

BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS

HOW TO START AND RUN
A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS BLOG



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Seventy Tips for a Fantastic Business Blog:

An Introduction

“The first thing you need to decide when you build your blog is what you want to accomplish with it, and what it can do if successful.”

– Ron Dawson, *daredreamermag.com*

Whatever role you play in the wide world of business marketing – from small business owner to advertising department intern – chances are you’re aware of the concept of writing and maintaining a business blog. The internet is littered with blogs written by all types of people; the stay-at-home mom looking to share her daily experiences, the film student blogging his way through his documentary-making assignments, the business CEO seeking a way to connect with his clients. Blogging is a trend that is seemingly here to stay, and that can benefit your business in many ways when executed correctly.

Why start a business blog? The short answer to this question is that a well-written, interesting blog can be a simple, easy platform with which you can connect with your clients and share information with the public. Studies show that businesses who maintain blogs typically experience a bump in sales and bring in new customers who otherwise would not have heard about the company!

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A blog gives your company a voice! Through blog posts, you can talk freely with your customers about new products, services you offer, trends in your industry and other information pertinent to the community, readership and customer base that you serve. Additionally, a well-written blog allows you the opportunity to be viewed as an expert your field, generates traffic to your business website, and provides you with an opportunity to build a sense of connection and community with your customers.

When it comes to efficient, easy ways to share information with your customers, a blog is, hands down, the best way to maintain an active conversation with existing and potential clients alike! Your company's blog is by far your most powerful way to share your voice and online presence with readers – making you a source of written content and information they trust and depend upon for needs related to your specific industry.

The key to producing great content for your readers is to provide well-planned, thorough posts covering a wide variety of content types. Consider options such as how-to articles, industry-specific news reports, stories of customers' specific experiences with your product or services, and opinion pieces that encourage commentary from your customers. In chapter three, we will delve further into types of blog content, and tips for producing stellar blog posts that are sure to grab the attention of your readers and customers!

When considering whether or not to start a company blog, businesses often wonder who will read the material they produce, and how it will benefit their

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sales. In addition to reaching out to their current customer base, businesses typically find that readers from across the world are viewing their content, and are in turn visiting their website and even ordering their products! The bottom line is, producing quality blog posts that are specific to your industry and appropriately dense in keyword-targeted content is a fast, consistent way to bring new readers to your blog, and to turn those readers into repeat customers.

Through the remaining chapters of this ebook, we will cover tips and tricks that will help you develop a thorough understanding of blog hosting, content writing, site-promoting and search engine optimization, leaving you ready to start publishing a dynamic, attention-getting business blog. These tested, tried and true methods of blogging have helped businesses achieve their blog development goals for years, and are now available to you through the pages of this ebook!

As you move through the tips in this ebook, take time to make notes and write down thoughts that are specific to your blogging goals. Taking notes as you read is a great way to make the information shared here work for you, leaving you with a list of strategies and ideas tailored just for you and your business blog when you are through!

Blog Hosting 101: **An Overview of the Blogging “Big Guys”**

“Blogging is just writing – writing using a particularly efficient type of publishing technology.”

– Simon Dumenco, *adage.com*

Once you have decided that you would like to begin a blog for your business, the first step to blogging success is to choose the hosting site that you will use to publish your blog. A blog hosting website provides your blog’s URL (website address,) allows you to choose a theme for your web page, and ultimately becomes the interface through which you will publish the content of your business blog day in and day out. There are many blog-hosting sites, but for the sake of time we will only cover a few of the “big guys” of blogging, focusing on those that are easy to use, free of charge and most popular within the blogging world.

Blogger

Blogger is a blog-hosting interface owned by Google. This publishing service has been around for practically as long as the internet, and because of its longevity and the power of its parent company, it is one of the most used and trusted hosting sites around. Blogger provides blog interfaces that are simple to set up, customize and use, and also makes monetization (earning money through ads placed on your blog) simple through the use of Google AdSense. Google has been actively working to

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improve search engine optimization (SEO) of Blogger-run blogs, and is growing the list of themes and plugins available to their bloggers fairly consistently.

Wordpress

Although one of the more complex publishing sites, Wordpress is praised by its users for being versatile, easy to customize, and excellent in the area of search engine optimization. It is commonly believed that Wordpress requires a little more study and skill to master, especially considering that a great deal of the customization capabilities require users to tinker with HTML code. Like Blogger, Wordpress has longevity on its side, being just a little over a decade old. Choosing a Wordpress blog may mean committing to a bit more time for learning and reviewing tutorials – definitely something to take into consideration if you're new to blogging altogether.

