

# Case Study: A Community that Provides Trusted Advice and Drives Early-Stage Interactions and Opportunities

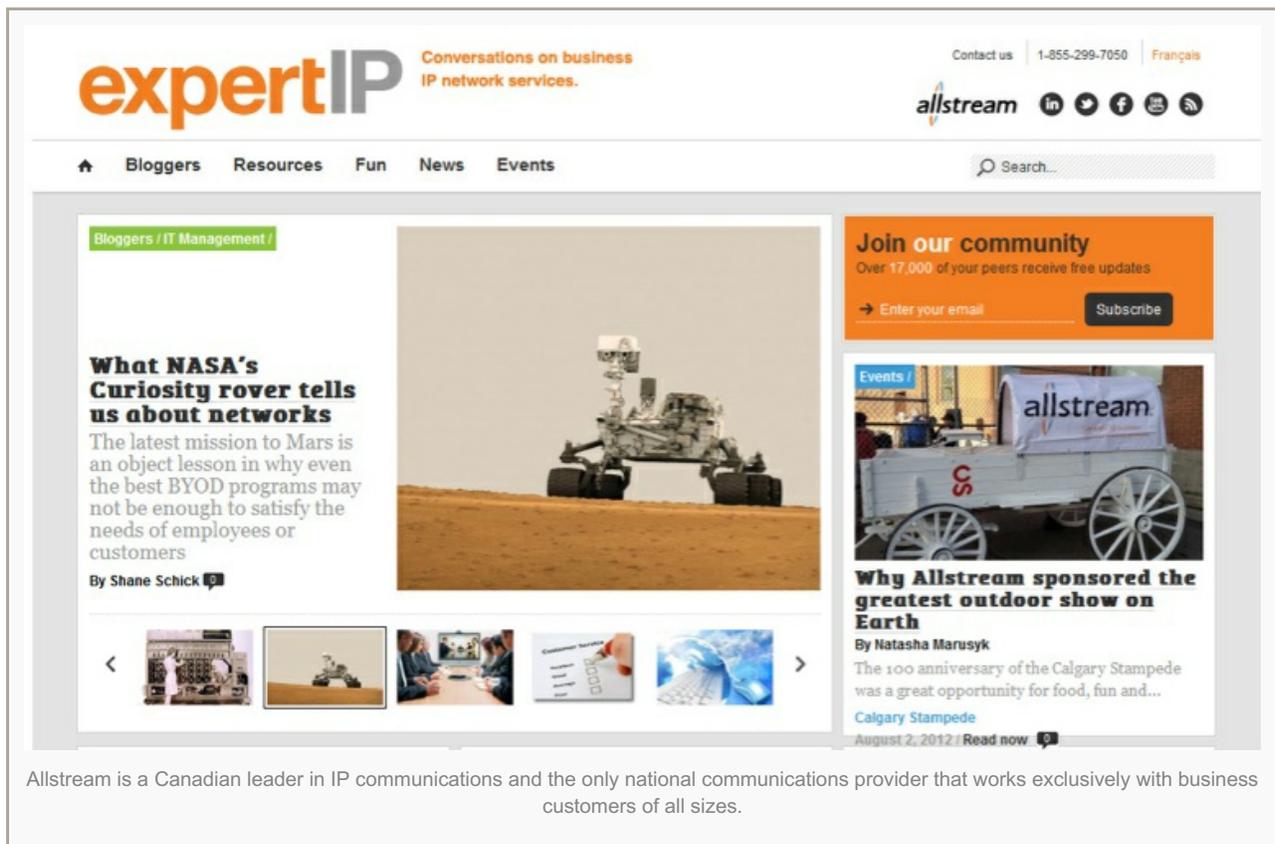
 contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/09/case-study-a-community-for-trusted-advice/

## The challenge: Find ways to attract and engage early buy-cycle stage leads

Prior to launching the [expertIP blog](#), Allstream had redeveloped its website to house information about its products, along with white papers that discuss how to use and implement these products. While the website proved to be a valuable tool for converting later-stage leads, Allstream knew it was missing out on engaging a huge audience — those just starting out or very early in the buying cycle.



*"We wanted to create content that would provide folks just figuring out that they had a challenge or opportunity we could address with value and keep them connected to Allstream as they sought to learn more as their needs developed," says Jeff Gluck, Senior Manager, Web Marketing, Allstream.*

A screenshot of the expertIP website. The header features the "expertIP" logo in orange and grey, with the tagline "Conversations on business IP network services." to its right. Further right are links for "Contact us", the phone number "1-855-299-7050", and "Français". Below the header is a navigation bar with "Bloggers", "Resources", "Fun", "News", and "Events" links, and a search bar. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column has a "Bloggers / IT Management" category tag and a featured article titled "What NASA's Curiosity rover tells us about networks" by Shane Schick, with a large image of the rover on Mars. Below the article is a carousel of smaller images. The right column features a "Join our community" banner (identical to the one in the text) and an "Events" section with a photo of an Allstream-branded cart at an outdoor show, titled "Why Allstream sponsored the greatest outdoor show on Earth" by Natasha Marusyk. At the bottom of the page, a footer states: "Allstream is a Canadian leader in IP communications and the only national communications provider that works exclusively with business customers of all sizes."

