Who's Blogging What

Spotting things you'll want to see today.

Better Business Blogging in 2011

Forward

'Weblogs' became popular in the mid 1990s as personal journals, maintained almost exclusively by individuals, containing daily details and passions that somehow retained their intimacy even as they were made visible to anyone with an internet connection. Information architect Peter Merholz claims that he was just being 'silly' in 1997 when he announced:

> I've decided to pronounce the word "weblog" as wee'- blog. Or "blog" for short.

Wee'- blog was soon being spelled as 'We blog' and Merholz's 'silly' experiment gained entrance as part of our modern lexicon. Perhaps the reason it stuck was the acknowledgement that weblogs were an **activity** as much as they were a communication form. The web site is something that a person has. The web blog is something that a person does.

The dynamic nature and friendly style of blogs soon became popular with businesses as well, and with good reason. Blogs gave a business opportunity to speak to the market directly, in its own voice and on its own terms. More importantly, blogs gave the market a chance to talk back and to share the conversation with like minded friends.

Webmasters soon noticed some unintended consequences. The evolving dialogues supported by business blogs frequently contained, in a rich organic environment, the search terms entered as queries by business prospects. When relevant sites linked back to the blog it further increased the likelihood that new customers would enter initially through the corporate blog.

Business blogging is now a practice that seems remarkably simple if done correctly. This Guide, written by individuals who actively manage and contribute to their own successful business blogs, is meant to help businesses increase blogging effectiveness in 2011. Successful results should be easy to see – the good business blog will reflect a business where everyone is united by their pride and excitement for their products and services. In short, exactly the type of place that people want to do business with.

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(**Who's Blogging What** is a weekly email newsletter read by web marketers who work with social media, search, email marketing, user experience and web analytics. You can get a free subscription here.)

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Chapter 1 – The Growing Influence of Blogs

Tamar Weinberg

Blogs have existed for more than 10 years and have become respectable news outlets, vehicles of change within organizations and communications tools for product announcements and updates. They also provide an opportunity to humanize a company to its market.

Every year the powerful blog search engine Technorati publishes a "State of the Blogosphere" that surveys bloggers of all backgrounds for information and trends about the state of the blogging affairs. The latest report has compelling data on the growing impact of business blogging. In fact, Technorati has tracked more than 133 million blogs, an indication by itself that blogging's impact is not about to diminish anytime soon.

In the State of the Blogosphere, Technorati found that:
- 71% of bloggers are blogging to speak their minds
- 72% of bloggers want to share their expertise
- 61% of bloggers do so to make money or for business purposes
- 53% of professional bloggers aim to attract new clients

Almost all bloggers have found that blogs have made them better known in their industry as a result of maintaining and updating their blogs.

It was 2007 when Dave Sifry, former chairman of Technorati, came out with some shocking numbers on blogging. Back then, it was reported that 120,000 new blogs were being created worldwide each day. There were more than 1.5 million posts being published per day – or 17 posts per second.

Ofcom's seventh annual communications market report found that UK users were more interested in commenting on blogs than in creating their own pieces of content. It seems that once an individual takes a liking to a blogger, s/he will use the blogger's own website to have regular ongoing discussions. If you're not consuming, you may still be participating, so while interest in creating a brand new blog might have waned, interest in blogging communities has flourished.

The argument for blogging is all around us. We may know a blogger or two. We may know a dozen or a hundred bloggers. And among those we know, we find that many are doing so for business purposes. Whether it is the hobbyist who just wants to make a few cents off Google AdSense or the enterprise social media company that has elected to launch a blog to showcase its expertise in expansive applications, blogging is an affordable way for individuals and companies alike to become a respected voice in an increasingly competitive online environment.

What do blogs do for your business? Like all other means of social media promotion, blogs can:
- Establish thought leadership, which is especially evident by the findings of the Technorati State of the Blogosphere report.
- Increase traffic to websites, since bloggers can optimize for keywords using search engine optimization techniques that will help customers find the business or product that they need.
- Help build links to corporate web sites, which will help people find your business in online searches.
- Build brand awareness, which gets your business known globally or wherever you are looking to be found.

Blogs can influence consumers in many ways. Pew Internet & American Life Project found in 2007 that 58% of individuals consult the Internet when they need to address problems. 53% of them consult professional advisers. As we become increasingly entrenched in the digital space we're bound to find that these professional advisers have an online presence. eMarketer found around the same time that 60% of shoppers are influenced by their peers. Individuals with similar interests will flock to common ground (like a blog) to discuss products with the goals of offering feedback for improvement. As a service provider, businesses that facilitate communication via their websites help increase user trust and belief in the product. The implied message is clear: we want to know what you have to say and are open to hearing your feedback.

