

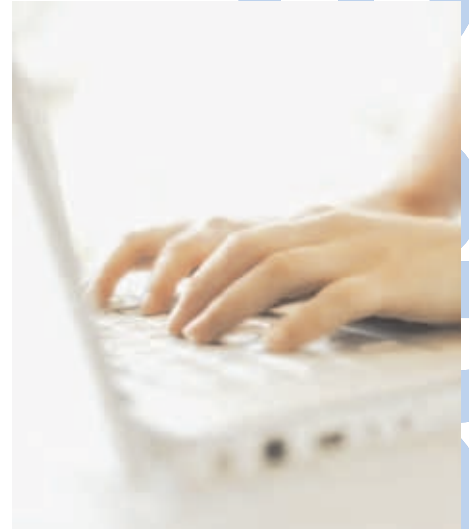
A Blogger's guide to Blogging

The (intermediate) blogger's guide to blogging

Once considered the golden child of social media, blogs have been somewhat nudged out of the picture in recent years with the growth of social networks. For consumers who have more communication tools at their fingertips than ever before, Facebook™ and micro-blogging site Twitter™ often replace blogging as the most popular way to share.

The truth is, however, blogs continue to be seen as an important channel of communication for many businesses, and most are continuing to see the benefits of engaging customers this way. In fact, it's estimated that, by 2012, 43% of businesses with an online presence will have a public-facing blog used specifically to drive online marketing efforts.¹

"Studies have shown that marketers perceive blogs to have the highest value of any social medium in driving site traffic, brand awareness, lead generation and sales—as well as improving customer service," says market research firm, eMarketer's, Senior Analyst Paul Verna.²



eMarketer also estimated that, by the end of 2010, more than half of all Internet users in the United States alone read at least one blog monthly. By 2014, readership will have risen to more than 150 million Americans, or 60% of the Internet population.

As a savvy marketer, blogs are perhaps "old news." Your business probably has one, if not two or three! You probably even have one of your own. Your company is no longer seeking 'how-to tutorials' outlining which platforms to use, which design to choose, how to write a blog post or how to optimise your blog for search engines. Instead you're looking for the next step. This Blue Paper aims to get you there by discussing blogging from a blogger's perspective, tackling one burning question: You have the blog and the readers ... but now what? Let's find out.

Bloggegy: Reassessing the blogging strategy

As with all components of your marketing plan a well-thought out strategy is the key to success or failure for all blogging efforts.

The blogging and social media storm happened in a blink of an eye, causing many

¹ Leggatt, Helen. "Companies Perceive Blogs as Valuable Marketing Tools - Blogs & Content - BizReport." BizReport - News & Insight for Online Marketers. 17 Aug. 2010. Web. 11 Oct. 2010.

[<http://www.bizreport.com/2010/08/companies-perceive-blogs-as-valuable-marketing-tools.html#>](http://www.bizreport.com/2010/08/companies-perceive-blogs-as-valuable-marketing-tools.html#).

² Leggatt, Helen. "Companies Perceive Blogs as Valuable Marketing Tools - Blogs & Content - BizReport." BizReport - News & Insight for Online Marketers. 17 Aug. 2010. Web. 11 Oct. 2010.

[<http://www.bizreport.com/2010/08/companies-perceive-blogs-as-valuable-marketing-tools.html#>](http://www.bizreport.com/2010/08/companies-perceive-blogs-as-valuable-marketing-tools.html#).

to jump on the bandwagon “just because.” Now that the dust is settling, in order to remain viable, it’s time all businesses put serious thought into the content they are producing, when they are posting and who they are targeting. If your business does not yet have a blogging strategy, now is the time to create one. Or perhaps, it’s time to reassess an existing strategy to remain relevant and proactive in the blogosphere.

Every blogging strategy should be based on the following aspects:

- A careful consideration of customers and stakeholders
- Interwoven with business and marketing goals
- Respect for company culture as it relates to the blog
- Reflection of brand values and promise
- Within the realms of realistic resources for execution—people, time and cost



Just as you would develop a marketing strategy or a business approach, the blogging strategy starts with research of audiences—identifying who the target audience is, what is important to them and how best to reach them.

