

# Blogging for Business

## Made Easy



## **BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS MADE EASY**

There was a time when many of us used to keep diaries, logs or journals, lugging around that ugly black book wherever we went. It was an efficient way of keeping track of things. Today, the Web has taken the place of that book, in the form of a blog.

### **So What Is A Blog?**

A blog, or web-log as it was once called, is today's version of the diary. But it is more sophisticated than that. It is a user-generated website that collects your entries (*known as posts*) in reverse chronological order, always listing the most recent post first. Readers are also allowed to comment and give their opinions of any posts via a simple form on a blog.



But the real beauty of blogs lies in its simplicity. It negates the tedious process of learning HTML, Web design or coding, otherwise needed to operate a functional website. You can update a blog via any Internet connection, even updating it using a cell phone.

Setting up a blog can take as little as five minutes (*and that's if you're unsure of what you're doing*) and you are ready to publish your content. It is that easy. If you can send an e-mail, you are more than ready to start blogging.

### **How Are Blogs Applicable To Businesses?**

The ease in publishing a blog makes it a perfect marketing vehicle for any type of business. Whether you work from home or are the CEO of a Fortune 500 corporation, blogs will make an ideal addition to your marketing strategy.



Blogs create a face to your business that your customers can identify with and participate along. It has become a valuable part of today's consumer-generated media, giving consumers a platform to engage actively and participate in dialogs with key personnel within a company.

Companies like General Motors, IBM, Boeing, and Microsoft have set up blogs to market their services or products because it is such a cost-effective way of communicating quickly with their prospects and customers. By providing a blog for their customers to talk about their product, a company can easily find out what their customers really want and tailor their products accordingly. The open-dialog between company and customer has dramatically cut costs and boosted revenue because companies are getting first-

hand research information for next-to-nothing! It is the perfect instant feedback mechanism.

If you are running a business from home, the same strategies apply. Use blogs to:

- Provide value-added content
- Build a relationship with your readers
- Establish trust with your customers while gaining credibility
- Create awareness about your product offerings
- Test ideas and research your market by getting your readers and customers to participate in discussions

### **Sounds Good, So How Do I Get Started?**

It is best to get started by identifying and choosing the right tools to get the job done efficiently. This means choosing the right blog platform for your needs. Blog platforms are offered as two options: hosted and standalone.

The hosted option eliminates the hassle of finding a host for your blog as the company takes care of that for you. This option would cost you a monthly fee. TypePad.com is one such company that offers this.

The standalone option allows you to purchase a license for the blogging software, which gives you the right to host it with a hosting company of your choice. MoveableType.org is an example of this. This option may give you greater flexibility with tinkering with the software code. You can probably tell this is the option for those who want ultimate control of their blog platforms.

But because you're probably just getting started with blogging, you should turn your attention to just two choices – Blogger.com and Wordpress.org. Blogger.com is a hosted blog which is owned by Google and the best part about it is that no monthly fees are charged. That's right, it is absolutely free. Blogger.com is very popular with those just starting out with blogging because the platform, hosting and domain-names are free.

Wordpress.org is the other blog platform you should know, which is a standalone option. If you are already hosting some of your websites with a web host, Wordpress.org is ideal for you. Not only is Wordpress.org free for unlimited use, but it is the best-supported blog platform there is. For ultimate control of your blog, this is as good as it gets. It is the blog platform of choice of today's savviest bloggers.

Wordpress.org also offers a hosted option called, Wordpress.com. Like Blogger.com, Wordpress.com offers the platform, hosting and domain names for free. But it is limited in a way that it is less configurable and offers limited control over web design. The choice of blog platform is left entirely up to you, but you definitely cannot go wrong with either Blogger.com or Wordpress.org/com to get you off the ground and running.

Visit the sites mentioned and if you're going for the hosted option, simply sign-up for an account and you'll be ready to start blogging immediately. With the standalone option, visit Wordpress.org and download the software to your server. There is great communal support with Wordpress.org so, if you get stuck at any point during the installation process, just check into the forum and your answer will probably be found there.

### Choosing a Name for Your Blog

If you already own a website, you understand the significance of choosing a good domain name. A good domain name not only enhances the branding of your business and makes it easy for your readers to share with others.



If your blog is going to play a significant role in your business, then spend some time choosing the right domain name for it. People tend to remember memorable domain names that end with a dot com to spread it around easier. You may consider using a free tool such as, DomainsBot.com to help in registering a good name. Then choose a standalone blog platform like Wordpress.org to stand a better chance of attracting heavy traffic to your blog on a regular basis.

