

An Interview with Robert Scoble, Famous Blogger, Scobleizer, & Author - Fast Company

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, published by John Wiley & Sons, the largest book every written on the subject of social media.



Today we are here with Robert Scoble, how cool is that!

RS: Sorry about that! We're here in the airport if you hear some voices and stuff in the background.

LS: You're on your way to Berlin, you said?

RS: Yeah.

LS: That's cool. Well, Robert Scoble is the author of *Naked Conversations*, published by John Wiley & Sons. He is also the famous *Microsoft* blogger and the *Scobleizer*. So we're going to talk a little bit about what Robert's doing and about Social Media. So let's get started!

Robert, can you tell our listeners a little bit about your background and your book, *Naked Conversations* and *Scobleizing* and what you've been doing?

RS: Yeah, I've been blogging since 2000. I use to plan conferences for health plan conferences for programmers and web developers and that got me into blogging and that got me into NEC and that got me into a job at Microsoft where I [01:15.1] interviewed 600 employees, about that number, and that got me a job at [01:22.4] and now I'm at Fast Company and I'm going around the world interviewing business and tech innovators.

LS: Wow! Six-hundred employees, you said?

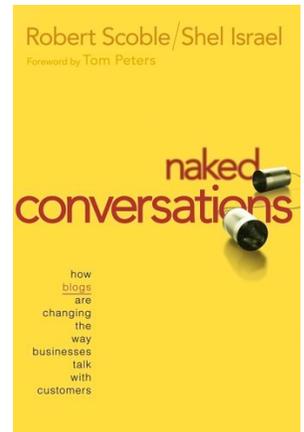
RS: Yeah, 600. And somewhere around that, 500 or something.

LS: Oh my gosh! That's amazing. Can you tell me a little bit about *Naked Conversations*, your recent book?

RS: I'm sorry?

LS: *Naked Conversations*, your recent book.

RS: Yes, I wrote that at Microsoft because I was one of the first bloggers in a big company and so MS interviewed 100 or so companies about how they were using blogging, and what their experiences were and talked about how to get fired with a blog. (Laughter) [02/05.0] the early set of blogging, now blogging is not just blogging but Social Media; and a lot of companies are having a Social Media offered so that is pretty interesting; like *Twitter* and *Facebook* and *Flogs* and basically all the online media.



LS: You've brought up an interesting point about getting fired by writing a blog. That seems to be, at least to me, one of the biggest obstacles, where companies are afraid to get involved in blogging because they... actually they are afraid of losing control over the corporate message.

RS: Yeah, that's a common approach. The company is used to... really feel like they had to control the message and that meant they had control of their brand and they would be able to talk to 14 journalists and get their message across. And now a kid in Australia with 50 or 100 readers or 50 or 100 friends can really change how you are perceived in the world.

LS: Well, and you've been blogging for a long time. If someone came up after one of your presentations and said, "Robert, can you point me in the right directions. I've never done any *Social Media Blogging* blogging". What kind of advice would you give them?

RS: Oh, man!

LS: How would they start?

RS: I would start by listening and participating rather than trying to talk, you know. Follow a bunch of friends on *Twitter* who really fill 100 blogs on *Google Reader*. You know, go over to *Flickr* to connect with that community. Go over to *UTube* and understand that community. And listen and see what people are saying about your company and your products, and stuff like that, and your industry, your job ability, your genre. And then, and only then, should you talk.

You know, by then you're probably impelled to talk, you know, because if somebody talked about you at a cocktail party, of course you're going to talk back, right?

LS: (Laughter) that's a good point. Yeah, so the advice is, kind of get out there, participate a little bit, understand what you're talking about, and try not to say anything until you actually have something to say.

RS: Right!

LS: Now, wasn't there...didn't you get a title for the number of blogs that you read in a 30-day period, did I hear someone say?

RS: I don't know about a title, but I read 100's of blogs...I have 700 feeds and my *Google Reader* and I read 3,000 people on *FriendFeed* and I follow 21,000 on *Twitter*.

LS: Oh my gosh! That's a staggering amount!