Then, goals and objectives can be developed based on your business’s challenges and needs. Goals and objectives should be established for the long-term, but monthly goals regarding milestones like readership, links and coverage should be considered, too. At this point, it’s also important for your team to lay some ground rules, discussing who is responsible for developing content and identifying parameters that define success. Social media (and blogging in particular) gets a lot of bad press for often being difficult to measure or calculate its ROI. By defining a successful strategy prior to implementation, businesses can set expectations that will allow for consistent measurement metrics. Once this is considered, the tactics and content can come into play.

If you’re already blogging, and plenty of you are, it’s likely that bits and pieces of this strategy have been developed or addressed. It’s the creation and refinement of tactical programmes that can launch a beginner blog to thought leadership status: Tactics that address what you will write about and when, how you will actively increase readership, how you will promote your blog to different audiences, how you will encourage interaction and whether or not to monetise your blog to create a revenue source. That’s what we’re talking about here.

Content development

You've heard it before: Content is king. If you've reached intermediate blogger status, developing content may not be an obstacle, but regularly churning out posts that are interesting and entertaining is hard work. It's easy to burn out or to lose inspiration. Take a step back, add in a little more methodology mixed with new blogging trends to combat content development slow-down.

First, recall these classic tips for compiling an editorial calendar that keeps the wheels oiled³:

- **Remind your bloggers what makes a good post.** An honest perspective, a fresh point of view, provocative thinking about an issue, trend-spotting, technology commentary and real news all make good posts. Keep in mind that it's not necessarily what's interesting to you that will make a good post, but rather what your readers find interesting. What's more, readers don't come back if the content is stale, so your editorial calendar should also address the issue of frequency: Try to tackle multiple posts per week, based on the goals previously established.
- **Designate an editor.** Corporate blogs need an editor to monitor the blog and ensure posts pass the standards established by your brand. This editor should be someone who's a brand champion and enjoys writing to ensure that posts are innovative, intelligent and accessible. Consider designating a new editor when each marketing calendar or blogging editorial calendar is developed to mix things up slightly and ensure the content does not become stale.
- **Have a purpose.** A blog is a reflection of your company, but it's a less formal communication medium, so you should experiment, take feedback and adapt your blog as you learn. It will be necessary to adjust content or voice from time to time to gauge what readers are interested in and will respond most to. If something doesn't work, move on. It's not failure; it's purposeful adaptation. Blog or web analytics are key to this one: Play around with topics, style and format, and carefully watch traffic and comments. You'll know what hits the spot and what doesn't pretty quickly.
- **Develop a content engine.** It's hard for just one writer to produce a lot of high-quality content. You'll need help. Hold brainstorming sessions



³ Kingdon, Mark. "Quick Tips on Corporate Blogging." ClickZ | Marketing News & Expert Advice. 21 Nov. 2006. Web. 12 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.clickz.com/clickz/column/1704173/quick-tips-corporate-blogging>>.

with various teams within your organisation to sketch out potential topics. Ask for contributions from other staff members or request suggestions from readers themselves. Use journalistic-style interviews with key players within your organisation or Q-and-A interviews with employees, customers and suppliers. Draft blog posts at a more frequent rate than they are actually posted to ensure that there is always content in hand, ready to publish.

- **Read other blogs and know the news.** In order to provide relevant content and join the conversation, it's important to know what others are talking about. Reading industry blogs and keeping up-to-date on recent events, especially those directly related to your business and industry, are great ways to stay current. RSS and blog readers make this fairly simple to do.



