



How to Start a Successful Blog

Strategies for planning, creating, and monetizing your brand's blog

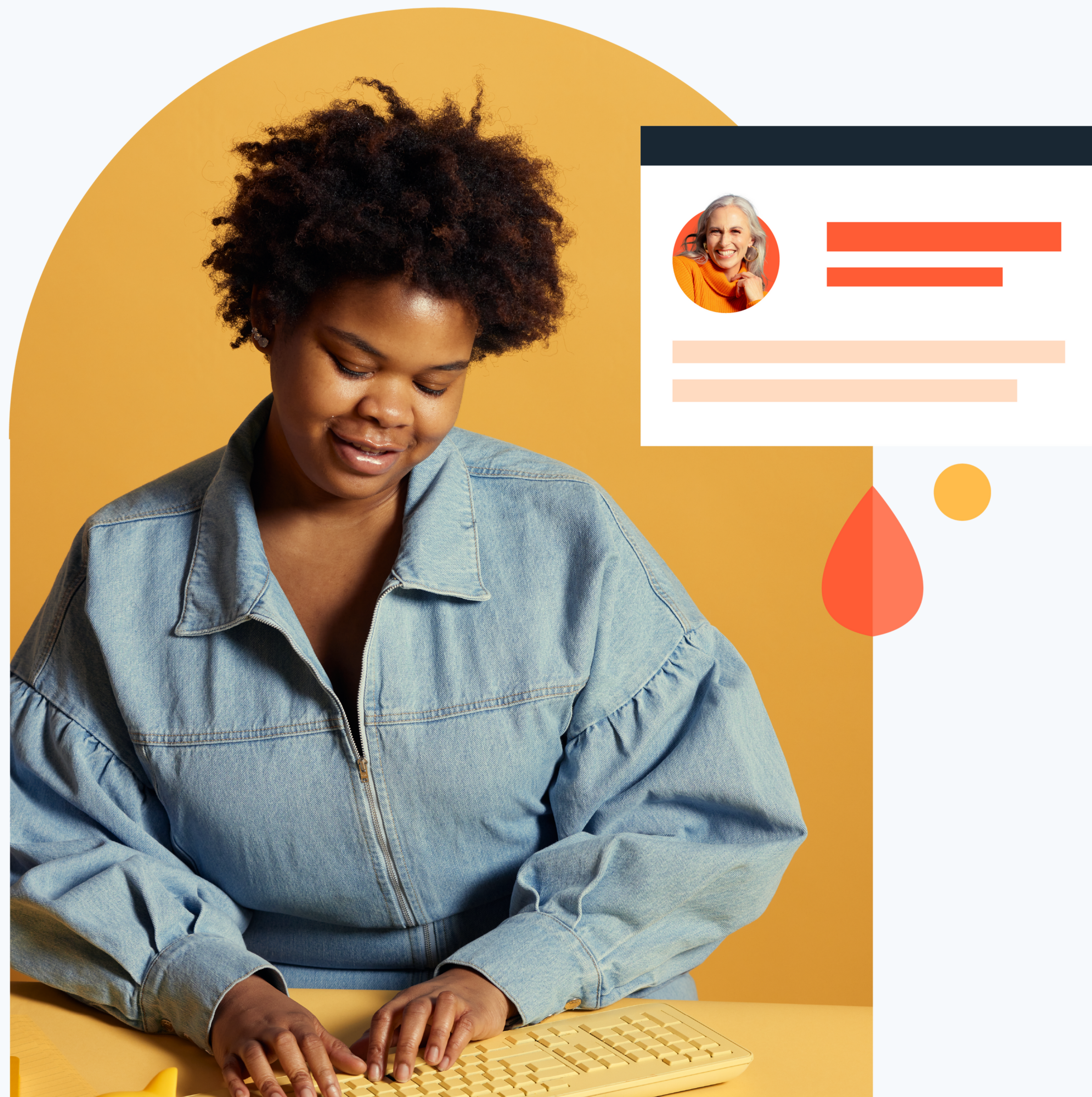


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Introduction

For many people, the term “blogging” conjures up images of personal blogs of the early aughts—an avid baker sharing recipes or a personal trainer documenting their fitness journey. While personal blogs are still wildly popular, blogs have also grown to become a powerful business tool.