Blogs have done something else too. In the last few years, we've seen companies take blogs to make businesses human again. Giving blogs a human face – which should almost be a prerequisite for blogs (an avatar and personal stories are highly encouraged!) – allows readers know that they're doing business with someone they trust: people like them.

With the right content and approach toward your readership, businesses can develop strong links that will help them build a solid reputation and foundation online. As content is consistently produced and comments are consistently reviewed and/or responded to, businesses are bound to find new readers who will check the site frequently for updates, get new search traffic, and establish visibility in their industry.

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Chapter 2 – Getting the staff organized and involved

Amanda Maksymiw and Devon Warwick

A corporate blog provides a forum for your company's leaders and employees to discuss topics of interest with your prospects, customers and the people who influence them. A corporate blog can consist of several individual blogs, each written by different employees ("specialists"). It can also have a summary company blog that incorporates all of the individual blogs. Organizing a blog in this fashion creates many more opportunities for your company to be found online and to generate new business. So how do you get everyone in your organization on board?

1. Get commitment from the person in charge

Require key employees to write a weekly post. As you can imagine, this announcement may receive some objection from certain members of the team. There may be doubt that another blog could bring value to the market or target audience but everyone should still be encouraged to blog. Over time, more employees will become excited about blogging. In order for the entire firm to be committed to blogging, the leader of the company must also demonstrate his or her commitment.

2. Appoint a blogging administrator

Dedicate a specific resource to manage the blog. This person's top responsibilities include:

- Monitoring that everyone submits his/her blog posts on the assigned day.
- Keeping everyone excited about blogging,
- Educating on blogging best practices.
- Sending out a weekly report to keep bloggers motivated and aware of the value blogging brings to the business.
- Making sure that subject matter experts are involved to review posts in their areas of expertise.
- Everyone should be enthusiastic about blogging but you can't assume that everyone will communicate in a way that the readers will easily understand. Enlist the aid of an editor to build consistent logic and structure.

The weekly report turns blogging into a fun competition. It is exciting to be featured as a top blogger.

Don't waste time on anything else until the blogging administrator has all of these basics in place.

3. Share the results

People get discouraged if you don't show them the fruits of their labor. If you get 25 new leads as the result of a blog post, let everyone know! If a thought leader re-tweeted one of your employee's posts, let everyone know!

Ideas for communicating results with the team include:

- Issue weekly emails that show all your numbers (bloggers with the most pageviews, unique visitors, click-through rates to your website, search engine rankings, comments, etc.)
- Store all blogging materials in a central location that is easily accessible to all employees and share ideas, tips and tricks.

- Hold regular meetings to share results, provide recognition to standout bloggers, announce upcoming goals, etc.
- Where possible, provide the exact number of leads converted – and what that corresponds to in actual sales figures.

4. Develop an editorial calendar

With many employees blogging it makes sense to organize blogging resources with a long term perspective. Consider splitting your company into 5 teams – one for each day of the week. Each day one team is responsible for submitting their blog posts. Each team typically writes about topics relevant to its focus but should be encouraged to branch out as well to spark discussion.

Use the calendar to track key points in your customers' buying cycle throughout the year and to make sure that your posts are timely to their needs.

5. Create a blogging contest

Competitions are a fun way to get every staff member onboard and engaged. Try to create a one-week internal competition to get everyone even more excited about blogging. Explain the objectives that you wish to communicate and let the staff come up with the best words to use. The winners might be the most excited but everyone will come away with a better understanding of the company's objectives and challenges.

The rules can be simple:

Each of the five blogging teams will compete against each other. In order to qualify, each employee has to submit a set number of posts during the week of the competition. Determine a prize that everyone is excited about. This can be gift certificates, additional time off, a fun team event, or something for the office. Categories can include:

- Average number of posts per person within the team
- Average number of page views per person within the team
- The greatest number of comments
- The volume of shares via social networks and other blogs
- A third-party person can select the top 10 blog posts. The team with the most blog posts selected, wins.

A contest structured such as the one above will get your employees excited about blogging. More importantly, it will make writing one post ever week seem like a piece of cake.

6. Write for your target

Before you start blogging you need to determine and personalize your target audience. Think in terms of a specific persona or multiple personas that identify segments within your market. Personas can help companies develop effective marketing messages and useful products. Think: Who are you writing to? Who do you want to read your blogs? Visualize the answers.