Now, begin to explore new options. Here are a few trends in producing winning content:

- **Watch your analytics like a hawk.** Your blog stats don't just show off how well (or not so well) your blog is doing—these insights also provide a window into what content your audiences are most interested in. Produce a graph reflecting data over the last year, and track topics in comparison with traffic, comments and links. Move forward with new content based on trends that you've identified.
- **Revisit old posts.** Go "back in time," and add new research, new perspective or a new voice to an old blog post. Not only does the resulting post meet the criteria of a new post, but it can illustrate how your business and/or industry is changing and what you're doing to keep up.
- **Recruit guest posts.** Approach industry thought leaders (or even clients!) to share a post on your blog. Take it a step further by finding guest bloggers with different views on the same topic. A little controversy goes a long way in creating interesting and popular content.
- **Outsource.** Once your blog has a solid following and predictable content topics, a business may want to explore outsourcing blog posts to freelance writers, to supplement in-house posts. Going this route alleviates some of the stress and time placed on employees and can help mix things up temporarily if someone gets writer's block.

The bottom line is, it's time to take the comfort zone you've created for your blog and begin to push the boundaries. Try new things, become thoughtful with content creation and planning, and measure what works and what doesn't to keep the energy going and your blog growing.

New ways to encourage engagement

We all know that blogs work because they aren't limited to one-way communication. While blogs are great tools for driving Web traffic, increasing visibility and positioning a business or its employees as thought leaders, they really only work when a blog is used to start conversations with others first. Think about dinner parties—the most interesting people to talk to, the most gregarious attendees, are those who talk more about others than themselves. Blogging works the same way.

Once a content plan has been developed, it's necessary to consider the action plan for facilitating conversation and encouraging engagement among audiences. A few tactics to consider include: commenting, developing participatory content, creating content for third parties and pursuing offline engagement tactics.

Commenting

Internet Marketing Blogger Chris Crum says that comments are the backbone of the social Web.

"Comments mean that advertisers get more clicks. Publishers get more money from advertisers. Readers get more valuable content - not only from the comments, but because if the publisher is doing well financially, they'll be able to keep providing the content," writes Crum. "Everybody wins. Furthermore, the publisher will be more inclined to post on subjects of interest, because they will attract comments, and the cycle continues."⁴

Comments often build upon one another. All it takes is one person to comment for the flood gates to open, but getting that initial comment isn't always easy. Part of this relates back to developing interesting content—posts that make a stand, draw a line, touch on a controversial subject are likely to get a response. Other conversation-starting tactics include posting questions to encourage sharing, featuring select comments in a sidebar of your blog, website or social media profiles, and commenting on other blog posts of similar topics but differing



⁴ Crum, By Chris. "Comments Make Content More Valuable | WebProNews." *Breaking News, Business News, Technology News | WebProNews. Web. 12 Oct. 2010.*
<<http://www.webpronews.com/topnews/2009/05/27/nothing-engages-an-audience-like-a-good-conversation>>.

views with a link back to your own post.

Be sure, too, to respond to comments to keep the conversation going and perpetuate the sharing and input from other readers.

Developing participatory content

Contests that ask for entries in the comments of a post—such as creating a limerich or poem on the future of social media or around users' favourite product of yours—or simply posts that ask for input directly ... beyond answering simple questions ... are likely to spark responses from audiences.

US, Organic yogurt manufacturer, Stonyfield Farm®, often combines the creation of participatory content with controversy—posing questions to blog audiences that raise eyebrows and draw traffic. Stonyfield currently has four different blogs offering a variety of content and most pose controversial questions that often have little to do with the brand but much to do with the interests of their readers. Questions like “Is God male or female?” or “Who should be the first female president of the United States?” are common, as are posts that aim to crowdsource future content and [even yogurt flavours](#). The result? Stonyfield's blogs see a combined total of more than 60,000 visits per month with hundreds of comments on posts.⁵

Christine Halverson, Stonyfield's company blogger, says that the impact can be seen in more than blog traffic.

“The blogs certainly affect someone's buying decision. The good will generated by the blogs is hard to measure, but we assume it will have a positive impact on our bottom line,” said Halverson. “We also have a huge website and sometimes our blogs are a great way to highlight some of the web content that might otherwise get lost. In this way too, we assume we're steering some blog readers to buy our products, and some to become subscribers to one of our four e-newsletters.”⁶

Creating content for third parties

Before you can build engagement; you need to attract 'eyeballs.' While we'll talk more about finding those eyeballs in a minute, let's start with how doing so

increases engagement. One of the best ways to increase readership is to create content that bigger sites can syndicate.