Tumblr

Tumblr is a fairly new blog interface that was recently acquired by Yahoo!. The site is more of a "micro-blogging" platform, meaning users focus on short, concise posts made up of video, short copy, infographics, images, pictures and other forms of media. Users within the Tumblr community are very reciprocal -- commenting, connecting and linking back to posts of other bloggers often. Bloggers who maintain a Tumblr blog should be comfortable talking and engaging with their customers, posting visual content and sharing quick updates multiple times per day.

Points to Consider When Choosing a Blog-Hosting Site

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1. **Space.** Make sure that your host site has enough web space to support your blogging needs. Consider the number of pictures you will use on your blog, as well as how often you will post sound files, video clips, animated images, etc. In addition to making sure your blog isn't slow to load in the beginning, this tip is also important so that there is space to expand as your blog begins to grow over time.
2. **Limitations.** In the same vein, be sure to check file size and type limitations. Be sure that your needs are covered by making sure you are able to upload the types of files you want (i.e. gif, jpeg, pdf) and that there are reasonable limits on the sizes of the files you are permitted to upload to your blog.
3. **Reviews.** Spend time reading reviews from other bloggers. Explore what other blog writers in similar fields have to say about the blog hosts you are considering.
4. **Stick with Free.** With the large amount of free blog-hosting sites that are widely used today, paid sites such as SquareSpace or Typepad are most likely unnecessary for your blogging needs. Avoid committing to hosting sites that charge a monthly fee unless you are absolutely sure that one of the free alternatives will not work for your business.
5. **Customer Service.** Take a moment to look into how customer service issues are handled within the blog-hosting company you are considering. Are representatives available to answer questions or help

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with problems that arise? During what hours is customer service provided? How quickly does the service respond to questions and concerns?

Choosing a platform through which to host your blog is not only the first step in the process to starting a successful blog for your business – it is also the most important! Without a blog-hosting site that you feel comfortable using and are confident will meet your needs in both the short and long term, you will find yourself frustrated and ready to give up on blogging early into your blog-writing venture.

By following the advice in this chapter and doing some research to be sure your blog-hosting site meets your needs, you are building a firm foundation for your business blog that is sure to kick-start your blogging venture and get you moving on to posting well-planned, interesting content in no time at all!

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What to Write and How to Write it: **A Beginning Blogger's Guide to Content**

“Where the internet is about availability of information, blogging is about making information creation available to anyone.”

– George Siemens, *Author, Knowing Knowledge*

Once you've set up your business blog on a blog-hosting site such as Blogger, Wordpress or Tumblr, it's time for the exciting part – publishing your blog's content! Simply put, blog content is the written words you publish on your blog, or your blog's “posts.” Copyblogger.com takes this simple explanation further by explaining that content marketing is “creating and sharing valuable, free content to attract and convert prospects into customers, and customers into repeat buyers.”

The content on a business blog should always be closely related to the products or services offered by your business. By focusing on your own industry and experience, you lead people to consider you an expert in your field, allowing them to trust you enough to do business with you. Be sure that your blog posts contain stories, images, articles, videos and other material that directly correspond with the type of business you're promoting. For example, an HVAC company's blog would contain posts about tips for maintaining your HVAC system, video segments about how to replace air filters, infographs about record heat waves, or other related information.

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With a basic understanding of what content is and how to use industry-focused content on your blog to establish your business as a trustworthy, professional source of information, we can now move forward with tips and tricks for writing outstanding, interesting blog content!

Layout and Content

1. **Take Notes.** Once you have chosen a topic for your blog post, your first step should be to sit down to research and make notes about the subject at hand. Pinpoint specific subtopics you'd like to address within the post, draw visual aids such as idea maps and brainstorming charts to organize your thoughts, and take some time to fact check and investigate issues you may not be completely familiar with. Taking some time to lay out your post on paper before your fingers ever hit the keyboard is a sure way to develop concise, accurate, well-planned content.
2. **Start with a Bang.** Give a great deal of thought to the title of each post. Focus on simple, to-the-point headlines that will summarize the content contained in your post and grab the reader's attention. Blog post titles are the first thing seen when your blog appears in an RSS feed or comes up on a list of search engine results. Keep it simple, make it interesting and summarize the entire post in one sentence if possible!