 For each persona you create you should have a good understanding of the following: goals, pain points, and interests at the very minimum. Personas will help your employees write blog posts that are relevant and valuable to your target audience. Encourage your staff to think and write to a specific persona or target audience within your market. By using personas, your staff will be able to focus their efforts on creating content on the interests

and pain points of your target market. Every blogger should start with the questions "What types of questions can I answer for each persona?" and "What can I say that will be of interest to them?".

7. Have a plan to market your blog content

Getting the staff motivated and involved will help to create a corporate blog that is, in several respects, self promoting. There are still centralized marketing tactics that can help (see Chapter 4). Make sure that as many corporate resources as possible promote the blog. This can include everything from putting it in email signatures to using the corporate email lists to asking speakers to mention the blog in conferences and interviews.

Amanda Maksymiw (left) and **Devon Warwick** (right) work for OpenView Venture Partners, an expansion stage venture capital fund based in Boston with a focus on high-growth technology companies. Both are part of the OpenView Labs team in which they support the portfolio companies with implementing content marketing strategies. Amanda can be contacted through her blog, The Open Marketer and on Twitter at @amandamaksymiw. Devon's blog is BizDev and she is @devwarwick on Twitter.

Chapter 3 – Seven Things That Blogging Does

Mitch Joel

1. Blogging = Critical Thinking

 If everything else went away (the readers, the comments, the community, the feedback), Blogging was (and still is) an amazing place to think about an issue or news item and work through it. I liken myself as a Media Hacker. A Blog is a great place for anyone to be a Hacker of whatever it is that they love. If you don't believe me, then just watch Seth Godin and Tom Peters in this video: [Blogging Still Matters... Now More Than Ever](#).

2. Blogging = Ideation

 In using your Blog as a platform for your critical thinking, you will quickly start uncovering new and interesting business models and ideas for how you can push your industry forward or how it can/should be thinking differently. Writing a Blog, reading the comments and feedbacking into them is the ultimate Petri dish for ideation and innovation.

3. Blogging = Tinkering.

The ideas and critical thinking are not always one hundred percent final. Blogging allows you to tinker with ideas. To work at them (like a complex mathematical formula). Slowly, over time, you start realizing how wrong you were, how visionary you were and how much further you still have to go.

4. Blogging = Relationships

 It's not about sitting in the dark recesses of your basement as you tinker away with words and thoughts. It's about using this platform to connect. It's about real interactions with real human beings. Some of my best friends are people that I would not have otherwise met were it not for Six Pixels of Separation (the Blog, not the concept). If you Blog, step out into the physical world. Meet other Bloggers. Share, learn and collaborate with them.

5. Blogging = Business

 Make no mistake about it. My business blog started out as a means for my agency to tell the world how we think differently about Media, Marketing, Advertising and Communications. Over the years, this has attracted many world-class clients, speaking engagements, a book offer and many other amazing and interesting business opportunities. So, while it is not a place where we shills our wares, it is a place that is directly tied to our overall

business objectives/strategy. It consistently delivers a very solid ROI to our bottom line (take that, you Social Media measurement naysayers!).

6. Blogging = Sharing As each day passes, I like Charlene Li's latest book, Open Leadership, more and more (her first book, Groundswell rocks as well). Many people think that Social Media is all about the conversation and engaging in the conversation. I believe what makes any media "social" is the ability to share it. To help you to open up. Not only can you share the concepts by telling your peers and friend about a Blog, but everybody shares in the insights as well. It has changed/evolved our corporate culture. A Blog makes you think more about how you can share your content, your thoughts and why others may want to work/connect to you.

7. Blogging = Exhaust Valve A great Blog is great because the Blogger actually cares and loves to create content. If it's forced, if it's your "job," then the passion rarely comes through. The biggest lesson I have learned in my seven years of Blogging is that my blog is my exhaust valve. After working a full day with clients and their many challenges, my Blog is my playground. It's the place where I can let off some textual steam. Make your Blog your exhaust valve. Caution: be careful that you're not Blogging simply to blow off angry steam. The steam and exhaust I am talking about is the pent up energy of passion that I have from doing what I love to do.


Mitch Joel is President of Twist Image – an award-winning Digital Marketing and Communications agency (although he prefers the title, Media Hacker). He is the author of Six Pixels of Separation which is also the title of his blog. You can follow him on Twitter at @mitchjoel .

Chapter 4 – 35 Ways To Market Your Blog

Joe Pulizzi

Even the best designed and well written blogs need a little help in finding readers. Here is a handy list of common and some uncommon ways to market your blog.