⁵ “Business Blog Case Study: Stonyfield Farm : Business Blog Consulting.” *Business Blog Consulting: Everything about Corporate Blogs and Business Blogging*. Web. 18 Oct. 2010.
<http://www.businessblogconsulting.com/2004/12/business_blog_c>.

⁶ “Business Blog Case Study: Stonyfield Farm : Business Blog Consulting.” *Business Blog Consulting: Everything about Corporate Blogs and Business Blogging*. Web. 18 Oct. 2010.
<http://www.businessblogconsulting.com/2004/12/business_blog_c>.



When reading the blogs of others, or content within industry e-newsletters and message boards, you should also be checking to ensure your content is on par with content these third parties might reprint or link to. No matter what you blog about, think about what would be an ideal third-party location for your content, and keep that audience and format in mind.

Pursuing offline engagement tactics

Blog engagement doesn't always take place on your blog. Keep this in mind at conferences, networking events and even on the sales floor to encourage or entice people to join the conversation. Facebook groups, review sites, Twitter chats within your industry, and creating Twitter #hashtags to facilitate ongoing conversations work really well too. Think outside the box and offline to encourage more action on your blog.

Promotion and marketing

If a blog is posted and no one reads it, did it ever really happen? Promoting and marketing your business's blog is just as important as promoting and marketing your business's website and other communications channels. If you don't have the budget to market your blog or the willingness to spend time and effort to spread the word, perhaps you should rethink blogging altogether. Take to the streets (or, the interwebs!), and drive that traffic.

Start with traditional channels

Include prominent links to your business's blog on your website, in e-newsletters and even in the e-mail signatures of employees. Have the blog URL added just below the website URL on direct mail pieces, print it on promotional products and include it on business cards and other literature. Utilise social media press releases in addition to traditional press release that link directly to the blog, and ask sales people to suggest it in conversation or when speaking at events. Basically, spread the word that it's out there and contains thoughtful, quality content, whenever you can.

Cross over to other social media sites

The chances are, if your business has a blog it may also have a Facebook profile or Twitter account, too. These are great channels for spreading the word about individual posts and interacting with others online, away from the actual blog space. Twitter, in particular, has proven success rate as a cross-promotion tool for blogs. In fact, a recent HubSpot survey found that small businesses that blog and then tweet about posts have 102% more Twitter followers than those



that don't.⁷

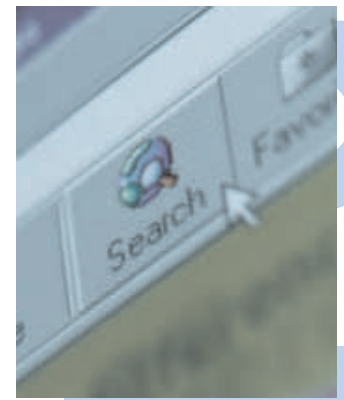
When using social media channels to drive blog traffic, be sure to mix and match posts—don't become a bullhorn that broadcasts only promotional content. That will have the opposite effect. Instead, post promotional content in between the conversational stuff on your wall and Twitter feed.

Utilise blogging tools

There are thousands of tools out there for promoting your blog; all you have to do is find the ones that work best for you. Registering your blog with Technorati and other blog directories, posting to social news site Digg, and incorporating RSS or a subscription model option in your blog are all popular ways to actively spread the word.

Don't forget about the search engines

All posts and their titles should be friendly to humans and the search-engine bots. Use descriptive titles that are keyword-rich to ensure that your blog gets found online. Tag posts in order to generate meta data while allowing users to find similar blog posts by keyword on your site or within your blog's platform. Use alt tags on all images, and link to your website, other blog posts and third-party articles whenever possible.