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3. **Open Creatively.** Consider catchy, interesting ways to open your posts. The opening lines of a blog post are what a reader uses to determine whether to keep reading, or move on to the next source of information. Focus on quality writing that is both attention getting and attention keeping.
4. **Subheads.** Since many blog readers are scanners of the posts they encounter, map out your post with subheadlines and bullet points where applicable. Subheadlines guide even the quick-scanning blog reader through your content by summarizing the subjects of each section of the post with a short, concise headline, typically written in bold font just above the section they pertain to.
5. **Call to Action.** A good blog post almost always ends with a call to action for its readers. Think about what you'd like your readers to do once they've read your content. Visit your website? Join the discussion by commenting on your post? Sign up for your business email list? Always offer readers a course of action that can be taken as a direct result of having read your content.
6. **Read it Over.** Once you've put your blog post together, be sure to reread the content and add additional depth where possible. Often, after getting all of your thoughts down in a post, you will find areas where you could be clearer or offer further information. A good rule of thumb when it comes to web content is to read, reread and then read again! Before clicking "publish" and sending your post live,

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make sure you've thoroughly reviewed the content you're about to release.

7. **Proofread.** While you're rereading your post in search of areas where you can be more clear or elaborate on your words, be cognizant of your grammar, spelling and punctuation. Make each read-through of your post a time of proofreading, seeking errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, formatting and spacing.

Content-Specific Tips

1. **Know Thy Problem.** When planning your post, be aware of what problem you plan to address in your writing, and of what solutions you will suggest to your readers. Writing a post about last-minute Christmas gift ideas? Offer procrastinating shoppers an invitation to shop your website and receive expedited shipping! Discussing tips for busy moms who want to keep their homes organized? Offer downloadable menu planners and shopping lists to get them started on the path to organization!
2. **And Thy Audience.** Be aware of who you are targeting with your blog posts. Identify your customers by age, gender, stage of life, occupation – whatever descriptors apply! Once you have a good understanding of who you are writing for, you can adjust your voice and style to best reach out to your targeted reader base.

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3. **Loosen Up.** The most important thing to remember about composing blog content is to enjoy yourself and have fun! Blog posts are a form of expression and can be a fantastic outlet for your creativity. Enjoy your journey as you experiment with different techniques and post types and figure out what works and doesn't work for your specific business blog!

Post Organization and Planning

1. **Make a Plan.** Create a calendar of blog posts, taking time to plan out at least a week in advance which posts will run on your blog each day. Having a clear plan and direction about where your blog is headed each week can keep you on track and help you produce well-planned, interesting content consistently.
2. **Schedule in Advance.** In the same vein, look into the schedule-ahead-posting features offered by your hosting platform. Many successful bloggers compose all of their posts for the week at the beginning of the week, and schedule them to post each day in consecutive order. Taking advantage of this feature can help you remember to post daily, consistent content that your readers will come to depend upon!

Writing blog content is a task to which you should apply the highest of standards. When posting content to your business blog, you are putting your writing abilities and style on display for the entire world to see. The

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internet is readily accessible to readers and consumers worldwide, making it imperative that you take pride in the content you produce!

The tips outlined in this chapter provide a thorough map of how to develop well-written content, from the initial planning phases through the time you publish a post live on your blog! As you begin to compose and publish content, visits to your blog will increase, and you will begin to desire promote your business blog and generate more readers. In the next chapter, we will delve into blog traffic – what it means, how to generate it, and when to get creative to bring in new readers!

Promoting Your Blog: **Generating Traffic to the Content Produced**

“What you do after you create your content is what truly counts.”

– Gary Vaynerchuk, *Author, Crush It!: Why NOW is the Time to Cash in on Your Passion*

If content is the “body” of blog, traffic to the blog can be considered to be the “blood,” pumping and running through the publication and cycling readers through the content on a consistent basis. There are more ways to generate traffic to your business blog than can be counted – from promoting your site through social media platforms to offline marketing and advertising and beyond.

The bottom line is this – the more readers you manage to pull through your blog, the more buzz your blog generates. The more readers who are buzzing about your blog content, the more other readers will hear about your blog and want to check it out. The more readers you acquire – the more customers you gain!

Blog traffic is important and is vital to the success of your blog. There are tips and tricks that are considered to be traditional ways of boosting traffic, and those that are more unconventional and creative. Below we will examine both types of methods for generating traffic. Choose a few from each category to start with, and as your readership continues to grow, refer back to this list and add others!