1. Promote it on your website. It's surprising the number of small and large companies that actually have a blog but it's not promoted anywhere on the main site. The blog is capable of hosting important discussions with your market. Welcome them to it on your homepage.
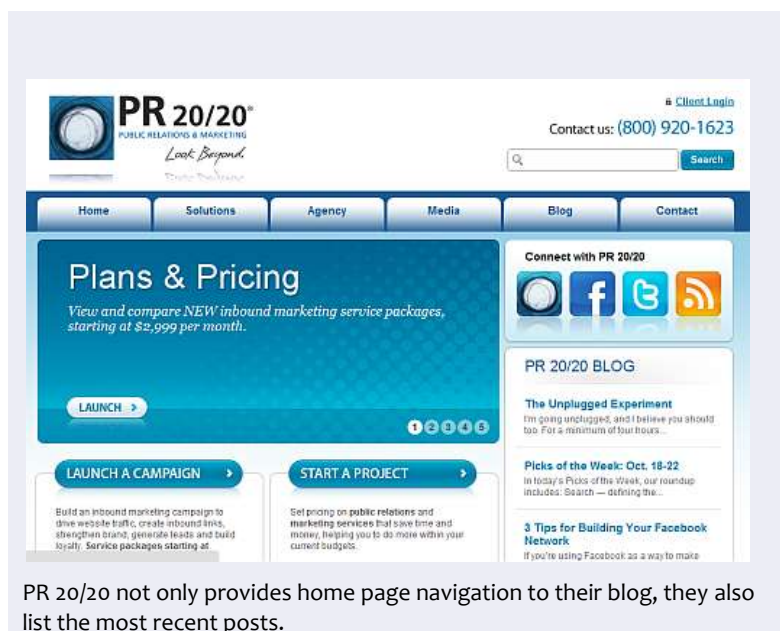
PR 20/20 not only provides home page navigation to their blog, they also list the most recent posts.

2. Include the blog URL in all email signatures. All employees are part of your marketing team today. Every time they send an email, it's a marketing opportunity.

3. Blog on Print. Put your blog address on your business cards, direct mail and print advertising.

4. Like Yourself. Many business owners forget to tell employees to 'like' their own sites on Facebook and Follow on Twitter. Be sure employees know that you'd love if they shared relevant blog posts with their networks as well.

5. Leverage Twitter Hashtags. When you promote your blog via Twitter, use relevant hashtags (i.e., #marketing) that prospects may follow.

6. Share your blog posts through your Facebook page.

7. Post to your LinkedIn status.

8. Submit to directories. TopRank maintains a comprehensive list of blog directories.

9. **Include links to your blogs in any press releases.** By using services such as PR Newswire, Marketwire or PR Web, you can get your blog link placed in sites like Google, Yahoo! and sometimes hundreds of other sites (select the SEO option where they embed the links into the releases).

10. **Post regularly.** The more you blog, the more opportunity you have to be found. Consistency is key.

11. **Guest post.** Find blogs where your customers are hanging out and volunteer to blog. Be specific with the subject when you approach the blogger. It shows you did your homework. Also, bloggers are always looking to take a breather...as long as the information is relevant and valuable.

12. **Interview.** Bloggers love to be interviewed. Doing a post about them is a sure way to get your post spread around.

13. **Submit your site to Google.** Just in case your site isn't getting picked up.

14. **Put your blog on company invoices as well as other correspondence to customers.**

15. **Showcase your employees on your blog**. Employees are your most important asset, putting them front and center strengthens your blog.

16. **Develop an opt-in eNewsletter out of your weekly blog posts.**

17. **Talk about your blog when you speak at events.**

18. **Listen to customer issues on Twitter and respond with links to blog posts that answer their problems.**

19. **Be human.** Stop talking like a company and start talking like a human. Write in your own voice.

20. **Use the blog as your customer FAQ.**

21. **Focus on information your customers really need**. If you provide valuable, relevant and compelling information via your blog, chances of success are good.

22. **Use the right keywords.** Leverage Google's keyword tool to find the terms that your customers are looking for.

23. **Post your blog on social bookmarking sites like Digg, Reddit and Sphinn.**

24. **Don't hide your RSS button.** If prospects like your blog, they might want to subscribe via email or RSS. Don't hide those buttons.

25. **Create a list of favorite bloggers relevant to your market.** Then notify them that they made the list. If the list is good, they'll promote it, and possibly comment.

26. **Use numbers in your title.** Jay Baer found that his most popular posts almost always included a number in them (i.e. 9 steps, 4 types, etc.).

27. **Comment on other blogs.** It's hard to be a blogger if you don't share. Show your expertise on other blogs and leave valuable feedback.