More tips for increasing readership and promotion

Fast Company contributor and well-known communications and marketing blogger, Valeria Maltoni (aka the "Conversation Agent") shared her tips for success in a recent "Blog Herald" article⁸:

1. **Seek out yourself** — Choose and attract the audience that is most like the content creator and your business. It's more comfortable building rapport and conversations with people who are like-minded. They will find it easy to identify with your material, enjoy reading it and spread it to others. This also means being able to "see" yourself and your business's culture in others — find the common ground and the basis

for a relationship by seeking out the other instead of pushing yourself upon them.

⁷ "Want More Blog Traffic? Tweet All Your Blog Posts. - Blogs & Content - BizReport." BizReport - News & Insight for Online Marketers. Web. 12 Oct. 2010.

<http://www.bizreport.com/2010/01/want-more-blog-traffic-tweet-all-your-blog-posts.html>.

⁸ Maltoni, Valeria. "8 Easy Marketing Tips to Increase Your Blog's Audience." Blog Herald. 16 Nov. 2007. Web. 12 Oct. 2010.

<http://www.blogherald.com/2007/11/16/8-easy-marketing-tips-to-increase-your-blog%E2%80%99s-audience/>.

- 2. Use speed to your advantage** — You must be constantly alert to opportunities to make a contribution that is timely. If you're alert to what topics and news are changing or coming and sense their imminence, you can capitalise on them. Do your research, and be poised to pounce.
- 3. Tell people how good you are** — Be a master of clarity. Communicating clearly is the essence of creating the impression of competence, skill and mastery. Great branding and marketing is the simplest articulation of what is at the core of a company's offering. Your ability to explain what you blog about, rather than actually reading what you write, is what most influences another's impression of your skill. The expert is the person who most clearly communicates their expertise. Communication is not a skill, it is THE skill.
- 4. Be incomplete** — One of the hallmarks of extraordinary experience is completeness. Yet, having all the answers may deprive your readers from having a role in your blog. You cannot be an expert at everything, even with diligent research, yet if you're diligent at developing relationships, your readers will know when to jump in and help you out.
- 5. Be grateful** — Use the magic words: Thank you. One of the most powerful introductions in lead generation for existing customers is the acknowledgment and appreciation of their business. There are other ways to show your gratitude — reach out by e-mail to enquire how someone is doing, welcome new visitors who leave a comment to your site and address people by name.
- 6. Radiate passion about what you do** — There are techniques and processes that you can put in place to plot a course and assess ways to increase readership steadily and mathematically. No breakthroughs will come from those. Express a commitment to be better and you will attract what you radiate — these will allow you to leapfrog.
- 7. Make your readers feel important** — It is their most basic need and the truest form of connection. You know it yourself; you love to spend time with someone who cares about you and places you ahead of themselves. Contribute to their success, give them the red carpet treatment and make it about them ... it is.



- Inspire** — The emotional connection is above and beyond experience. It's about standing for something meaningful that touches your readers on an emotional level. Find out what interests and inspires your readers and provide motivation and encouragement. Use your influence to make things happen for them.

Monetisation

After developing a strategy, putting out quality content and engaging users, it might be time to consider monetising your blog. Why would someone walk down this road? To pursue revenue opportunities and to build profitable relationships with advertisers, suppliers and other bloggers.

Many bloggers go down this route simply by allowing ads, often through a blog's platform or through GoogleAds™, to be placed on their site. A small commission is made in return for limited control over which ads appear on your blog.

Then, there's affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing is an option that offers bloggers an opportunity to promote products/services that are relevant to the community of readers they have built and receive commission on any sales that they generate at the same time.

Affiliate marketing is a low-risk strategy for advertisers because their marketing budget isn't consumed by invalid clicks or un-targeted impressions and it's a great opportunity for bloggers because they can earn commissions by giving their readers the information that they're looking for.

