

# WHY EVERY MARKETER SHOULD TAKE UP LIFE HACKING

text: Karin Bosveld  
image: Evalien Lang

## DEFINITION LIFE HACKING

Life hacking is '...a mix between time management, knowledge management and personal development, with a touch of web 2.0 and a dash of MacGyver. It is all about how you collate, organise and filter information, keep an overview and guard against being steered by information stress. Life hacking is about doing more in less time with less stress, so that you can operate expertly in the information and network society ...' (source: wikipedia.nl) British technology journalist Danny O'Brien coined the term 'life hack' at the O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference in San Diego, 2004, where the term 'web 2.0' was also introduced.

**The internet has brought with it a lot of headaches for the marketer – as shown once again in the latest “Grote Marketing Enquête” (Great Marketing Survey, number 07/08 2007). How and when do you deploy it, how do you find time for it, what do you do with the flow of information that descends on you like hot lava, how do you incorporate the hypes and what on earth happens with your corporate and/or brand reputation on all of these blasted weblogs? Life hacking is the answer.**

Life hacking? Just another hype? Do we not have enough on our plate already? Are we not already being driven round the bend fretting about whether or not to have a corporate weblog? Whether or not to join Second Life? Where do we find the time to even work through our inbox, let alone keep track of information in the field? Rest assured, life hacking is actually a way of simplifying and streamlining those kinds of issues. The term that has blown over from – where else? – the USA represents a combination of time management, knowledge management and personal development, all of these served with the right dosage of web 2.0. It is, in fact, all about how you can make the internet work for you. How you can channel and filter the flow of information, or even better: have someone else do it for you. How you can get clients and enthusiastic experts to solve the problems on your behalf. What – free – tools are available, and how you can spend as little time as possible on these.

## Hijacked

Sanne Roemen advises companies on internet marketing and the use of web 2.0 in order to improve and simplify operational management. She is also one of the brains behind [www.lifehacking.nl](http://www.lifehacking.nl), which was launched in September 2007. On her weblog she describes herself as a 'life hacker and web 2.0 evangelist'. 'Web 2.0 is life hacking', says Roemen. 'It is internet as it was originally intended: a platform where people can readily

share information with one another without the constraints of time and place. It was slightly hijacked by marketers who saw it as a tool for sending one-sided information to consumers. But in the meantime the original dialogue has also continued, and by now all sorts of free, user-friendly tools have been developed to suit every content production need. The original idea is therefore becoming increasingly better realised,' according to Roemen, who prefers to use the term 'social web'. Where everyone can reach one another, and information is readily accessible. But which also places many marketers in a difficult position. How can you make web 2.0 work for you efficiently as well as effectively, instead of becoming dejected or hopeless entangled? Roemen's response to the internet woes of marketers: 'What I come across most often is that companies are afraid of sticking out their necks. Because the moment you enter the blogosphere you are no longer in control. Well, that's correct. Control is, in fact, an illusion. So why not rather exploit the fact that everyone else is doing worse than you at the moment? The best that can happen to you is that you become the centre of a great uproar – positive or negative - in the blogosphere. Take part in the discussion - visibly, correctly and intrinsically.' A large insurance company recently invited Roemen to explain how dangerous web 2.0 is and how they can best steer clear of it. 'I'd say inviting me was their first mistake,' laughs Roemen.

## Use existing communities

Of course there is a lot to be said for good corporate blogs and she is happy to lend a hand in that respect, but Roemen does not believe that a weblog is a prerequisite for every organisation wanting to keep pace. On the contrary. That is in fact a case of counter-life hacking, i.e. neither efficient nor effective. Many markets are already saturated; it is often better to show your face on existing communities. Where your clients are to be found and where you can discover what their demands are. 'Look beyond the boundaries of your brand. If I were in the foodstuff sector, I would be hanging around the healthcare



De hele marketingafdeling deed die zomer aan *Lifehacking*.