With Millennials and Gen Z making up **more than 64% of business buyers**, ensuring that your company appears in online searches and outranks competitors is essential.

Blogging is an inexpensive marketing strategy that allows you to open a dialogue with your audience and provide useful information, all while keeping your brand top of mind.

In this guide, we'll give you the tools and strategies to start a successful blog including:

- ✓ Identifying your target audience
- ✓ Setting goals for your blog
- ✓ Creating strategies to use your blog as an acquisition and retention tool
- ✓ Content planning and strategy
- ✓ Writing and formatting blog posts
- ✓ Choosing a content management system and setting up your blog
- ✓ Promoting your blog
- ✓ Tracking metrics and understanding important data from your blog
- ✓ Monetizing your blog



HubSpot Academy: How to Start a Blog and Create a Blogging Strategy for Your Business

Are you ready to take your blogging skills to the next level? This course from HubSpot Academy covers everything you need to know about creating a successful business blogging strategy.

[Take the Course](#)

Research and Channel-Fit

STEP ONE

Determine Your Buyer Personas

When professional bloggers begin writing a blog post, they often have a fictional representation of their target persona in mind. They may even have a physical picture of this fictitious person displayed at their workspace to help them focus. Creating a buyer persona is a great way to identify how you'll use your blog. What is this ideal customer searching for online? Where do they get their information?

Let's say you are a meal delivery service. Your ideal customer is a busy, 25-40-year-old professional who lives a healthy lifestyle and earns an upper-middle-class salary. In business, this is called a buyer persona. Buyer personas represent your ideal customer guided by your own data and market research.

Free Resource

HubSpot Make My Persona Tool

Identifying Buyer Personas for Blogging

→ Dig through your data and look for patterns. Are most of your top customers a certain age? Do they live in a particular region?

→ Use forms on your website to collect relevant data. Ask for company size, title, and other information that may help you identify your target audience.

→ Survey your sales team and find out what attributes the best customers have in common.

→ Interview customers and prospects. Ask them how they found your product or service, why they like it, and who they may recommend it to.

