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THE TECHSTARS CHALLENGE

Inside the Inside Track

Getting into an incubator means money, mentors, and connections. Here's how to make the cut

by Max Chafkin

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Where Have All the Bloggers Gone?
Business blogging on the decline

Is blogging dead? Not quite, but a recent survey of Inc. 500 companies reveals that it could be on its way out as a marketing tool. The study, conducted by the University of Massachusetts’s Center for Marketing Research, included interviews with executives at 170 companies on the 2011 Inc. 500. Last year, only 37 percent of Inc. 500 companies maintained blogs, down from 50 percent the year before.

According to Nora Ganin Barnes, director of the Center for Marketing Research, it’s not that these businesses stopped blogging; it’s that they never blogged in the first place. “A lot of the Inc. 500 companies weren’t in existence in the early blogging years,” says Ganin Barnes. “They are newer companies that moved directly to Facebook and Twitter.”

Still, the companies that do have blogs are very happy with them. Ninety-two percent of those businesses called the platform a success, up from 86 percent in 2010. Facebook, though more popular than ever among Inc. 500 companies, saw its success rating decrease 3 percentage points in 2011. Eighty-two percent of the companies that used Facebook deemed it a success.

“Blogging has gotten a bad rap for being too time-consuming,” Ganin Barnes says. “but it’s an invaluable tool to these companies. It’s the only place where you can really be a thought leader in your field. You can’t do that in 140 characters.” —Issie Lapowsky

Close-up: Jessica Alba

The Sin City star turns mompreneur

Jessica Alba is getting into the baby-products business. The actress recently co-founded The Honest Company, a Los Angeles–based business that makes nontoxic and eco-friendly items for infants. “The idea came to me three years ago, when I was pregnant with my first daughter, Honor,” says Alba, who gave birth to her second child, Haven, last year. “I was horrified to find out how many toxic chemicals are in baby products.”

Alba launched the business in January with Christopher Gavigan, author of Healthy Child Healthy World, and serial entrepreneur Brian Lee, co-founder of ShoeDazzle. The Honest Company lets parents order customized bundles of eco-friendly diapers, baby wipes, shampoo, and other products online. The bundles, which sell for $36 to $80 each, are delivered every month.

Alba, the company’s president, says this experience has been eye-opening—and tiring. “We’re still this scrappy little company where everybody is working long hours and doing five things at once,” says Alba, whose workday includes unglamorous tasks such as packing boxes and taking customer service calls. “I had no idea how tough it would be,” she says. “I commend anyone who can start a business.” —Darren Dahl

Timesaver: Jessica Alba figured new moms would prefer to have diapers delivered to their doors.

Eco Baby: The Honest Company’s baby wipes are biodegradable and all natural.