

QUICK-START GUIDE:

BLOGGING TO DRIVE BUSINESS

How to set up a business Blog that builds loyalty, generates buzz and positions you as an industry expert.

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About the Author

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He's written for multinational corporations like Royal Bank of Canada, EF Education First, EXFO and Widex as well as successful start-ups like B2B Connex, InfoSpi, EmailDeals and Lifestyle Hearing.

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Introduction

You've probably heard that Blogging can be a very valuable asset for a business. It's true (we'll get into how and why in a bit), and it can be a great marketing tool no matter what size your company is or what industry you happen to be a part of. Whether you're a lone consultant trying to make waves in your field, or part of a multinational corporation looking to gain further market share, a well-organized and content rich Blog can do wonders for your business.

BUT... setting up and running a successful Blog can be frustrating, time consuming and unproductive (even counterproductive) if you aren't sure how to go about it properly.

Go ahead and use this guide as a simple step-by-step blueprint that can and will help you start and manage your own successful Blog presence online.

What is Blogging?

Just in case you've been trapped on a desert island for the last 10 or 15 years, we should explain what Blogging actually is.

Ok, let's use Google's unbelievably boring, but very accurate definition first, *"A Blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order."*

If you are still awake after reading that, let me try and put it a bit more simply... *"A Blog is an online journal where you can share 'stuff' with your readers."*

The 'stuff' you choose to share is usually what separates a successful Blog with a Blog that has one regular reader... who also happens to be said Blog's owner.

I'll go over what kind of 'stuff' you should be putting on your Blog later on in this guide so stay tuned!

Anyway, Blogging has become so important, that practically every business now has a Blog. The problem is, most businesses treat their Blogs like an extension of the company PR department and shove press release type material at their quickly dwindling, half-comatose audience until no one is left to read about the breakthrough Jenny from Sales just made with the broken photocopier.

Ok, so what is a Blog good for when we look at one in a business context? Read on to find out...

How Can Blogging Help Your Business?

Social Media is about building relationships with consumers and I consider Blogging to be one powerful weapon in your Social Media arsenal.

When I say Social Media, you might think: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or FourSquare but a Blog offers many of the same functions and allows us to go much deeper with our audience than most other forms of Social Media.

Done right, a Blog will become the central hub of your Social Media marketing activities and allow for lively and engaging discussions with consumers.

A Blog provides a way of creating a real and meaningful dialogue, something that's become more and more important in our increasingly competitive and cluttered culture.

Once you've created trust and provided value to your readers, then you can sell them your remarkable widget through more traditional channels.

If you take one idea away from this Blogging guide it should be this - Relationship First... Sale Second.

People come for the content and stay for the conversation - they don't come to be sold. If you can take that onboard, your Blog will be ahead of 95% of your competitors, who simply can't resist trying to sell their (obviously inferior) widget whenever someone happens to be in front of them.

Those dummies!

Take a peek at the list I've put together to help you see how a good Blog can help you drive business.

- 1) **Build Relationships and LOYALTY with your market.**
- 2) **Position yourself as the 'go-to' expert in your field**
- 3) **Promote products, services and special offers**
- 4) **Expand your reach beyond traditional channels**
- 5) **Generate 'buzz' or word of mouth marketing**
- 6) **Get your message out there and have a conversation**
- 7) **Build and develop your Brand**
- 8) **Drive people to your brick and mortar location**
- 9) **Drive people to your virtual location**
- 10) **Communicate quickly during a crisis**
- 11) **Get feedback on how your company is doing**
- 12) **Learn how your Brand is perceived**

Setting Up Your Blog: It's Easier Than You Think!

There are quite a few options to choose from when the time comes to set up your blog.

Here are a few of the more well known Blogging engines that can help you get going quickly and easily. Some are free while others require a minimal investment.

www.wordpress.org

www.wordpress.com

www.blogger.com

www.typepad.com

For this exercise I would recommend you choose [wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org). This is a blog engine that allows you to host on your own site. So it would look like: yoursite.com/blog

There is one massive advantage to this approach: YOU OWN THE BLOG because it's hosted on your own server. So for example, if you were to choose Blogger instead, they could take your Blog down for any reason... or no reason at all. This leads to a very unstable situation and over the long term, I suggest you avoid it and go with [Wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org).