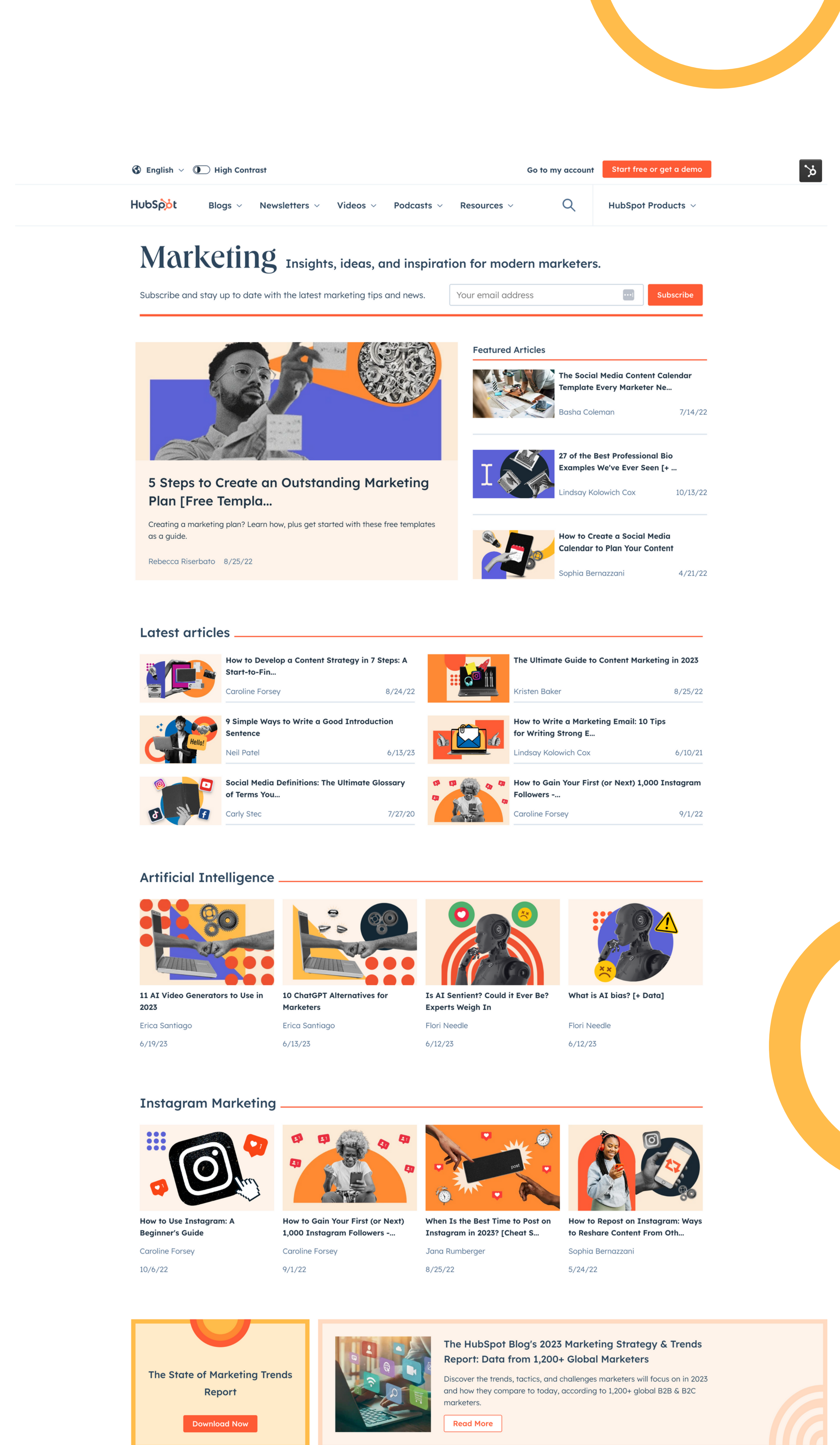
STEP TWO

Connect Your Blog to Your Brand

Consider your blog's relationship to your company and brand. Your blog can exist independently or be incorporated into your website and brand. At HubSpot, our blogs are a part of our core brand and live on the subdomain blog.hubspot.com, which is in our main navigation under "Resources."

For SEO purposes, this helps your company build authority for your primary domain while maintaining your brand. Having a separate domain for your blog may make sense for certain business situations, like if three similar companies are starting a blog together under one domain.

Keeping your blog aligned with your brand identity and as a subdomain or page on your main website will help improve rank and authority for your company.



STEP THREE

Determining Your Blog's Goals

Like we mentioned before, blogs can be used for different purposes, meaning they will have different goals depending on the use. When determining your blog's goals, start with your purpose.

- Why are you creating this blog?
- What do you want your reader to do with your blog?
- What will success look like 3 months from now? 6 months? 3 years?

Since blogs are a long-term content strategy, you'll need to choose goals and milestones to track progress and analyze which posts, times, lengths, and keywords perform best.

We'll tackle metrics later, but for now, it's time to explore some blog goals and their pros and cons.



GOAL Drive Traffic

For this goal, your primary goal for the blog is to drive new viewers to your website or product pages. To achieve this goal, your main activities would be keyword research, frequent publishing, and link-building efforts.

PRO

Low cost

CON

Takes time, not a quick-hit option, competition for keywords



GOAL Generate Subscribers

To use your blog to grow your subscriber-base, you can incorporate slide-in, pop-up, or in-text CTAs (calls-to-action) asking for an email address and offering value to your readers. Here are some catchy, clickable [CTA options](#).

PRO

Effective, good way to bring folks into your ecosystem without asking for too much info

CON

Limited real estate, needs setup, requires email nurturing, long-term effects



GOAL Convert Leads

If you want to use your blog to convert your existing traffic or prospects into leads, you can create specific types of content for those in the consideration phase of the buyer's journey. Offer product demos, premium content, and more to get more information from prospects.

Tip: Try [HubSpot's Smart CTAs](#) to show lead offers for current subscribers and subscriber offers for new visitors.

PRO

Assists sales efforts, good way to repurpose content, organic leads are more likely to be qualified and convert into customers

CON

Takes time, not a quick-hit option, competition for keywords



GOAL Retain/Convert Customers

Blogs can be a great way to keep your audience up-to-date with product features, explore new or industry-specific ways to use your service or tool, or a place to feature customers who are using your product extremely well. After all, it's easier to sell to current customers than acquire new ones.