RS: It's...the thing is it brings in, you know,...I surf that to see what people are talking about and then I use search engines, in fact, *FriendFeed* and *Twitter* has a search engine now. And you can see what everybody is saying about a certain topic, you know, like what everybody saying about Barak Obama this morning.

LS: And that's another good point that you brought up there, is that when I talk to people and I show them the Social Media ecosphere and the size of all the different tools, people have a tendency to get overwhelmed, not

only with the tools, but the data. So would your advice be to just focus on what's the most important, screen it out, but just be aware of everything else?

RS: Yeah, if you are feeling overwhelmed, segment it. Start putting it into folders or tract to fewer people. Back off on the number of people you are following or the [5:44.1] especially you are following.

I find I don't get overwhelmed. I find that it's just hard to find the real nuggets among the noise.

LS: That's a really good point, too. There's a lot of chatter out there, but not a lot of substance.

RS: Yep.

LS: Okay. Here's another observation. You started out as a type blogger and you moved into the video and you've made yourself famous for *Scobleizing*. You've got some really incredible videos. Can you tell me what caused the transition to video and what your thoughts are on that?

RS: Well, there was a group of us sitting around the lunch table at Microsoft and meeting with a developer and we wanted a way to communicate with other people in a different way than just text. "(I thought) why can't we just video this lunch conversation. Why do we have to write it up, because writing it up is just impersonal and not...it doesn't let us communicate the way I wanted to communicate, which is visually". And I said, "Let's just buy a cheap video camera and film these kinds of conversations and see if we can change how people communicate."

LS: One of the things I noticed about your videos is that they are not polished! They're not studio-quality grade, but really what you're talking about is substance and content.

RS: Yes, some of them are. I actually do a show now every Friday in the studio. But to tell you the truth, I find it's really hard to have a good conversation in the studio, because when people get underneath lights and get in front of professional cameras, they shut down. They don't tell you...they don't relax and they don't open up to you. They don't share really what they're about. Also, when you're in a studio...where was I going...when you're in a studio you're working with a committee to make media. The media is often slick and professional, but it doesn't tell you a lot of stuff. I like video that teaches me something, right...educates me and makes me smarter.

LS: So I just saw one of your recent videos with Alan Levy sitting on the patio of his house.

RS: Exactly. Or, like I just visited one of the architects who built the Staples Center. Or I've been in the test lab with the chairman of the board of the [08:28.5] Corporation or like this week we going to go follow around Mr. "C.E.S." Steven Leon who runs a whole bunch of events at the Consumer Electronics Shows around the world.

LS: That's really cool! You've really had some incredible names that you've Scobleized. Can you do a little bit more name-dropping to kind of show us this?

RS: Well, I was in John Edwards' plane and I have pictures of him with his mistress. (Laughter) That gives you an idea....!

LS: Now, that's cool. (Laughter)

RS: A "Forrest Gump" kind of moment. I've interviewed Rick Warren who runs one of the largest churches in the world, to Bill Gates, to Mark Zuckerberg....all sorts of different people who've done interesting things in their lives, particularly I focus mostly on the tech industry. But I'm rounding out to general business, people who are doing innovative stuff in business. Umm, yeah, I've been very fortunate to get them.

LS: Well you've left out one of the less famous names that you've *Scobleized*. By the way, thank you for *Scobleizing* me last March.

RS: Oh, no problem.

LS: (Laughter) that was a heck of an honor. And didn't you recently do a Congressman?

RS: Yeah, we visited Washington, D.C. a couple of months ago and interviewed six Congressmen and the FCC Commissioner and the Chairman of the Cable and Television Communications Association.

LS: That's really exciting and just on the blogging you've done and the reputation you've built is really giving you "carte blanche" to get into places that other business people do not get...do not have those opportunities.

RS: Yep. I've been having an unbelievable life.

LS: (Laughter) congratulations. Also, is there any misconceptions, pitfalls, things to watch out for if somebody wants to go out and, either, start blogging or video blogging or vlogging. What would you warn them about?