28. **Link to your other posts within your current post.**

29. Go back to older posts and add new links to current posts.

30. Don't over complicate your site. Make it easy for people to get around and share.

31. Try a contest.

32. Find relevant forums to add your input (like Google Groups). Add your blog link to your signature line.

33. Have a point of view. If your posts are the same as everyone else's posts, who cares? Be different and get noticed.

34. Define your niche. Focus on an area that you can be the leading expert in. If your topic is too broad, you'll never be able to make a dent.

35. Never ever stop. Your blog is a promise to customers. Keeping that promise going will be a key factor towards your continuing success.

Remember that a good blog supports two way communications. Involve your audience and they will become the most important part of your blog promotion team.

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Chapter 5 – Blogging with Search Engines in Mind

Ann Smarty

Search Engine Optimization (commonly referred to as SEO) has its roots in efforts by webmasters to make their websites easy to access and crawl by search engines. The concept has been evolving into something much bigger and broader than simply making websites "crawlable" by the machines. SEO has started to cover usability issues, conversion tactics, backlink acquisition and more. Most SEO experts, including Google engineers, agree that the blog is an area that holds great leverage in all aspects of SEO.

Remember: search bots only "see" text and keywords, they are straightforward and, well, they are machines. Your primary task is to make your blog easy to understand and interpret even for those robots. Three basics:

- Create a clear navigation and naturally link to your old content and posts

- Create natural keyword prominence: have your important words in the "prominent" places

- Make your pages lightweight for people and bots to load easily.

SEO Terms that all bloggers should know:

1. Title Tag <title>

The title of each post is of crucial importance. Not only will it grab your readers' attention and prompt them to read further, the page title is also the most "prominent" place to showcase your important keywords:

- Title tags are displayed in search results (this is the linked part of Google search engine listing)

- Title tags are used by search bots to "understand" the main topic of the page

Make sure to create catchy and attention-grabbing titles AND include some post-specific details in them. Helpful details might include the product you are reviewing, the person you are interviewing, the place you are describing, or the market you are covering. These "details" can help to get your post to appear in relevant searches.

Some best practices and rules:

- All title tags throughout the site should be unique

- Title tags should be preferably no longer than 70 characters (including spaces)

- Page titles should be specific and contain your main keyword(s) – to help Googlebot understand what the page is about.

2. Meta Description

Officially, the Meta Description is not taken into account for ranking websites. But it is used to generate the search snippet (a couple of lines you see below the linked part on the search results page). Meta description should thus be attention-grabbing and concise. They are a great opportunity to exert control on the text that searchers will see when your posts come up in queries.

> Actionable tip for Wordpress users:
>
> All-In-One SEO Pack is the easiest-to-use and the most reliable SEO plugin for the popular Wordpress blogging platform. It will help you create meta descriptions for all pages of your blog.

3. URL Structure

Clear, "readable" URL structure will help with both the usability and SEO of your blog:

- URLs containing keywords will appear in search results (with keywords in bold):

- Search engines take keywords in the URL into account to rank web pages in search results.

What bloggers should know:

- Avoid very long URLs: no more than 3-5 words in your URL (for Wordpress bloggers: use "post slug" option to customize your URLs);

- Avoid uppercase in URLS: URL is case sensitive – meaning that if by any reason (your choice or CMS) you stick to a an upper-case version, remember that this can cause a few issues: people are most likely to link to the standard lower case one and you might both lose link juice and suffer from duplicate content issues. Worst case, interested users may get a 404-Page Not Found at the worst possible time.

- Avoid dates in URLs (unless your posts are time sensitive).

Here are some important SEO tips for bloggers to follow:

1. Focus on unique content only. Even if you are approached by a PR person with the "ready-made" press release or product review for you to "just copy and paste", take a few minutes to retell the contents of the release with your own words and express your own opinion. This will make your blog voice stronger in the community, your style more recognizable by readers and your content more valuable for search bots. Remember, Google only values unique content!

2. Link to your previously published posts. Search bots discover and index your posts by following links. Thus, before publishing a post, make sure to drill down to your previously published articles, find relevant ones and link to them from within the new content. This will also encourage readers to browse to your older posts and

motivate them to stay on your blog (Take advantage of "Related posts" and interlinking plugins to automated the process but don't forget to link to your posts manually from within the post content as well).

3. Linking to posts on other blogs is another smart idea. Linking is the foundation of your online connections. Bloggers are always eager to know who links to them. They will most surely discover your trackbacks, go to your website, browse, comment… and also link back to you! So link generously and get discovered (*Wordpress plugins like [Zemanta](#) and [Arkayne](#) could be a great help here as well*).