PRO

Less expensive than attracting new prospects, turns customers into promoters and brand advocates, success stories help convert others

CON

More timely to gather info and work with partners/product teams to create content than just writing evergreen or topic-based content



GOAL Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the extent to which people know about your company. By sharing your knowledge and creating a voice and direct dialogue with your audience, you can help grow your brand identity and reach. To drive brand awareness, try guest blog posts and collaborations as well as frequent social media publishing.

PRO

Promotes your business as an expert, allows you to steer the conversation about your brand

CON

Hard to measure, time consuming to post and analyze social media efforts, takes time to see results

Setting Up Your Blog

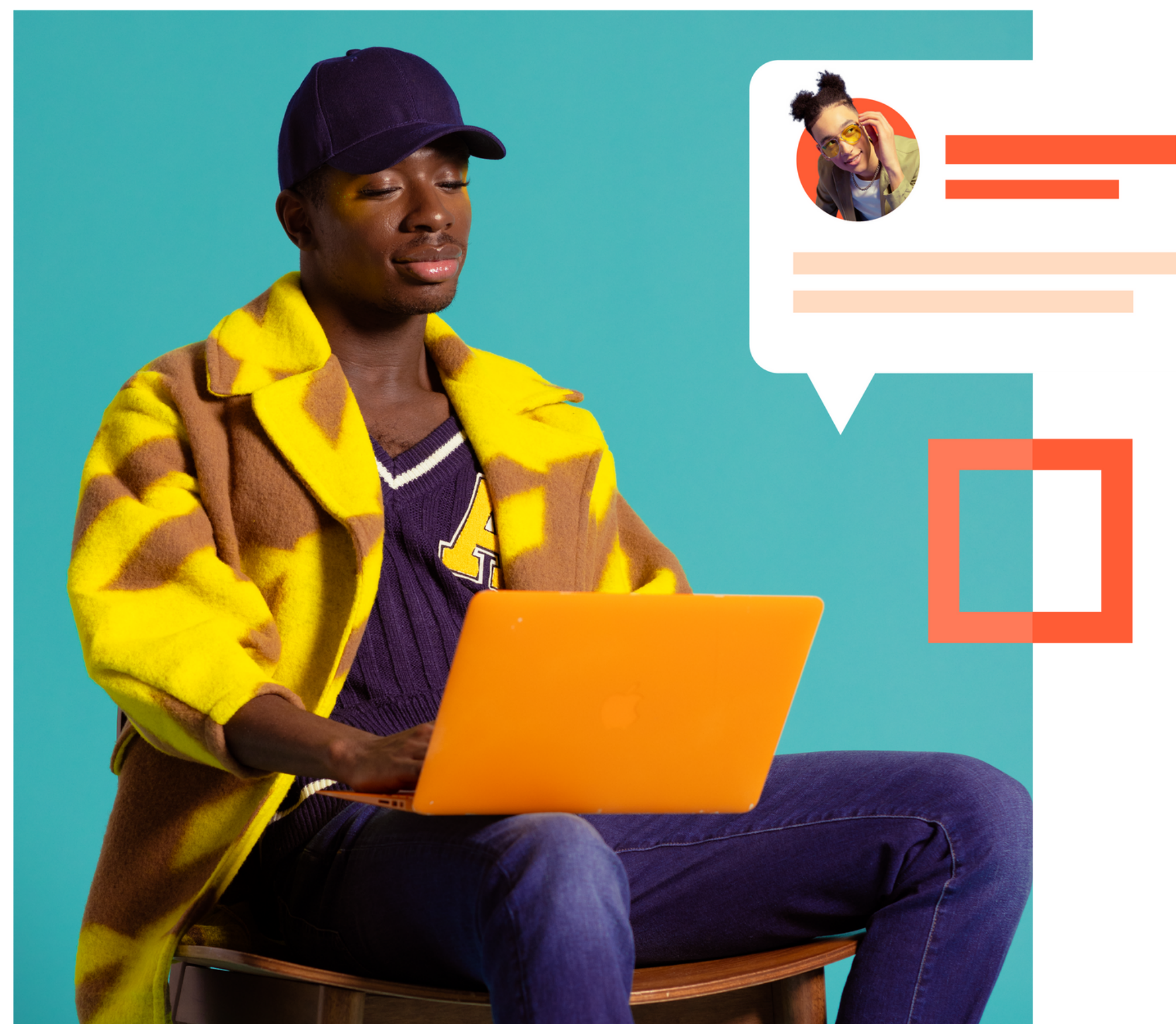
Setting Up Your Blog

To get your blog up and running, gather a few tools and helpful collaborators. You'll need to decide who is writing, editing, publishing, and promoting, who will be in charge of analytics and data/metrics, who will create a blog style guide, and more. You'll also need to choose a content management system (CMS), preferably one that is easy to use for those who are non-technical