The fantastic thing about Wordpress is that they offer a very powerful, yet very simple interface so even us non-techies can use it with ease. No coding needed. No HTML or those other computery languages needed. Love it.

If all this seems very technical to you, don't worry, a good web professional could have this stuff in place for you in a matter of hours.

This guide is not intended to be a technical walkthrough. If it was, I could go on for pages and still not explain clearly how to set up the technical aspect of your Blog as I also need a web pro to help me create web properties.

So we'll leave it at that. I suggest you contact a web designer who can get you going, if you don't have a web person on-hand, get in touch and I can recommend some top-notch pros.

Organizing Your Blog: Two Steps to Success

So your Blog is up and running and it looks fantastic. But what's the next step? Should you dive in and begin tapping away at the keyboard or step back and organize how you're going to manage your Blog effectively. If you have high hopes for the long-term health of your new Blog, take a breath and get organized!

Step 1 - Decide who's going to write and/or manage your Blog.

If you are a part of a large company, you should think who will be best suited to writing your Blog. Perhaps you already have a writer on staff that can adapt his or her style to the online space you've created.

Maybe you have the option of assigning a few different writers to team up and take charge. The fact is, not every person in your company will be suitable for this sort of writing.

The last thing you need is a dry, dusty corporate robot as the face of your Blog.

You need someone who is inquisitive, friendly (at least online!) and willing to work at it. Some people take to Blogging right away while for others, it takes time to adjust. Believe me, it isn't easy to Blog, or at least to do it well.

If you work at a large company, you'll probably also have the budget to get some outside help. There are many writers who you can hire to lend a hand on a regular or as needed basis. Try and find someone who you can rely on as you'll want a fairly consistent tone for your Blog. After all, it's going to contribute to your Brand profile and positioning. A Blog is not, or at least should not be operating in a vacuum. It should work to raise your Brand profile, promote your expertise and ultimately, help make selling your product or service easier.

So what if you don't work for a large company?

What if you happen to be a one man (or woman) show? Obviously your options are limited but if you want to know who will probably have to start writing your Blog, have a look in the mirror, I'm sure it will come to you.

If you do have some extra money as a start-up or single person operation you could hire a writer to help you, even if it's to create a few posts that will get you rolling. If your budget permits, get your writer to create multiple posts so you can simply add them to your Blog when it's convenient. I'm all about creating a simple situation for Blog content creation. If it's inconvenient or troublesome to create content, you won't end up using your Blog enough, or effectively for that matter.

Step 2 - Create an Editorial Schedule

This step is extremely valuable and will really make the Blogging process a lot simpler over the medium to long-term. It's called an editorial schedule and it takes some planning but it's worth it in terms of reduced stress and confidence in your content.

An editorial calendar is simply a place to put down ideas for your Blog posts, schedule your writing and decide when to publish your completed post.

The worst thing you can do, or a least one thing that will make it tough to succeed long-term is to try and wing it every time you sit down to write. It's just difficult to generate ideas when you need them right then and there.

Trust me... I'm a writer... it's hard.

When you have a well-organized editorial schedule, you'll be able to sit down and just write the post.

Because Blogging can be fluid and ideas will pop up, you can always use your editorial schedule as a backup when fresh content ideas aren't coming up.

An editorial schedule is a great thing to have in your back pocket for when you need it. How's that cliché go? It's better to have it and not need it, than need it and not have it!

Creating Content (The Most Important Part!)

There's a saying that you should keep in mind when developing posts for your Blog. It states simply that, "CONTENT IS KING".

The most important point to remember, and it may seem obvious, is that you must focus on creating content that YOUR READERS find interesting or valuable. The fact is, many companies make the mistake of writing about what they feel is important without considering their readership.

In fact, many companies end up using their Blog as if it is simply an extension of the PR or marketing department.

Some do it because they can't wrap their heads around the fact that social media is a two way street; a medium that is supposed to promote engagement and conversation. For many marketers who've been using the traditional bullhorn approach to marketing, it can be a tough transition.

In the recent past, we spoke TO consumers, not WITH consumers. This is known as interruption marketing, where we try to get someone's attention and then tell them why they should pick us instead of the other guy.

