



Succeed with Social Media

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Social Media: Blogging

Blogging can be useful for almost any type of business. Like other social media venues, blogging is a commitment but can produce powerful business results.

A blog is an ongoing collection of posts, which could be multiple paragraphs long. Unlike other social media sites, a blog is something you create on your own, not a broader site that you post to. Blogs can help a company gain exposure and become a thought leader in an industry. Similar to other marketing and social media strategies, blogs can support goals such as building your brand, generating leads or sales, or generating advertising revenue. The first step to starting a blog is deciding which goals will apply to your blog, so that you can formulate a strategy based on your objective(s).

Getting started

Consider the following issues and questions when getting started with a blog:

- What will the topic or niche of your blog be? Who is your intended audience? It is better to focus on a more specific topic than leave it too broad, as you will appeal to a specific group of people. Determining these factors is very important.
- Think about your content:
 - How often will you write? This will depend on your resources. The more often you post, the more traffic you'll get, but don't commit to a frequency you can't maintain or readers might lose interest.
 - Based on the niche or theme of your blog, think about what specific topics you will write about. What kinds of posts will you write?
 - Decide how to organise your blog posts within your blog site. It may make sense to do so chronologically, or by topic categories.
 - Plan to integrate important calls to action into both the content and design of your blog. For example, you may want your readers to join your email list, buy your product, email you for a consultation, connect with you on another social site, etc. Emphasise your desired calls to action (with links) within the design of your blog, and also incorporate such links in the content of your blog when relevant.
- Determine your blogging process. Who will scope ideas and write each blog? Will blogs be reviewed by an editor or manager?

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- Choose a design and software. If your company doesn't have the resources to design a blog yourself, you can find free or paid pre-designed templates online.
 - Decide whether you will host your blog on your existing website or a different one. Keeping it under the same domain name as your public site can enhance SEO (search engine optimisation) value, but may be complicated depending on the software your site is built on.
 - When choosing blog software, think about the features that are important. For instance, the ability for users to comment, share links and subscribe to something are all potential features of blog software.

Launching your blog

Once you're ready to launch, be sure to promote your blog to attract readers.

- Consider an email campaign to inform customers and prospects of the new blog and the value it can offer them.
- Take advantage of other social sites you're on. Promote the blog there initially, and continue to highlight new blog posts periodically.
- If you have an e-newsletter, include blog posts there.
- Promote your blog on your company website home page. Even if you host the blog under the same domain, it can be hidden for people just visiting your general site. Promote the latest blog on the home page with a link to the full blog site.
- Consider adding your blog's URL to your email signature, business cards, sales collateral and other visible locations.

Also be sure to establish a process to monitor your blog traffic, analyse goals and make changes as needed. Simple analytics software often comes free with your blog hosting account, or Google Analytics is another option. If certain topics are not popular, consider changing your focus. If you're getting a lot of traffic from Facebook®, for instance, expand your reach there. When assessing your blog, think about your audience, content, frequency and readability, and make changes to improve.

Blogging best practices

You don't have to be a great writer to be a great blogger. Consider these suggestions:

- Read other blogs. You'll learn from others' successes (and mistakes) and sharpen your own skills. Better yet, find blogs about blogging, such as copyblogger.com.
- Always keep your audience in mind and write content for them, not for you.
- Try to offer a unique opinion or point of view. No one will have a reason to read if you don't stand out.
- Don't overtly plug your products or services. Instead, discuss trends, offer expertise, provide your insight on recent news or talk about clients' pain points.
- Include statistics and link to other resources or blogs (assigning appropriate credit) to give more credibility to your blog.
- Make your content readable and easy to scan. Online, people don't spend much time on a page, so it is vital that you make your content easy to digest. Don't write in big blocks of text. Instead, use bullets, numbered lists, subheadings, bold and italics, short paragraphs and spacing.

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- Spend time on each headline. People will read your headline and decide in a second whether to read your post. Make headlines worthy of the great content you write. Also, keep your headlines searchable by including relevant keywords about the blog post topic.
- Always proofread your blogs. If possible, have someone else review them as well, to double-check for typos or writing that doesn't flow.

Common mistakes and roadblocks

- Don't treat your blog as your press centre. Blogs are not about promoting your business or products. If you do mention a business or product announcement, do it casually and sparingly—it should not be the main topic of your post.
- Make sure your blog allows people to leave comments, so that others can start conversations and leave feedback. Participate in this conversation yourself when people leave comments.
- Don't expect overnight success (and make sure upper management doesn't have those expectations). Establishing a readership takes time and hard work; you should see results if you continue regularly putting out valuable content targeted to your audience. Give your blogging efforts at least a year before considering if it might not be the right choice for your business.
- Not blogging regularly can hurt readership, so strive to maintain the frequency goal you established (or change the goal if it's not feasible). One strategy to improve is to plan and write posts in advance, so you're never scrambling at the last minute.
- Some companies find it simple to start generating content, but run out of ideas after a couple months. Here are some ways to help keep good content flowing:
 - Always be on the lookout for potential blog ideas. Keep a file on your computer to save links and ideas as you come across them.
 - Increase the number of people blogging for your company to expand content.
 - Explore the idea of guest bloggers, with people relevant in your industry.
 - Ask others in the company to submit blog ideas as well.
 - Build a content calendar to scope out content in advance. This could also generate ideas based on timely topics or seasonal events. A calendar can also help with the above frequency issue.

Check out some good examples of business blogs in this article from Inc.: www.inc.com/magazine/20091101/19-blogs-you-should-bookmark-right-now.html?nav=next.

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