Assigning roles on the blog team

Now that you're ready to start creating and publishing content, you'll need to assign roles to everyone who will be contributing to the workflow. This is an important step in starting a successful blog. If you don't identify who will have the final say, chaos will ensue when there is a debate surrounding cadence, tone, CTA use, and more.

Individuals can hold more than one job on the team, but make sure you split up writer and editor to get a fresh set of eyes for typos, links, and maintaining your brand voice.



Blog team roles and responsibilities

Writer:

writes content and incorporates SEO

Editor/SEO Optimization/CTAs:

edits content, optimizes for search engines, adds CTAs

Publisher:

plans and publishes content, maintains content calendar

Analyst:

tracks metrics, owns CTA tracking, provides regular reports to the team with best performing content

Developer/IT:

owns blog from a technical standpoint, troubleshoots

Choosing a CMS for your blog

In order to successfully launch and maintain a blog, you'll need an effective **content management system** (CMS)—a digital system that enables you to host digital content. While identifying your target persona and generating content ideas is the strategic side of launching a blog, now you'll need to consider the equally important technical side.

What to look for in a CMS

EASE OF USE

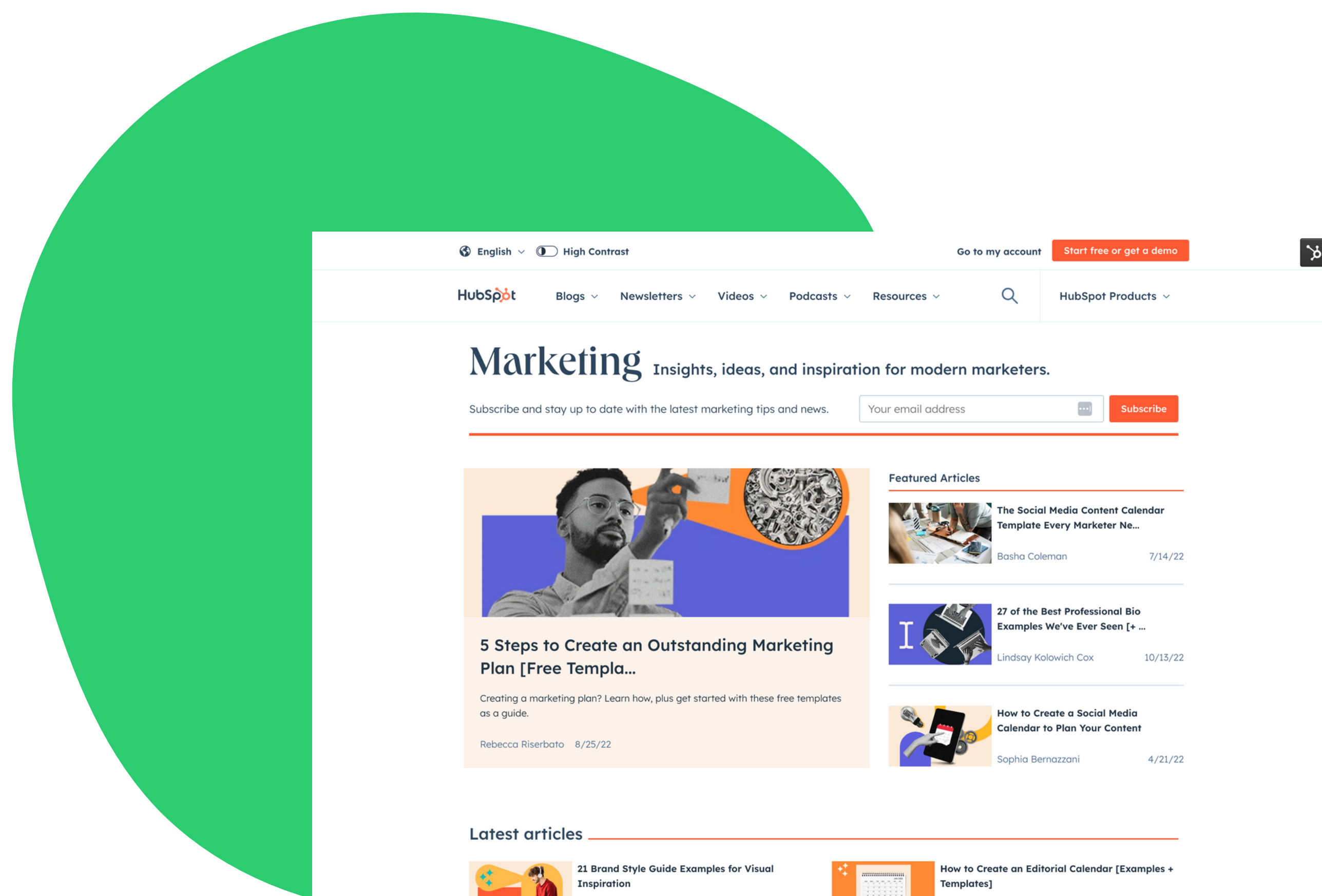
If you don't have a lot of technical support at your company, choose a CMS that's easy to use. Most content management systems come with templates you can use or support to help you design it, so make sure you choose one that will work for the skills on your team.