site Gezondheidsplein.nl. And if I were in the energy drink market I would go in search of outdoor sports forums, for example. The platforms are already there so you don't need to set up your own community... which would not do your credibility any good anyway. If Mars talks about food on its own platform, we all know that it will only be promoting itself. Among many marketers, this begs the question of where you should start if you want to join these forums and the blogosphere. Roemen: 'You could start by subscribing to RSS feeds on those weblogs relevant to you. Identify the bloggers relevant to you and keep an eye on them for a while. Nowadays it is no longer difficult to spot and approach the experts. All you need to do is send them an e-mail, which they usually respond to positively. And subscribe to Google Alerts,

## Second Life

If you keep active within the blogosphere in this way, you will automatically learn how to respond to hypes, according to Roemen. 'Then you will automatically learn, for example, that it's rather silly to transfer the limitations of real life onto the internet,' she comments, referring to Second Life, to which she is opposed. 'It takes us back to square one. If you're on the internet, have your own weblog or participate in other weblogs, then you already have a second life, an online existence; you are already accessible and approachable. Second Life also adds the constraints of time and place – those exact obstacles that the internet overcame in the first place. I come from a 3D background. Navigating in a 3D environment is incredibly difficult, even without the added limitations of the internet in terms of speed. Second Life

# 'You will fall short if you only start applying the tools the moment you need them'

so that you can receive a message every time something is written about your brand; it saves you a lot of time scouring the web.

## Marketers steer clear of weblogs

On trade weblogs like MolBlog, AdfoBlog and Frankwatching, people with expert knowledge hold informative, substantive and sometimes heated discussions, while the marketers of the brands usually shine in their absence. Simply appalling, according to Roemen. 'In this day and age you must be curious and proactive. At the moment you still have the first mover advantage – it will soon become very congested when everyone starts joining these blog discussions. Do it now, when you will still be talked about.' An added advantage – and another life hack – is that you can deploy this method to have your problems solved for you. 'People tend to help one another on these experts' weblogs. People resolve your problem without any vested interest in it. What could be better than that? So all you as producer need do is show your face every now and again, and say: Wow, such valuable suggestions! May we use them and share them with our clients?' Also applicable, Roemen feels, in cases of improper use of your product, such as: 'how do I tune up my scooter's engine?' or 'how do I override my iPod's maximum volume?'. 'Even that is still good news if you think about it. It's a sign that people are involved with your product and trying to improve it. So it's perhaps a good idea to do nothing about it for the time being. You can't control it anyway.

has added value if you want to test your hotel or shopping concepts or want to give a sneak preview of a holiday home, for example. But the target group is limited. Participation on Second Life is not life hacking. Time is scarce; attention is in short supply. If you want to achieve something through the internet, you need to make it as user-friendly as possible. Second Life's threshold is too high. I love attending online courses through MIT, but not on Second Life because I can't navigate my way around it easily. I want the info to stare me in the face and jump out towards me spontaneously. Me flying around on Second Life, I mean really!

## Twitter equals procrastination

Trends like online community Hyves and microblogsite Twitter are no examples of life hacking either, according to Roemen. 'I mainly view these as a means of expanding your social contacts. Although I do understand the fun factor. But the question is whether you should jump on the bandwagon. The point is: we are often so terribly busy and so much information comes our way that it paralyzes us. Because of that we become slightly addicted to this kind of distraction. Procrastination is the fancy term. Delaying the inevitable. Anything so you don't have to get started on that mountain of work. Apart from that, she does follow it with – professional – interest. 'I'm all ears if someone comes up with something truly innovative once again!' There are indeed opportunities for marketers to use something like Hyves around a product launch. 'But in that case it is also true that you are only credible if you were present and

active on forums and blogs beforehand. You will fall short if you only start applying the tools the moment you need them.’