4. Never link to suspicious sites. While linking in general is highly appreciated, linking to "bad neighborhoods" may get you into trouble. What is a "bad neighborhood"? Just a couple of months spent online will teach you. Those are various health- or gambling-related resources which are likely to send a spam email to your inbox. Be careful who you link to.

5. Make sure that your pages are lightweight. Google has started to incorporate the page load speed into its algorithm but that's not the only reason to care about your page size. Neither people nor search bots will be able to go through your website in full if each page loads terribly slowly. Besides, taking care of your blog load speed isn't that hard: choose a good reliable hosting provider, make sure your images and files you upload are less than 100K and install some caching plugin (especially if you have a lot of pages already).

SEO is about making your blog easy to go through, visible and useful enough so that even a search bot can understand your main points and find it usable enough to rank high in search results. At the same time you'll be producing content that people can value and link to. You don't need to pretend being good – you can achieve much more by actually being good.

Ann Smarty is the Director of Media at [BlueGlass](#) where she serves as the Editor of [Search Engine Journal](#). Ann's expertise in blogging and tools serve as a base for her writing, tutorials and her guest blogging project, [MyBlogGuest.com](#). You can follow her on Twitter at [@seosmarty](#).

Chapter 6 – Using social media to find new readers

Callan Green

The most awesome and informative post is only as good as the number of relevant people who see it. Promoting your content is a key element for blog success. If you share your content strategically it will keep your faithful readers returning often and can expand your audience exponentially. Here are a few best practices for getting shared and conversing through social media.

1. **Write content that is share-worthy** - No one is going to pass along a post that is mediocre. Make sure that you give your readers valuable news and/or perspectives. In short, give them content that they are proud to share and to be associated with.

2. **Continuously grow your networks** - The sad truth is that as your contacts grow their networks they may lose sight of you. In order to make sure that you always have fresh people paying attention go out and proactively follow/friend request new people who are interested in the content you are sharing.

3. **Craft your update carefully** - Avoid cliché words and common sales-pitch terms. Also try alerting them to whom this content is for. People are busy and not everything you share is relevant to everyone.

4. **Encourage comments** – Posts with a lively comment trail are good for a number of reasons. From a social media perspective you are more likely to get shares from commenters who now feel a part of the post. Comments also confirm to all readers that the post is interesting and worth noting, making them feel better about sharing it with their own networks.

5. **Spread out your shares and avoid synching your networks -** If you have a presence on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, don't syndicate your update across all sites. Chances are that you have people connected to you on more than one platform, and if they see the same content, presented in the same way, they are likely to see you as spammy. Instead craft an update that speaks to the nature of the platform and spread out your sharing across a few hour time-span. (Don't wait too long though, because even the best posts can become old fast).

6. **Say thank you for shares** – This will encourage your community to share your content more often and also shows the rest of your community that your content is share-worthy. To get the most bang for your buck on Twitter, consider re-tweeting their share with your thank you. That way your followers who missed your original share will have another opportunity to click on your link.

7. **Use social sharing sites outside of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn** – Consider building a presence on 'bookmarking' specialists Digg, StumbleUpon Delicious or Redditt. The key to any of these sites is that you have to be an active participant in the network to see any real traffic from it. Simply creating a profile will not suffice. You will need to build your community there, connect with people and share content outside of your own, often. Look for vertical specific sites where people in your industry are networking.

8. **Come up with creative ways to re-share on Twitter** – We all know that different people are on Twitter at any given time of day, so simply sharing your post once probably isn't the most effective. Find ways to re-share it without just re-posting the same content. Add some sort of "in case you missed it" so that

those who didn't miss it don't become annoyed. I'd also make sure you tweeted plenty of non-self serving content in between.

9. **Call people out** - If your post includes someone in your industry or another brand, let them know. If it is favorable they are likely to share it with their social networks (or through their own blogs). You can add a trackback to their site so that they will get a pingback about your post, but also try the more direct route of just reaching out to them on their networks and sharing your post with them. Many businesses have installed automated social media monitoring services. If you mention a brand or business in your posts there is a better chance that it will show up on their dashboards if you can include their website, Twitter ID or Facebook page. Hopefully they will Tweet a link to the post or create a share to their 'likes' on Facebook.

In the end, there is no way to guarantee that each post you write will get a lot of social buzz or a lot of traffic, but you won't find out if you wait for someone else to get the ball rolling. It is up to the blogger to offer shareable material, reach out to their networks and then encourage the community to share.

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Chapter 7 – Guest Blogging for Business Blogs

Anni Wallace

Guest blogging has become a popular and very effective way to promote your business and expand your reach to targeted audiences outside of your existing customer base.