RS: Ooo...I would...the first thing is to listen. This is a two-way communications medium. It's not one way. It's not like doing TE or that kind of stuff. And business people are usually really good about learning how to talk out, but not very good at listening or demonstrating that they are listening. And if you can demonstrate that you're listening and participating rather than talking all the time, you'll get more kudos than if you just are always trying to find out how to get people to listen to you.

LS: That's a really good point, too, because doing *The Social Media Bible*, I was trying to do a lot of talking to the different people in the industry, and nobody really has time to listen. But when I spun it and said, "You know what, really the reason I was talking is I want to hear your story." And we started this podcasting and it was really quite amazing how many people agreed to actually participate, and absolutely amazing stories that they have to tell, similar to yourself.

RS: Yep.

LS: Well, is there any success stories, specific kind of success stories that are worked around blogs or vlogs or business related where companies actually started doing it and recognized some success. Is that anything you can quote to inspire us?

RS: Well, *Zappos*, for instance, uses blogging and Social Media very well to communicate with its customer-base, and getting a lot of kudos. The tax people....ah....who does taxes....

LS: IRS? H & R Block?

RS: H & R Block does a really good job with *Twitter* effect...aah...I'm sorry, I was doing my taxes at H & R Block, and I wrote a *Twitter* message saying that I hoped I wouldn't get screwed by Uncle Sam, and somebody at H & R Block wrote back on to *Twitter* within 20 minutes while I'm still in the office and said, "Let me know how it works out. Let me know if we can improve the experience at all." That was an example of a company [12:38.6] and demonstrating that it was listening to this medium, not just trying to push out messages and [12:46.0].

LS: Wow, and I heard this morning...I was interviewing someone who was telling me that there was a person on *LinkedIn* that just blasted out a sales message.

"Here's my brochure, here's my website, here's what I can do for you, hire me." And it ticked off the whole *LinkedIn* crowd.

Is there anything else that you could share about Social Media, blogs, video, the stuff that you're doing that might help our listeners and get them inspired to get out there?

RS: I would look at one called *WineLibraryTV*, because he is using video to create the need in your head for different kinds of wine that you never knew you wanted. Right? You watch one show and you might create the need in your head for a Peruvian wine and another show will have an [13:32.0] wine, or another show will have a really weird wine from Sonoma Valley that you've never heard of before.

So, you've created the need in your head to try that kind of wine and then it uses the Social Network on his site to help people argue out which wine is actually best. And he has a wine store where he [13:56.4] you and you can buy the wine. So those three things together, I think, are the future of how marketing going to be done online.

That's pretty much one place where I would watch just to get ideas and see how somebody's really doing something innovative online.

LS: I love what you just said, "Get out there and develop the need, build the need, engage your clients." And then the second thing is user-generated content where the customers are actually discussing the need. And then the most important thing you sell them here is actually somebody's figured out how to monetize it.

RS: Yep.

LS: Can you give me that web address one more time?

RS: Yes. www.winelibrary.tv

LS: That's really cool. So, can you tell our listeners, Robert, a place where they can find out more about you, see some of your videos, maybe a web address, and also buy that book?

RS: Lon, thanks. If you search Google for Robert, I'm the #1 Robert on Google.

LS: Are you really! (Laughter) That's Googleized!

RS: Yeah, that's pretty good. I'm on www.FastCompany.tv; I'm on www.Scobleizer.com.

LS: And of course they can find *Naked Conversations* at Amazon and other book sellers?

RS: Absolutely, yes.

LS: Well, that's really cool. Well, I'm going to let you get on you plane out to Berlin. I truly, Robert, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for squeezing this into your schedule before you leave the country.

I would like to thank Robert Scoble, author of *Naked Conversations*, published by John Wiley & Sons, for sharing those amazing insights with us. Thank you, Robert.

RS: Thank you. Thank you for having me on the show.

LS: Thank you. This has been Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out our other valuable social media tactics, tools and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book, as well as our companion website, www.thesocialmediabible.com.

And if you want to find out more information about me, please by all means, go to www.lonsafko.com.

And again, Robert, thank you. Please have a safe trip.

RS: Thanks very much. Sorry about that.

LS: That's great. Have a safe trip.

RS: Thank you, see ya.

LS: Thanks Robert.