### Information filter

But there is more to life hacking than sorting out the chaos of the blogosphere and managing your corporate reputation. It is also about not allowing yourself to be overwhelmed by the almost endless flow of information that comes your way and the constant appeal via not only the internet and trade media, but also the simple tools of e-mail, telephone, voicemail and text messaging. Roemen made a few rigorous decisions herself. ‘My phone number no longer appears on my website. People can e-mail me and I will decide when to respond, which is usually rather soon anyway. But when I’m working I make sure that I can

grasp the technology are often also slightly too young to understand which problem it can actually help solve. They deploy all of these new possibilities as a tool with which to conduct old-school marketing. Churning out information, guerrilla actions, bluetooth bus shelters... terrific, fun, creative, but the trend is actually towards: simply reinstating the human factor. Which does not imply that everything must be socially responsible and environmentally friendly. Of course your creations may be ‘politically incorrect’, as long as you are honest about it. Take the Hummer, for instance: it is a ridiculously mammoth of a fuel-hungry vehicle, but you get such a kick out of driving it and you don’t go unnoticed in it; it is expensive and everyone knows that you earn enough to be able to afford it. That is authentic transparent communication.’ And

## ‘Time is scarce; attention is in short supply. If you want to achieve something through the internet, you need to make it as user-friendly as possible’

focus. If you allow yourself to be distracted it will cost you about 20 minutes to get back into things. That is why my phone is switched off and out of sight when I’m working. I also have my voicemail turned off, because it takes longer to listen to the messages than simply returning the person’s call. No complaints about being client unfriendly? ‘Hardly any’, she says. ‘By now my network knows that I will answer a call when I am available, and that I will then be able to give them my undivided attention. So they actually know that they will never be interrupting me, and they find that reassuring.’ She also offers to act as an information filter for her clients. A site such as <http://del.icio.us>, for example, allows you to save your ‘favourites’ online. Roemen: ‘So people who subscribe to my del.icio.us account basically enjoy access to the same information that I have. Incidentally, you can also do this kind of thing in a closed environment, so that it is not accessible to everyone. If you are working on something within a team, for example, then such a del.icio.us pool is a very wise option. I also do this for my clients.’

### Enterprise2.0

Roemen ultimately views web 2.0 as the prelude to what she calls Enterprise2.0. she is eagerly looking forward to it. What it comes down to, she says, is that we, specifically due to the loss of control, are forced to return to the human factor. As far as she is concerned, that is distinctive of Enterprise 2.0: openness, transparency, authenticity. ‘Young people who

the funny thing is, comments Roemen, that the over 45s are in fact the ones who fully grasp this concept; they understand which problem is being solved, because they’ve also lived through different times. ‘Young marketers have the wonderful trait of wanting to try out and incorporate everything at the same time. But they are often prejudiced in thinking: then I have to convince management; all of them old geezers who will never cotton on. Not true. In fact, they understand it very well. And you need this kind of balance. You need to have the oldies and the trendies working side by side in the same room.

### LIFE HACKING, SOURCES

[www.lifehacking.nl](http://www.lifehacking.nl)  
Sanne Roemens weblog:  
[www.weblog.oomph.nl](http://www.weblog.oomph.nl)  
Martijn Aslander introduced life hacking in the Netherlands:  
[www.martijnaslander.nl](http://www.martijnaslander.nl)  
[www.lifehack.org](http://www.lifehack.org)  
[www.lifehacker.com](http://www.lifehacker.com)  
[www.listible.com/list/the-life-hack-community](http://www.listible.com/list/the-life-hack-community)  
[www.businesshackers.com](http://www.businesshackers.com) – life hacking specifically for businesses/entrepreneurs  
[www.reputica.com](http://www.reputica.com) – online service to help you manage your reputation  
[del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) – online bookmarking and/or subscribing to the bookmarks of ‘experts’  
Book: ‘Lifehacking. 88 tactics to turbochange your day’,  
Gina Trapati (reviewed on [http://www.weblog.oomph.nl/2007/03/boek\\_lifehacker.html](http://www.weblog.oomph.nl/2007/03/boek_lifehacker.html))