



7 Steps to a Successful Blog

Why good business blogs are like hen's teeth

Just about everyone has a blog, yet how many do YOU read? Are you like most executives—too busy to waste time reading if there's no obvious benefit?

Whether you're thinking about a blog or have one now and want more readers, here are 7 steps that will make yours the one to read. But a question before you start:

Why bother?

Are you still unconvinced about the value of a blog? You're not alone, but consider these statistics¹. Companies that blog actively:

- Generate between 67% more B2B leads
- Generate 88% more B2C leads
- Get 97% more inbound links (which raise your Google Page Rank).

Considering the amount of time and money needed (compared to creating say a White Paper or a video), blogging is one of the cheaper marketing activities. However, as you'll see, there's no direct link between your blog and ROI. It's much more subtle.

Before you start

Don't just blog because competitors do or the marketing guys say you must. Make sure you can add something of value that can't be found anywhere else.

Then, consider what it will take to maintain focus and quality. Writing isn't just a matter of time, it's creative energy too, and we all run out of that from time to time. But, don't panic; you don't have to do it all on your own. You can set the standards, get the ball rolling and get someone else to do it for you.

Regardless of how you do it, if you've decided to blog, let's look at how to make yours a successful one.

1. Have a purpose and stick to it

Your purpose shouldn't be promoting your company, products and services, or yourself—even if the statistics above are attractive. There are plenty of self-promoting blogs out there and they're the ones that no-one reads.



Great blogs get great results because they don't directly set out to achieve them. (More on page 2.)

The writers of great blogs have a burning desire to share know-how and industry experience with others who face the same issues. Everyone likes good advice based on genuine experience, so it's easy to see why such blogs are read and recommended.

2. Be really useful

Write for your audience. Blogging is giving: from really useful information, tips and know-how to e-books, case studies, expert commentary, to links to external content which sheds light on problems in your industry.

Put yourself into the shoes of your readers; talk about issues and problems they relate to. Show them that they're not alone.

3. Captivate and cultivate

In traditional advertising, if you want to reach more people, you have to spend more money. In social media marketing, you reach more people when your content is relevant and your voice engaging.



This is because readers like your content, like the way you tell your story, and they share and keep sharing it.

If your voice isn't engaging (read genuine; it comes back to burning desire and passion) or your content isn't original or useful, the converse happens. No one reads your material and the CEO pulls the pin on the blog.

4. Relax and be yourself

Your blog is not the place to tell people how brilliant you are or to show off your skills for crafting extraordinary prose. Speak in a conversational, relaxed tone. Don't create someone else's voice, or preach or speak as the world's authority, even if you are.

Speak to your readers directly in their language, and they'll trust you. More than that, they'll like you because you sound genuine. Even if someone writes your blog for you, the same rule applies; you just have to imprint your personality on your blog and your writer.

A good way to find your ideal blog voice is to imagine you're sitting around the table with your readers, talking, sleeves rolled up or shoes off, beer in hand—or whatever works in your situation.

5. Make posts easy to read

Most people don't read in the traditional way; they scan, they skim, they look for things that stand out and grab attention. They want to 'cut to the chase' and will decide to read, keep, share or delete, instantly.

Even if you write really compelling content, you must make it easy to scan and digest. That is, short sentences, short paragraphs—and, of course, font style and size that are easy to read. You also want to attract your reader with short, intriguing or quirky headings and subheadings. Long, unoriginal titles just won't work.

6. Make posts good to read

Clunky writing is like a track full of roots, rocks and overhanging branches; you don't want to go there. Conversely, if you give your readers a comfortable trip over a smooth road, they'll thank you and reward you.

Use plain English words and simple sentence structures, use imagery whenever you can, and use examples and illustrations. Make it a short, enjoyable trip, as well as a useful one.

6. Use variety, voices and media

A corporate blog can gain real colour and variety by having several contributors with different voices. These can all be from within your organisation, or not.

A guest post from an industry thought leader, for instance, can add a fresh view and drive more readers to your blog. You can also use other media (videos, slideshows etc) to add interest or illustrate your points, but don't overdo it. Keep it simple.

Summing Up

If the insights and information you give your audience are valuable and you follow the rules, you'll attract readers.

That said, it will take time to build numbers up, so don't expect overnight success. If you follow the rules, you should see steady improvements over time. However, a successful blog could take years, but again, don't panic; you don't have to do it all yourself.

You may have someone on staff with a great sense of humour or a gift for writing. He doesn't have to be the CEO, CTO or even CMO. However, if it's important to the company that is one or all three of these, they can coach your copywriter and supply the bones of what you want.

You could even get your copywriter to subscribe to the RSS feeds you (or they) use to keep up to date, explain your view and preferred voice, and leave it up to him. Good copywriters have no problem changing hats and taking on multiple personalities, in writing at least.

Finally, be clear about what you expect your blog to do.

Don't look to generate leads, sell products or get a direct ROI. Today, your blog is an important tool in your marketing kit. Depending on your market it might be mandatory. Either way, use your blog to raise your profile or build your thought leadership and the rest will follow. ###

References

1. <http://www.famousbloggers.net/building-successful-blog.html>