KEY METRICS YOU CAN TRACK

Does the CMS allow you to track metrics like conversion rates, page views, and where your traffic is coming from? Analyzing the success of your blog will be incredibly important post-launch, so make sure your CMS allows you to easily track the success of your efforts.

RESPONSIVENESS

More than **60 percent of all Google searches come from mobile**, which means it's essential for your blog to be optimized for any device that your user opens content on. A CMS that automatically makes your content responsive to device type is a must for marketers in today's mobile and tablet world.



Setting Up Tracking and Analytics

Once your post is out in the world for the first time, you can go back and edit, but you'll miss out on data from before the change... if you haven't set up tracking properly. To set up blog analytics, you can use a tool like Google Analytics or use HubSpot's blog tools in the CMS.

Most CMSs will have built-in blog page analytics. From there you can learn [how many people viewed a certain page](#) on your blog and you may be able to see more like what devices they're on, where they're located, bounce rate, and time on page. If you prefer Google Analytics for tracking, install the Google Analytics code on your blog (usually in the header.) [Here's how to install the GA code on a HubSpot blog.](#)

When sharing blog posts on social media and running campaigns to promote blogs, make sure to use UTM codes on the end of your blog sharing URLs. UTM codes can track campaigns, sources, mediums, pieces of content, and terms.

FREE RESOURCE
[UTM Link Generator and Tracking Template](#)

Designing Your Blog

Once you've chosen a CMS, it's time to design your blog and optimize it for search engines and lead generation—turning visitors into prospects and, ultimately, customers. To accomplish this, you'll need a blog design that's easy to access and shareable. Most content management systems will offer you free templates that you can modify and use if your team has less design experience. Need a little inspiration for designing your blog? Check out [these awesome examples](#).

What to consider when designing your blog

MAIN BLOG PAGE

The main page should tell your visitors about the blog and include links to the most recent posts. Be sure to include a search feature and/or an archive of your past posts so visitors can access both new and old content.

COLOR SCHEME

To make your blog's design feels coherent, choose a color scheme and stick with it across all your pages. Try using your brand colors as a base and adding a few accent colors to tie the whole design together.