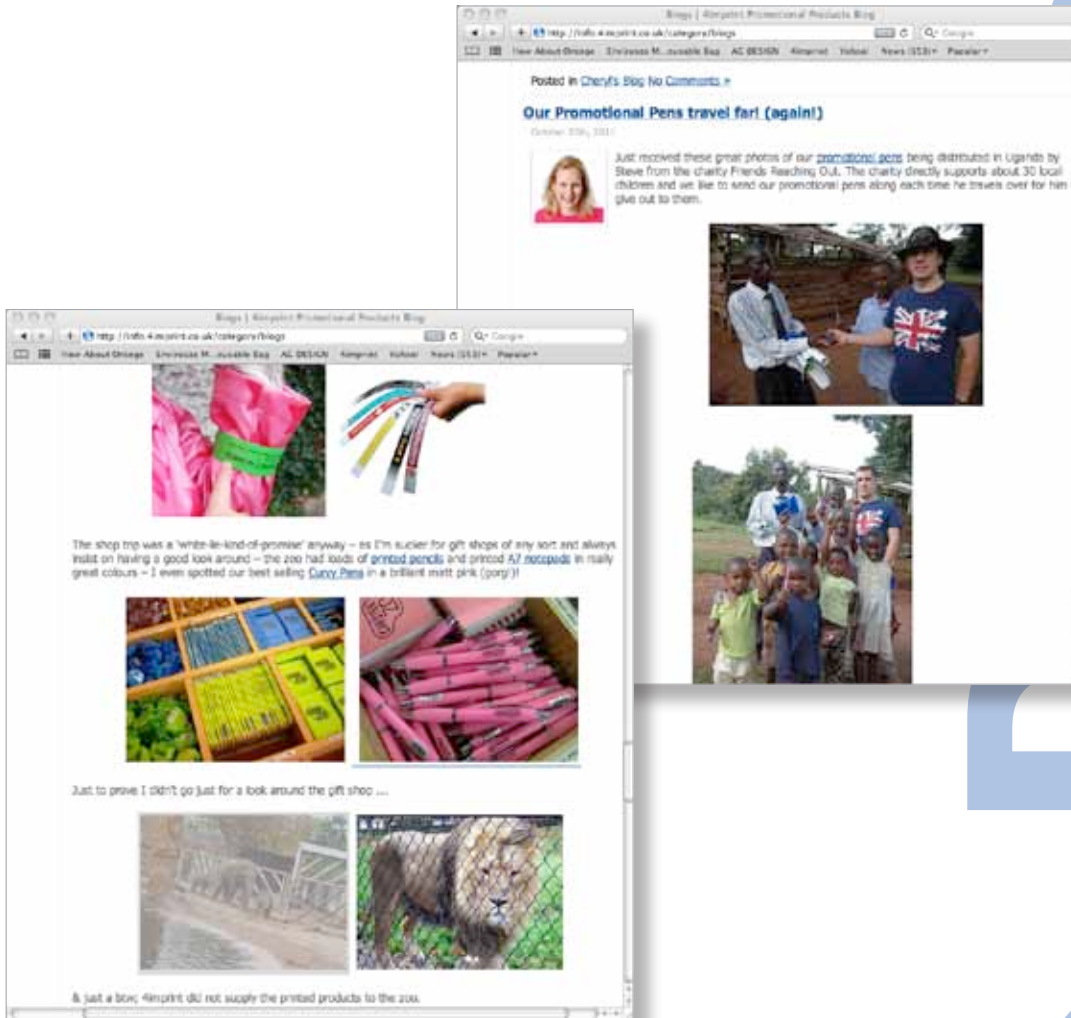
The one caveat here is disclosure—bloggers are ethically responsible for disclosing the relationship between blog content and payment or commission of any form.

Step it up

To move beyond beginner's luck in the world of blogging, your business will have to up the ante. Reassess your blogging strategy, seek new ways to interact with audiences, integrate your efforts and promote like you've never promoted before. Then, you'll see your web presence grow, your brand reputation expand and the online relationships your blog builds pay off.



Cheryl, the Marketing Manager at 4imprint UK regularly blogs. Her aim is to share stories about how our customers use promotional products to promote their businesses & organisations and to share news about funky new products. Check out recent posts at www.4imprint.co.uk/blog



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