### Choosing a Template / Theme for Your Blog

With Blogger.com and Wordpress.com, the hassle of hiring a Web designer is eliminated. These hosted options already have blog templates (often called "themes") ready for use. Just pick a design that works well with the theme of your business and get ready to start blogging. The downside to this is that there is only so much you can do to alter its look and feel. What you see is what you get.

With Wordpress.org however, you're free to hire a Web Designer to design the style of your blog from the ground up. There are no limitations to what you can do with your design. There are Wordpress.org templates that are also freely given away by the Wordpress community with no strings attached. You have full rights to grab any of these templates and alter them to suit the theme of your business blog.

WORDPRESS.ORG

Showcase Themes Plugins Mobile Support Get Involved About Blog Hosting

Themes Directory

Username  Password

Finding WordPress

Plugins

Themes

- Commercial
- More Info
- Contact Us

Mobile

Looking for the awesome WordPress themes? Here's the place to find them!

Welcome to the Free WordPress Themes directory.

Search below or check out our new filter and tag interface

8,179 THEMES, 87,195,365 DOWNLOADS, AND COUNTING

You can search on Google “Wordpress themes” and you’ll get a variety of sites to choose from. One of the more popular ones is found at <http://themes.wordpress.net>.

## Publishing Your Content

After all the “back-breaking” work of setting up your business blog, it now comes down to the most important reason of having a blog in the first place - getting your content out to the world.

For some, this is an easy process. For many others however, publishing useful and unique content regularly can be severely daunting. Distinguishing yourself from other business bloggers takes a bit of understanding of who your core readers are. Put some time aside to research your audience and find out what they would like to read about. Here are some considerations to bear in mind when publishing your content:

- Should I make my posts educational, newsworthy, informational, entertaining and debatable or, a combination of all those?
- How long should my posts be (*this is where getting feedback from your readers comes in*)?
- Should I consider a blog partnership (*getting guest bloggers to write unique content for your blog*)?

The initial excitement of publishing a blog can quickly dissipate when your “content well” starts to dry up. So where do you turn to for ideas and inspiration to get readers queuing up to read your work? Well, let’s start with how you can categorize your content in a way that could potentially skyrocket your readership:

- The infamous Top 10 lists
- How-To information
- Reviews
- Interview someone within your business niche
- Latest trends and newsworthy information
- Present relevant business case-studies
- Recommend other business blogs that might be of interest to your readers

But all the above may be rendered useless if you can’t get to a source for inspiration. So here are some of the best places to visit when you need to get those creative juices flowing:

- News sites – CNN, Yahoo News, Google News are just some of many News websites available to spark an interesting idea for a blog post. Dig into News stories and press releases to see what is significant for your blog. Cast your opinion on it and you've just got yourself a new post. But don't stop there.

Look for News sites that are specific to your industry as well. For example, if you're blogging about finance, head on over to Bloomberg Financial News and get ideas from there. About.com is another site that covers a gamut of topics that makes for such a great source for content ideas.

- Online Groups / Social Networking sites / Forums – Message board forums, Facebook Groups and Yahoo Groups are a wealth of information. Your potential readers and customers could be lurking within these groups, freely exchanging the kind of information a market research company would pay thousands of dollars for.

Don't ignore forums that are relevant to your industry. Like social networking sites and online groups, forums attract the kind of audience that could be interested in the information you are offering.

- Social Bookmarking Services – Like social networking sites, social bookmarking services are all the rage today. These services allow users to rate and recommend topics that are popular with them. They are a portal into the hottest and latest trends as deemed by public opinion.

Visit sites such as Technorati.com, Delicious, StumbleUpon.com, Reddit.com and Digg.com to get blogging ideas. While there are a great number of other social bookmarking sites springing up onto the web quite regularly, those are the most referred to by professional bloggers for research.

- High Traffic Sites – Another fantastic source of blogging ideas can be found at high traffic sites such as Alexa.com, Amazon.com, Ebay.com, Craigslist.org and Wikipedia.org. A wealth of ideas can be mined just from sifting through these sites' categories.
- Article Directories – Article directories offer you the option of re-printing the articles of your choice on your blog. This can come in handy if you're having an off day but need something to whet the appetite of your readers. Even if you don't intend to publish any of those articles, use them as a source of ideas for writing your next post.

Some of the more popular directories are EzineArticles.com, GoArticles.com and ArticleCity.com. These articles are free to re-print but, read the terms on these sites on how to go about re-printing them.

- Some Other Sources – Another idea-generating method is to look out for what people are searching for and decide if you could blog about these search terms. Visit popular sites like Google Zeitgeist and MetaCrawler.com for this purpose. You can use keywords tools like WordTracker.com.