BRANDING

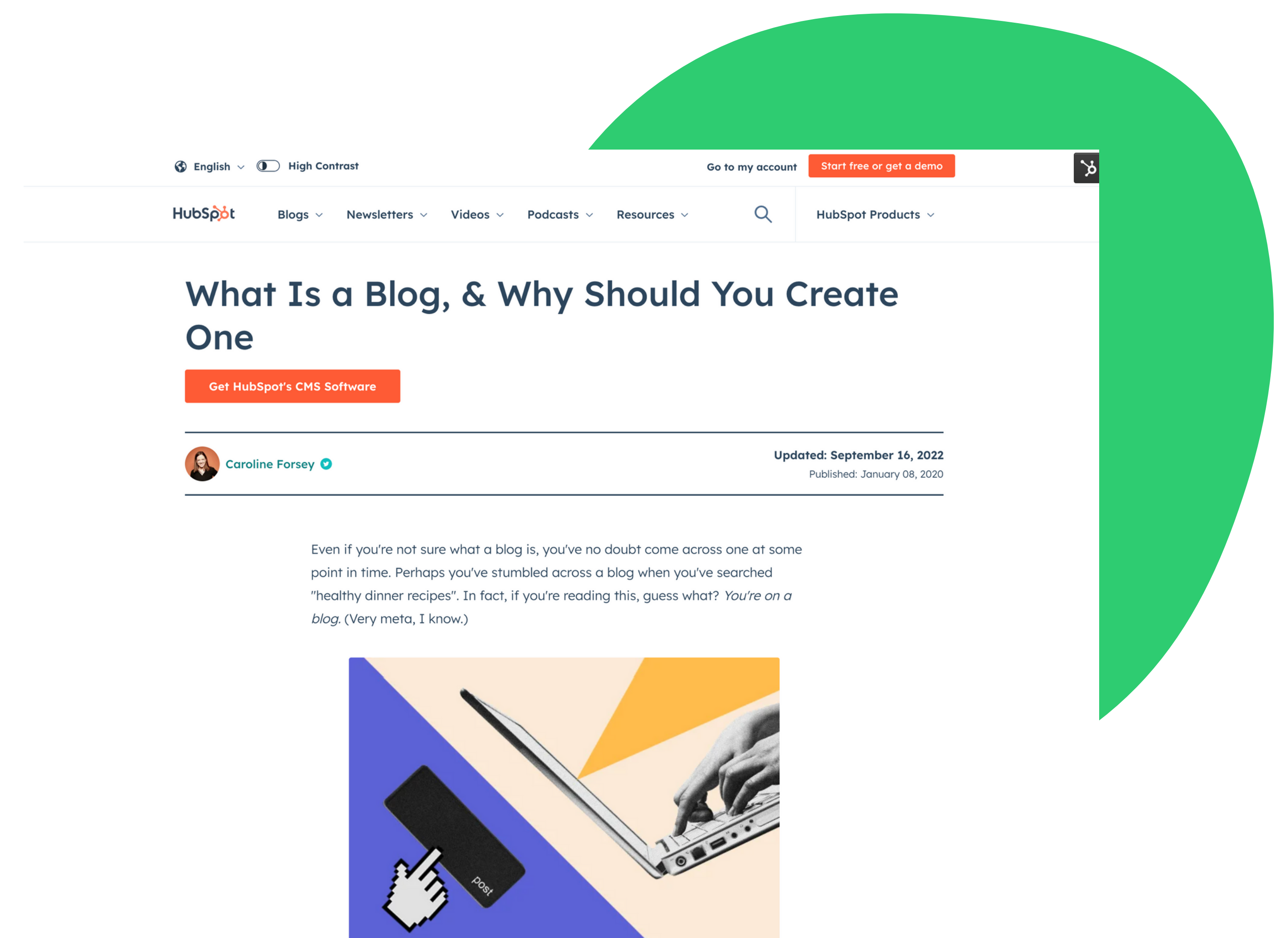
Make sure your blog's design looks consistent with the rest of your site's branding. While it's important to distinguish your blog's look from other pages on your site, your visitors should still feel as though they are on a related page.

BLOG POST TEMPLATES

Each blog post should have the same general layout so readers have a consistent experience across each page. A simple way to ensure this is by designing or using a premade template for each new blog post.

CALLS-TO-ACTION (CTAS)

A blog is a tool used to convert visitors, prospects, and customers, so linking to pieces of content that will nurture your visitors is important.