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Traditional Tips for Increasing Blog Traffic

1. **Good Content.** It's a simple fact that readers will not waste their time on content that is poorly written, uninteresting or overly wordy. Experts say that a successful blog is made up of 90% content and 10% everything else. When you write, do it well.
2. **Branding.** Use your blog's name constantly. In social media posts, on written documents, in message board discussions – anywhere you can. The more people see your blog's name, the more readily it will come to mind when they're seeking information specifically related to your field of business.
3. **Don't Over-Sell.** It's important to be concise in all forms of content writing and blog promotion. Overly-wordy posts – in internet forums, on social media sites, or on your blog itself – quickly bore readers and will cause them to stop returning to your site, thus decreasing traffic.
4. **Solicit Comments.** End your blog posts with a question. Invite readers to tell a story about a personal experience. Hold contests and giveaways on your blog that require users to use the comment form. Get your readers talking, engage with them, and watch them return repeatedly.

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5. **Banter.** Be interesting! Witty, funny, sensible blog posts are key to gaining readership and to keeping existing readers interested.
6. **Be Solid.** Have a solid opinion about issues concerning your field of business and stick to it. Not only do readers respect consistency, but hearing you state your opinions firmly establishes you as an expert in your industry.
7. **Always Answer Email.** If a reader takes time to email you – respond! Answering a small question or responding to a complaint may seem like a trivial task, but the more you respond to the needs of your readership, the more you build your reputation as a trusted member of your field of expertise.
8. **Link to Posts in Posts.** When a topic that you've posted about previously comes up in a post you're writing presently, be sure to link back to the previous post. Allowing readers easy access to past posts encourages them to cycle back through previously unvisited parts of your blog, causing them to learn more about you and your company.
9. **Don't Over-Spam for SEO.** Search engine optimization (SEO) is a method of placing specific keywords within blog content, in hopes of causing your blog to show up more frequently in search engine results. While SEO has its time and place, be careful not to list too many keywords or appear spam-like in your writing. Allow SEO to

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flow naturally within your posts, otherwise you risk annoying and eventually losing readers.

Creative Ways to Increase Traffic

- 1. Offline Marketing.** List the web address of your blog on printed business materials such as brochures, business cards and flyers. Also consider posting advertisements for your business blog in places such as coffee shop community boards or grocery store bulletin boards, especially if your business is most focused on serving your local area.
- 2. Discussion Forums.** Browse the web for discussion forums pertaining to your field of expertise. Participate in forum discussions, being sure to reference a link to your blog within your post. Similarly, consider answer-based websites like Yahoo! Answers as a way to promote your blog. These types of sites allow you to answer questions asked by other users who are seeking information about your field. In addition to helping someone answer a question they have, you'll have the opportunity to promote your blog by listing the URL within your answer.
- 3. Comment on Blogs.** Similar to the above tip – be sure to leave your blog URL whenever you comment on a post on another blog. The more you put the web address of your blog out there, the more chance readers will click on your URL and head your way!

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4. **Sponsor and Support a Cause.** Seek out local events and causes in your local area and offer sponsorship or support on behalf of your blog. Those who volunteer or support a cause financially often receive public mention for their efforts, bringing more attention to your business blog.

5. **Instagram.** If your business has an Instagram account, be sure to post a photo from each blog post as an Instagram image, including a link to the post in the photo description. For example, if a photo of a catering event your business just handled is included in a blog post, post the same photo as an Instagram with a caption that reads, “Our team catered an event for 500 local community leaders this weekend,” and include a direct link to the blog post.

6. **Vine.** Consider Vine, a fairly new addition to the social media landscape, as a way of promoting your blog. Vine allows users to create and post short video clips in an innovative, quirky fashion that gets lots of attention. Put together a short clip promoting your blog post, and include a link to the post in the same way described above.

7. **Pinterest.** Another extremely popular social media site, Pinterest allows the sharing of ideas through boards and images. Consider starting an account solely for your blog, then create a “pinned” link to each post that you publish.

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The possibilities for promoting your blog and increasing blog traffic are truly endless. If you can imagine it – do it! The vast landscape of internet message boards, social media platforms and other online presences truly open up more doors than one can count when it comes to methods for producing blog traffic.

Once you've established a readership base through well-written, well-planned content and have begun to increase traffic to your blog with the promotional tips covered in this chapter, you'll be ready to run analytics reports on your blog! As you'll learn in the next chapter, analytics reports are a powerful tool that help you learn a great deal about your blog, your readers and your presence on the internet!

5

Directing Traffic: **Using Your Readers to Grow Your Site**

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“Don’t focus on having a great blog. Focus on producing a blog that’s great for your readers.”

