### **What do you do to stand apart from all the other political blogs out there?**

I'm consistently putting out more material, new material. I'm also consistently sharing that material. You'd be surprised how many people don't do that. You just won't be taken seriously if you don't do it.

I'm also able to find stories that are interesting, and that other people find interesting. My readership has doubled in the past year, so I'm obviously finding the right stories.

**Why do you think you've been so successful?**

I think it's because I've been doing this for a long time and have been very consistent with it. So many bloggers out there just quit. There are millions of people who put up a couple of posts and never come back to it. And, as I said earlier, I'm able to find interesting stories and communicate them in an interesting, entertaining way.

**What advice do you have for people who want to give political blogging a try themselves?**

People ask me for advice all the time. And it just has to be the same message. You have to be willing to put in the hours, and you have to be willing to reach out. And you have to be respectful when you reach out.

**Do you find that many bloggers are less than respectful when they reach out to other bloggers?**

Yes, and I don't know what it is. Maybe it's something about the Internet, because I don't run into people like this too often on the street. Sometimes, people will email you and expect that you'll jump for them. That doesn't show much respect. But if someone is more humble and respectful in their approach, I'll certainly appreciate that.

**Do you have any other, more specific advice for aspiring political bloggers?**

It's important to proofread your writing as much as possible and avoid spelling errors. Nobody's impressed with someone who sounds stupid.

**Are there certain things you wish less experienced political bloggers would do differently?**

Yes, I don't want to sit and read three or four page postings. I want to see it and get it within a short amount of time. So people who write postings that are like novels don't interest me. I just don't have the time.

Another thing is that a lot of new bloggers write about how they feel, and they tend to get all sappy. I don't really care about that. I just want to know what happened. I just want to get the facts.

**Briefly put, how has the political blogosphere changed over time?**

What's different today, as I mentioned earlier, is that anybody can put up videos, and that it's easy. That's changing our whole society. When you have a video out on the Internet, the news media are going to report on it. They have to. When people see a video, it's so much more of a story than if they just read about it. It's more believable to people. It's just amazing. You notice it with your hits that, when you have a story with video, it gets a lot more attention.

Another thing is the rise of *Twitter*, which I've started using more recently. It can help you find some good stories, because everybody's on *Twitter*.

The media have stopped ignoring bloggers. In fact, most media have their own blogs today, like the *National Review's* "The Corner." It's been a great move for that organization. If you have an organization, you need to have a blog. It's going to draw in people, readership, and help build a community.

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