Getting your word out and building brand awareness are among the most obvious benefits of guest blogging. Posting on successful blogs (other than your own) gives your blogging staff a reputation for having specific subject and communication skills, providing a helpful luster for your business within your key markets. Being seen as a "thought leader" in your industry certainly has its advantages. As experts, you'll have an easier time meeting new prospects and earning their trust – a huge competitive advantage.

As with many things in life, guest blogging comes down to the **three P's: preparation, pitch and patience.**

1. Preparation

First of all you need to actually find some blogs to guest post on. The most effective way to find guest posting opportunities is to network: look around your current connections in your niche. Use your staff and existing customers as a resource – ask them which blogs they frequently read.

There are some valuable online resources for finding relevant blogs:

- [Technorati](): The popular bookmarketing service has a "blogs relating to" search option
- [Authority Blogger](): a community set up to talk about blogging in general
- [About.com blogging forums](): a forum uniting About.com bloggers and readers
- Google has a topic based blog search and a 'Related blogs about…' feature
- [MyBlogGuest]() is a specialized forum for connecting people who need guest bloggers with people who want to post on other peoples blogs.

2. Pitching

Once you have identified the blogs that you feel are relevant, start reading them thoroughly for a week or so to get a feel for their style and mission. Create lists of possible topics and angles that you don't feel they have covered already but that is in line with their content.

Make sure to write a personalized email aimed at the owner (or editor) of the specific blog in question. Nothing turns people off more than a standardized form. If they ask you to provide any information with your submission make sure you do it. Remember not to be pushy, just explain in a clear manner who you are and why you think your post would be a good fit for their blog.

3. Patience

The hardest part of applying for a guest posting opportunity is waiting for a response from the person who gets to make the decision on whether you are in or out. As with print publications, most high profile bloggers will be extremely busy, which can result in a significant delay before you hear back from them regarding your particular proposal.

Waiting a week or so before hearing back is not uncommon. The common question here is how long one should wait. Use your common sense – picture the inbox of the other person and find a level that keeps you in the loop without being annoying.

Once you managed to get the piece published, remember to visit your guest posts often so you can reply to any comments they may receive. Interacting with people who have cared enough to leave a comment (good or bad) is a great way to pick up new long-term readers.

Remember that guest posting is all about networking: you won't achieve much unless you get enrolled: build your connections and following with care, value each new reader and contact and you will soon be amazed by the outcome!

Annie Wallace is a new mom and entrepreneur blogging at [Viral Mom](). She started blogging a bit more than 6 months ago and has still a lot to learn (and a lot to share!).

Chapter 8 – Effective Business Blog Designs

Cameron Chapman

The design of your business blog has a huge impact on how it is perceived by your visitors. A great design instills trust, makes you more credible and invites your readers to participate. A poor design can make your blog and your company look unprofessional.

Just as with regular website design, there are certain best practices you should keep in mind when working on the design of your blog. The best practices of regular website design still apply, of course, but there are also important blog specific considerations:

1. Don't Insist on Your Blog Design Matching Your Website Design Perfectly

So many business blogs try to shoehorn a blog into their existing website design. That's fine if your website has a text-centric design that's similar to a blog design to begin with. But many great business websites don't resemble blogs at all. In those cases, it's important for your blog design to echo your website design, but it doesn't need to match it perfectly.

Your blog design should instead repeat elements like the graphics or color scheme, and should incorporate similar typography.

http://www.mint.com   http://www.mint.com/blog/

The Mint home page and blog have a similar look and feel but the blog uses its own layout and styles

2. Focus on Typography and Readability

Since blogs mostly revolve around text content, it's important that your design makes that content easily readable. This means using a font that's suitable for reading onscreen, as well as having proper contrast and a font that's large enough.

As a general rule, dark text on a light background is more readable than light text on a dark background. Just look at white text on a black screen for a few minutes and then look at a light surface. You'll see black bands super-imposed on your vision for up to a few minutes. The same effect doesn't happen with a light background and dark text.

You also want to limit the number of fonts used on your blog. Ideally, use one or at most two fonts in your design. Instead of using more than two fonts use multiple weights and styles in the fonts you choose to add diversity to your typography.

3. Establish a Hierarchy of Site Elements

There's a definite hierarchy of design and content elements in any blog design. You just need to make sure that the hierarchy your design establishes is the one you intended. In other words, make sure that the most important parts of your design and content are most prominently displayed.

In most business blogs the two most important elements are going to be the main content and the header, which should include branding for the company. Make sure that when you look at the design of you blog that those are the two elements that stand out among all the others.