Try searching for ideas using blog search engines as well. Try Technorati.com for potential ideas.

### Now That I've Got Content, How Do I Get Traffic?

Probably the trickiest part for any online business owner is getting targeted traffic to their sites. This is more science than art and has spawned an industry all of its own. Search engine optimization or SEO as it's more affectionately referred to, is a major player in how you get targeted traffic to your sites or in this case, your blogs.

There are other promotional and marketing strategies that you can employ to get traffic, but it all starts with optimizing your blogs for SEO. If you want your blog to be found, you have to optimize it for the search engines.



How much optimization you can perform on your blog depends once again on whether you're using a hosted blog platform like Blogger.com or a standalone like Wordpress.org.

A standalone platform like Wordpress.org is the best way to go for SEO purposes. There are no limits as to how you can customize your Wordpress.org blog. But because most beginners tend to use the hosted option, we'll explore SEO tactics that everyone can benefit from.

### Split Your Blog's Search Engine Optimization into Offsite And Onsite SEO

Offsite SEO can be summed up as just this – inbound links. This means blogs other than your own, are linking to your blog and a wide variety of your content. Inbound links are quite possibly the most important SEO tactic that could get your blogs highly ranked in the search engines.

So how do you get others to link to you? Here are some ways to get you started:

- Write Quality Content – Nothing gets you links faster than writing content that affects your readers. If a little bit of controversy helps, throw that in. As word gets around about your posts, bloggers will inevitably link to you.
- Post Comments On Blogs You Read – Don't hesitate to post worthwhile comments on other blogs, be it your competitors or not, but realize blog comments themselves don't have impact on your SEO results. You may get a follow-up with a link pointing to your blog. And if that happens to be from a competitor with a huge audience, you'll be looking at some major traffic influx to your blog.

- Submit Your Blog To Directories – You can submit your blogs to blog directories to generate more inbound links. Apart from buying links, this is something many bloggers do to get more traffic. Technorati.com and DayPop.com are amongst two of the more popular blog directories right now, but you can perform a Web search to find more.

Onsite SEO requires customization within your blog itself. Here's how to get started:

- Optimize Your Content With Targeted Keywords - This topic really requires intense study, as it is one of the more important subjects when discussing SEO. But in a nutshell, your blog posts should contain the keywords or keyword phrases that your potential customers or readers would most likely type into the search engines to find what they are looking for.

This requires advanced research of keywords on your part so that you can place these targeted keywords within your blog content. The result would be a highly optimized blog for the very information your potential customers are looking for.

Have each of your posts focused on one specific topic so that you can moderate the keywords going into your content. Over-stuffing keywords can make for terrible reading which defeats the purpose of finding and keeping your customers.

Make your posts as original as possible and update your blog frequently, at least three times a week.

- Place Your Keywords Here Too – Within the URL of the page, page and post titles, heading tags such as H1, image alt tags and meta tags. Bold your keywords where you can too.
- Create A Good Linking Structure Within Your Blog – Create links that link from a certain post in your blog to another relevant post which you had written previously. This interlinking makes it very easy for search engines to re-index your blog, allowing for more of your pages to be indexed. Categorize your information and place them on your blog's sidebar. Create a sitemap once your blog starts growing larger in size.

But one thing to remember is not to over-optimize your blog. Write naturally and don't overdo it with keywords. Use descriptive wording and use synonyms rather than repeating the same keyword phrases over and over.

## What's The Deal With RSS?

Work on the above SEO tactics for your blog and you will be well on your way towards a healthy search engine ranking. Meaning, be prepared for traffic to your blog.

Another very important benefit to publishing a blog, is something called "Real Simple Syndication" or RSS for short. RSS is a content delivery channel, distributing your content to your audience wherever they may be. Blogs use RSS to automatically deliver

your content to your readers without them having to visit your site everyday to check whether your blog had been updated recently.

To accomplish this, your audience needs to subscribe to your blog's feed. Using an RSS Feed Reader, they can now read your latest posts from the reader itself. It works like a simple subscription form. You place your feed icons in a prominent place on your blog where your readers simply click on it and get subscribed. You must have seen these icons. They look something like this:



## Place these icons on your site

RSS Feed Readers are available as desktop downloads or as Web-based applications. Many are freely available like Feedly.com and Newsblur.com.

Using RSS is a much better way of syndicating your content than e-mail because RSS goes beyond just e-zines. And if you were wondering how managing your blog's subscribers could be possible, there's Feedburner.com to answer your question. Probably the best in the business, Feedburner.com provides the most detailed stats about your blog subscribers, giving you the edge to improve your blog's performance as you see fit.