– Brian Clark, *Founder, Copyblogger Media*

A great meter for how well you’re doing with composing interesting blog content and generating traffic to your blog is the science of measuring blog analytics. Analytics are reports, generated by programs such as Google Analytics or Stat Tracker, that give a blog owner a concrete glimpse into the way in which their blog is being utilized by their readership. These reports can measure your blog’s growth over a specified period of time, track which sites most frequently refer readers to your blog, determine the most popular types of content you are producing, and much more.

Basic analytics reports track unique visitors, page views, bounce rate, time spent on your blog site and several other valuable pieces of information. Below is a breakdown of the basic types of analytics reports available, and how they can help you understand both your blog itself, and the readers who pass through it, a little better.

Understanding Analytics Report Terms

1. **Unique Visitors.** A report of unique visitors shows you how many unique, individual visitors pass through your blog. If your blog was a busy coffee shop, this report would reveal how many individual

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customers visited your store, not how many customers came back twice in one day for a refill.

2. **Page Views.** Page view reports show the number of times your blog has been viewed over a specific period of time. This number includes new visitors and returning readers alike.
3. **Visits.** The visits report indicates every time that every reader has been to your blog's website. This includes the new reader who found your blog on a message board and the three separate times a reader came back to your blog to refer to a single post.
4. **Bounce Rate.** Your blog's bounce rate refers to how many readers begin on your blog page and then click off to a different website, versus how many readers begin on one blog post and continue clicking on pages within your own site. A low bounce rate indicates that people enjoy your content and are sticking around to read several posts when they visit.
5. **Time Spent on Site.** The details of this report are simple – this statistic shows how much time people are spending on your blog website when they visit.

Making Analytics Work for You

1. **Measuring Blog Growth.** Typically, analytics programs allow you to specify a certain period of time to display a graph charting the growth of your blog. This way, you can review the past three months, the

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past year, or the growth of your blog since its beginning – whatever information you need!

- 2. Referral Tracking.** Many bloggers enjoy viewing reports of which websites most refer readers to their blogs. These types of reports enable a blogger to see which search engines display their blog post information, determine if the time they are spending posting on message boards and leaving blog comments is paying off, and more. When it comes to generating blog traffic, a referral report is a fantastic asset for seeing what methods are worth investing your time in and which are better left to the wayside.
- 3. Determining Popular Content.** Since analytic reports show which blog posts receive the highest number of views, bloggers who spend time reviewing these reports can make wise decisions about the types of content they choose to publish most. For example, if a company that sells dietary supplements finds that a particular supplement they have been posting about is getting a great deal of page views, they can plan for posts that include more content specifically about this supplement in hopes to provide their readers with more information and to draw in new readers who may be searching for information about the product as well.
- 4. Keyword Search.** Reports that show which keyword searches led readers to a particular site can be very informative. If a blogger notices certain web searches are routinely leading readers to the blog via search engine results, the blog owner can incorporate these

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keywords into blog posts more often in hopes of creating SEO paths that lead readers consistently to their blog website.

A first step in beginning to track your blog's analytics is to research which analytics programs are most often used with your blog-hosting platform. Most analytic-tracking programs have detailed tutorials, and an internet search will turn up many blog posts and how-to guides on maximizing the tracking platform you choose

Once a basic understanding of how to read analytics reports is mastered, the information contained in said reports can be absolutely invaluable to your blog's growth and success. Consider analytics a personalized guide to what you're doing well, what you need to improve upon and what your readers want more of!

6

Final Thoughts:

“A blog is only as interesting as the interest shown in others.”

– Brian Clark, *CEO, TopRank Online Marketing*

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One of the most important things to remember about running a successful business blog is that a dynamic, effective blogger is always changing the way they work. Readers change, companies change, industries change, customers change – being willing to accommodate those changes and produce relevant content is key to remaining successful in your blogging endeavors! As your blog grows and changes, you will learn more and more through hands on experience. Refer back to the tips contained in this ebook as needed, but also remember to keep your own notes on the lessons you learn from your day to day immersion in the blogging experience. You are often your best teacher!

The most important tip we can provide you with is to hear the voice of your readers and customers and give the people what they want! Through blog comments, emails from readers, and analytic reports, you will learn a great deal about what is working for your business blog and what is not. Hear the feedback that you are given and, most importantly, accept both praise and criticism. Producing written content on a regular basis is a difficult but rewarding task and should be handled as such.

As we bring this ebook to a close, we encourage you to review the tips listed within the book and make notes on how you plan to implement them in your business blogging venture. From researching blog-hosting websites to one day reviewing your first analytics report, we hope that the information in these pages provides you with the basic stepping stones for getting started with your blog and becoming a thriving, successful blogger!