But in the new media environment, if you've got your 'sales bullhorn' out every time someone visits your Blog, it's very unlikely you'll build a loyal following. The end result will be that you'll waste a good deal of time and money.

If you are going to use your Blog to SELL your products and BRAG about your company... I wouldn't bother starting one.

I'll use my own Blog as an example to illustrate what I, and many others think works. If you want to have a look, visit www.brianbirnbaum.com/blog.

I'm in the marketing business, many of my readers tend to be marketing and communications managers. Though they work in a number of different industries, they are all interested in marketing as a topic.

What I try and do is provide actionable material they can take away from my Blog and use in their own efforts and so far I've been successful. And I can also tell you for a fact that in many cases, clients have approached me or been convinced of my expertise strictly because of my Blog.

To give you a couple of examples, I may offer information through a direct illustration like, "How to Write a Brochure" or through a story where I try and make a point, such as "Why Too Much Creativity Can Kill Your Campaign", it could even be a criticism of a particular marketing piece. For example, my Blog features a segment called "Terrible Taglines" where I basically make fun of company slogans that I find to be... well, terrible!

But no matter what information I put on my Blog, I'm hoping that people will find the information I provide useful and actually use it to improve their own marketing. But I'm also positioning myself as an expert in my field so if they ever require marketing services, they'll think of me first.

So when you create a Blog post, you should try for:

- 1) UTILITY – Is your material actionable?
- 2) RELEVANCE – Is it relevant to a) your customer and b) your industry?
- 3) CONVERSATION – Is your post something that will ignite conversation in or with your readership?
- 4) READABILITY – Make sure your language is simple to understand and enjoyable to read and not filled with complex jargon.

Here are some ideas for Blog topics that readers find interesting with an example of each:

Lists – Top Ten Reasons Newspapers are Failing

How-To – How To Win Friends and Influence Twitter Followers

Critique – Why Facebook ‘Like’ Buttons Are Dangerous

Analysis – What the New Financial Projections REALLY Mean

Product Launch/ Update – Our New Software Upgrade Improves Privacy

Promotion – How To Win an iPad with Acme Corp.

Topical – Are You Going to ‘The Idea Conference’ in February?

Success Stories – How Acme Corp. Grew a Client’s Business by 200%

Interacting with Readers : Blogging Best Practices

A Blog is only as good as its moderator. It is very important that you encourage conversation among and with your readership, be involved and of course, provide the tools that will allow for conversation in the social media landscape.

Encouraging comments and moderating comments:

Blogging platforms such as Wordpress, Blogger and Typepad allow you to turn commenting on or off. We obviously encourage you to turn them ON. This is the bare minimum for creating a community on and through your Blog.

We do suggest you also turn on the function that allows you to moderate or read comments before they go 'live' on your Blog. This will allow you to ensure the conversations going on about your posts are respectful and relevant.

Moderating your Blog's comments will also allow you to prevent Spammers from using your Blog for their own nefarious ends, though many Blogging platforms function so that Spam won't even make it to the moderating stage.

Create a commenting policy:

This should be fairly simple but you really shouldn't try and do without it. Create some simple rules people must follow if they are going to be able to participate on your blog. Some examples might include, being respectful of others, no swearing or insults, using real names as opposed to anonymous posting and others that would be relevant to your particular business and/or Blog.

Remember: DO NOT erase comments that you simply disagree with or speak negatively about your company. People will realize that you are trying to control the conversation and nobody likes Big Brother. If someone does have an issue with your post or is criticizing your company, service or product, we suggest you respond and ask that they get in touch with you personally so you can resolve the issue. This sort of thing falls into Online Reputation Management, a discipline all companies should become very familiar with.

Adding Social Media Functionality to Your Blog:

Your Blog should be only one part of your social media presence, but at a minimum, you should provide the functionality that allows people to share your Blog posts with other people online quickly and easily.

Wordpress has easy to install and simple to use Plug-ins that allow you place buttons linking your Blog to other social media properties like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

When you write something that people reading your Blog find interesting, they will be able to share it with people in their network. This will drive people to your Blog to see what you're saying and often, they will become consistent readers. Then they will start sharing and the cycle repeats itself over and over.