## Promoting Your Blog To Find Even More Readers

If you've read this far, you're already armed with enough knowledge to publish well-optimized business blogs. But there can never be enough readers for your blog. This is where some promotional strategies can come into play. Let's run through some of them:

- Guest Blog Posting: One of the most effective ways to increase your blog traffic is by posting original content for other blogs related to your niche topic. Look for popular blogs and check if they have guest posting guidelines and submit your content. Also, start building relationships with other bloggers in your niche, so they are more likely to publish your content. When you guest post, you get to promote your website in a byline, so people who love your content will be interested in coming to your site for more.
- Use Trackbacks - We mentioned commenting on other blogs previously, but trackbacks is another useful feature found on most blog platforms. If you were writing about someone else's blog, you should perform a trackback.



Trackbacks deposit your content onto that particular person's blog you just wrote about. Sounds complicated but this is a great way of getting another person's audience to pay attention to what you have to say. Not all blogs display trackbacks on their websites, but other blog owners will usually be notified when you do link to them, so they are more likely to be aware of your work and potentially share it with their readers.

- Post To Article Directories – You know about submitting your blogs to blog directories, but why not submit your content as articles to article directories? You will be reaching out to a significant amount of targeted readers this way. A website publisher could easily use your articles as content for his audience and that could mean lots more eyeballs for your blog. The most popular article directory is ezinearticles.com.
- Use Offline Promotional Methods – Get your blog's URL printed on your business brochures, flyers, business cards, letter heads, envelopes, ads or anywhere else you advertise offline. This is a great potential stream of new targeted readers. You may consider advertising online too.
- Add Your Blog's URL To Outgoing E-mail – An often overlooked strategy but very effective. You never know, your recipient might be a potential customer.
- Promote Using Web 2.0 Methods – Participate in social networking sites, online groups and forums to let them know about your business blog. Because they share the same interest, they are bound to pay your blog a visit.

Make use of social bookmarking services to spread the word about your blog. You can do this by placing icons offered by these bookmarking services on your blog. Anytime your readers find something worthy of being spread around, they would click this icon. It works like the "Tell-A-Friend" script used by many websites during the Paleolithic age (*ok, about two years ago*), but with these bookmarking services, the reach is far greater.

### **Can I Monetize My Blogs?**

Absolutely. Once you've got a good stream of traffic coming in, monetizing your blogs is a cinch. Today's most popular method of monetizing blogs is allowing advertisements on it. And the company offering the world's largest online contextual advertising program is Google. This program is known as Adsense.

By signing-up with Adsense, you are allowing Google to place targeted ads on your blog that are relevant to the theme of your blog. If a reader sees an ad and clicks on it out of interest, you earn yourself some money. The more readers that click on the ads, the more money you make. There are



people making a full-time income doing nothing but creating sites for Adsense. This may not necessarily be the best way to monetize your blog, but it is one of the easiest.

There are many more types of advertising programs like CPC advertising, Impression-Based Ads, Text Ads, etc. Take some time to study which advertising model works best for your blog.

The other way of monetizing your blog is to place affiliate links throughout your content. Amazon.com is an example of a company that offers an affiliate program. Signing-up for it is free as with most companies offering such programs. CommissionJunction.com is another. If you find a product that appeals to both you and your audience, you can sign-up as an affiliate to sell it. Doing so involves either placing banners on your site, or text-links that you can weave into your content. When a reader clicks on that link or banner and buys the product, you earn a commission.

Here are some other ideas you could implement towards monetizing your blog:

- Seeking sponsorship
- Donations or tip jars
- Selling merchandise
- Selling blogs
- Selling content via a subscription-based model. Your subscribers pay to read your high-value posts. To make this work, you need to offer something very unique to your readers that they can't get anywhere else.
- Get paid to write for a blog network. Sites like Squidoo.com and HubPages.com, provide a revenue share on advertising. Other sites may pay you per post.
- Turn your blog content into a book. You can self-publish a print book or sell it in ebook format.
- Selling original downloadable products like ebooks and information products.

Ultimately, the key to making your business blog an overwhelming success is to keep it real and have fun with it. Make it a point to interact with everyone of your subscribers. The truth about publishing a blog is that it does not belong to you. It belongs to the community. Use this to your advantage to tap into the minds of your readers. If you're planning a new product, ask them for some of the features they would like to see in it. The blog makes it a perfect feedback mechanism to get the answers you need to make your business an ongoing success.



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