Allstream also struggled with SEO, as most of the visitors who came to its site came from branded search (i.e., typing "Allstream" along with the name of one of its products into Google). Allstream wanted to be more discoverable and rank better in terms of unbranded search: *"We wanted to be found more easily and come up more often when people weren't necessarily looking for us, but rather searching for topics related to what we do and the benefits our services bring," says Gluck.*

## The solution: Launch a new type of online publication to fill content gaps and provide trusted advice

Allstream partnered with its agency-of-record, [Concrete Design Communications Inc.](#), to identify ways to fill the gaps in its content strategy and provide educational content for people in all stages of the buying cycle. Allstream and Concrete felt that a robust blog — better described as an “online community” — would be the most natural and cost-effective way to achieve these goals.

Concrete’s research determined that the blog should provide expert advice about the challenges that Allstream’s target audience — IT managers and stakeholders in mid-market organizations — face. The blog would also describe how IP networking and associated communications and technology services help solve these challenges (i.e., improving IT performance that, in turn, drives workforce productivity and helps manage costs). Although one of the goals of expertIP is to drive leads through Allstream’s white papers and webinars, the blog focuses primarily on providing trusted advice and keeps Allstream’s branding to a minimum.

## The implementation: 7 keys to corporate blogging success

Here are seven things Allstream and Concrete learned as they launched expertIP and would like to share with other organizations that are thinking about starting a corporate blog:

**1. Have a strong understanding of your voice:** One of the biggest challenges of corporate blogging is developing a consistent voice. To get your voice right, you first must have a solid understanding of your target audience. Who are they? Where do they hang out? What types of content do they find valuable?

To reach its audience, Allstream wanted to tone down its “corporate” or “sales” speak: *“We’re a fairly conservative organization and tend to rely on more formal language,” says Gluck. “However, we knew that we needed to use friendly, everyday language, as the blog is not the voice of the organization talking to the market, but the voice of individuals within the organization. It’s no longer ‘business to business’ but ‘people to people.’”*

**2. Make a business case:** To make the business case for its new content marketing initiative, Allstream needed a number that would define the project’s cost. Allstream totaled all of the costs, along with what it could realize in terms of value (i.e., increased findability, brand awareness, etc.) to prove that a blog would make sense from a business standpoint.

**3. Develop an expert team:** Allstream and Concrete knew they needed a top-notch team to create a blog that would set Allstream apart from the competition. Concrete brought Allstream a full team of experts — including designers, developers, freelance writers, and SEO professionals.

*“One of Allstream’s value propositions is to sell honest advice, so content marketing is important” says Larry Gaudet, Strategy, Concrete Design Communications, Inc. “However, to do it you need high expectations. You also need skill sets that aren’t usually found within companies or agencies alone. That’s why we harnessed help from other areas.”*

**4. Draw from the wealth of knowledge that is already inside your organization:** expertIP’s diverse contributor community includes more than 20 in-house subject matter experts. While some of Allstream’s experts had experience writing, many of them were new to writing but excited to contribute to the blog.

*“We’re trying to make the blogging process as easy as possible for our in-house experts,” says Gluck. “For example, we may connect our experts with a professional writer who can interview them and organize their thoughts into a blog post. We can also coach our experts through the writing process or provide editing*

*services if they prefer to write their own posts.”*

**5. Don't underestimate what goes into creating great content:** Allstream and Concrete want to maintain the highest journalistic standards so expertIP will stand apart from other technology blogs. An ongoing challenge is finding the balance between affordability and hiring the necessary talent to keep a first-rate blog operational.

*“Don't underestimate the quality and kinds of skill sets involved in putting together a first-rate product,” says Gaudet. “Be humble enough to understand that creating a publication of quality is more than just nuts and bolts — it's a commercial art. With all of the bad content and noise out there, you need to stand out.”*

**6. Measure your results:** Think about what you're not achieving with your current marketing, and use this to form the basis for how to measure your blog. For example, if you're lacking in discoverability, pick some keywords and see how you rank for them after you launch your blog.

Also set a benchmark that tells you if your content is good enough to hold your audience's attention. For example, if it takes two minutes to read an article, but most people leave the page after 20 seconds, your content may not be compelling enough.

**7. Consider your multi-language readers:** The expertIP team also created a French version of the blog. Allstream wanted to develop all new content for the French blog to appeal to a slightly different audience and culture. However, less French contributors and a smaller budget means that some content from the English blog is translated to supplement the unique French content.

## **The results: Increased website traffic and ppt-ins for premium content**

The launch of expertIP had reenergized Allstream's marketing and helped the company achieve its goal of engaging early-stage leads. Although the blog just launched in April, Allstream is already noticing significant increases in its web traffic.

*“After three months of activity we're driving upwards of 25 percent new incremental traffic into our digital ecosystem, and in particular, visits from unbranded search have slowly but steadily increased each month since the blog launched,” says Gluck.*

One of the highest-performing channels for driving traffic has been StumbleUpon, where links to about half a dozen articles have gone viral.

*“We have also seen that people are responding to the blog's banner ads and downloading the associated premium content,” says Gluck. “I've been somewhat surprised by how well it's done. Without getting too specific, we've seen expertIP play a role in upwards of 20 percent of leads in some of our campaigns.”*

expertIP is also helping Allstream position itself as a leader in its industry, as the blog's content is getting picked up by other news sources and received a very positive review from a major industry consultant. And further, it provides another source of content from which Allstream can project communications and drive engagement through its other social channels.

To learn more about blogging, check out our [Ultimate Guide to Blogging](#).

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