Make sure, too, that hierarchy within elements makes sense. Your blog post titles, for example, should stand out over any subheadings contained within the posts. Elements within your sidebar should be arranged in a manner that makes sense in terms of usability (for example, the navigation of your blog should appear above any blogroll links you choose to incorporate).

Visual hierarchy doesn't have to be complex. 37signals' product blog has simple yet effective hierarchy within their posts

4. Don't Forget Comment Design!

Almost every business blog wants to foster communication and discussion with their visitors. After all, an engaged readership is more likely to come back on a regular basis and more likely to be loyal to your company.

The comment form on your blog should be easy to use and make it apparent which fields are required (most often a name, email address, and the comment itself). The comments should be arranged and formatted in a way that clearly separates each comment. Make sure that the typography—the size and contrast in particular—make it easy to read the comments.

You'll also want to decide whether you want your comments to appear in chronological order or in a threaded manner (where replies appear under the comment being replied to). If you want to foster conversation among commenters, then the latter option will almost certainly work better. If you mostly want your commenters to converse with your authors, then the former might work better.

Differentiate your author comments, too, to make it easier for readers to see an author's responses to other commenters. Of course, if your authors rarely or never comment (which isn't a good thing), this becomes irrelevant.
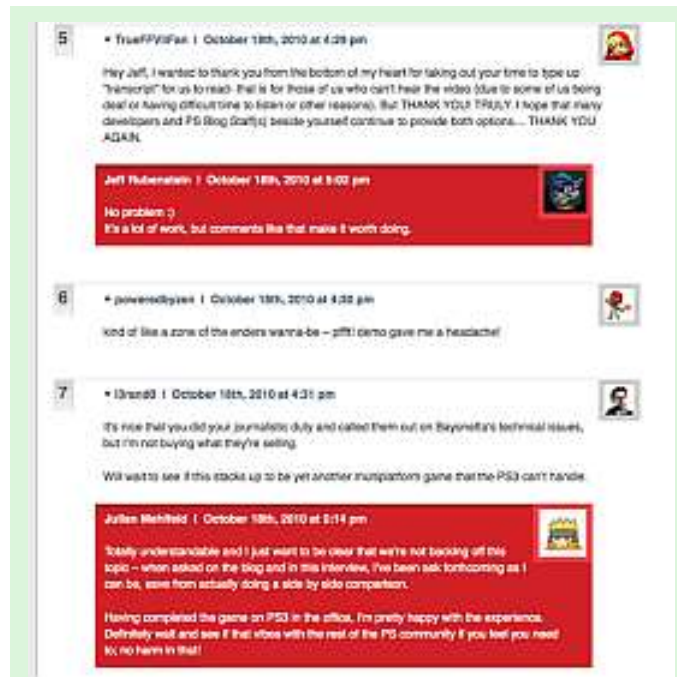
The Playstation Blog has a well organized section that uses numbered, threaded comments and highlights author replies in red. They also use gravatars for each commenter

A few more considerations for comment design

- Include a gravatar image for your commenters.
- Paginate comments if you regularly get more than 10-20 comments on your posts.
- Separate your comments from your trackbacks (incoming links to blog posts from other website).

5. Make Provisions for Other Content

While most business blogs still focus primarily on text it's important to make provisions for rich multimedia content. You never know when you might want to expand your blog to include podcasts, slide shows or video content. Even something as simple as including images in a post is sometimes overlooked in the initial blog design.

Think about the types of content that are commonly incorporated into blog posts and then think about how you can best serve those kinds of content within the design. Even things like making sure your main content column is wide enough to properly display images or video shouldn't be overlooked.

The wide columns on the eBay Ink Blog easily integrate video and other rich media within text posts.

6. Make the blog a Reflection of Your Company's Values and Personality

The design of your blog should reflect your company values and corporate culture. A company with a traditional take on things should reflect that in their blog design. A company that's hip and modern should have a hip and modern blog design.

Blog designers, however talented, cannot change your corporate DNA. Work with them towards a presentation that is inviting, open and flexible while accurately representing the values and style of your business.

Cameron Chapman is a freelance blogger and designer, and the author of Internet Famous: A Practical Guide to Becoming an Online Celebrity. You can follow her on Twitter at @cameron_chapman.

How they do it – a look at how some savvy social media organizations communicate through their blogs

 LinkedIn Signal: A new way for professionals to consume information and news (9/29/2010)

 A Better Twitter (9/24/2010)

 A spring metamorphosis — Google's new look (5/5/2010)

 New video page launches for all users (3/31/2010)

 New Groups: Stay Closer to Groups of People in Your Life (10/6/2010)

 President Obama on the Daily Show with Jon Stewart (10/27/2010)

 Brazil 2014 World Cup Can (7/20/2010)