Making CTAs and conversion points

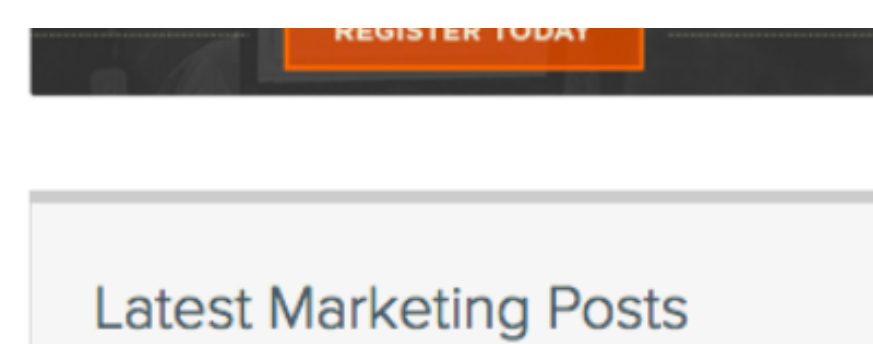
Think of your high-performing blog content like real estate. You're getting lots of traffic through this one central location and the traffic is people who are at least somewhat interested in the general realm of what you have to offer. CTAs are a way to flag down those who may be interested in you and offer them something more.

Blogs can have **many types of CTAs**. These include pop-ups, header bars, slide-ins, in-text CTAs, buttons, image CTAs, and more. You can also include links or buttons to share posts on social media, email to a friend, or save the link to your reading list.

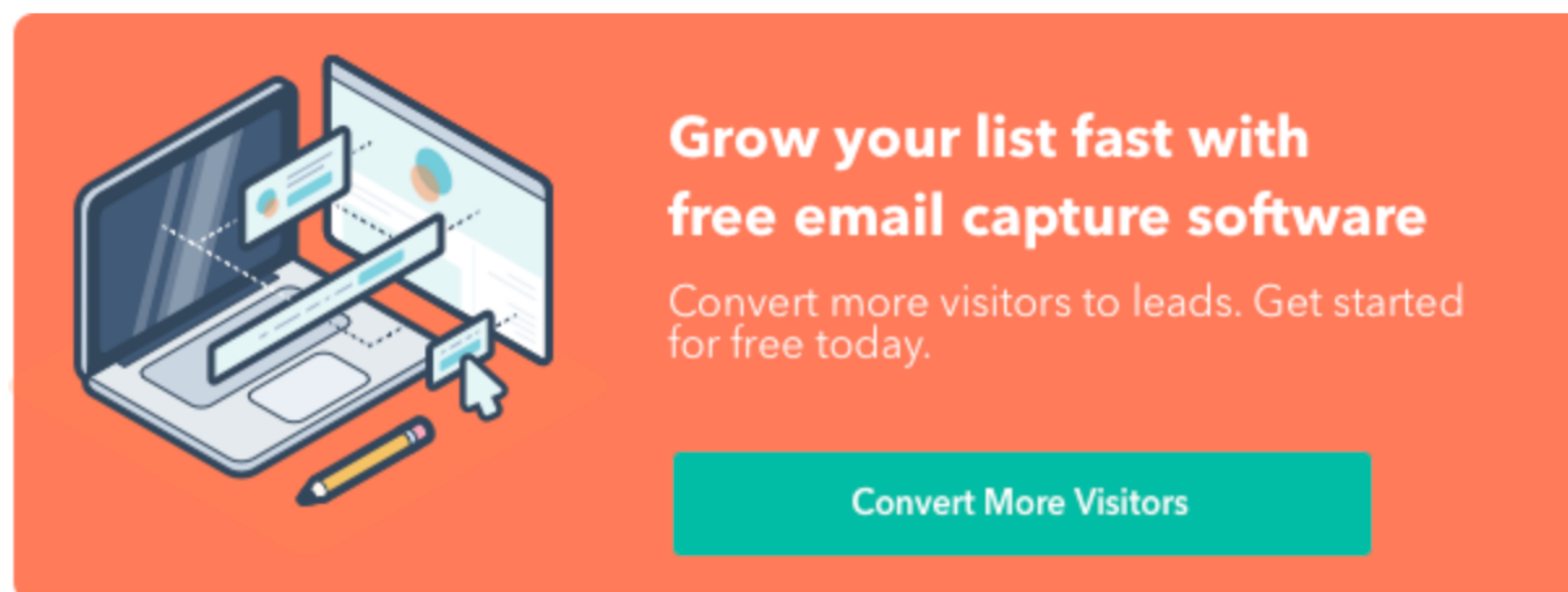
When choosing which action you'd like your reader to perform, consider if this piece of content would attract a visitor/prospect or lead/existing customer. For prospects, offer another piece of related content or a downloadable template or infographic. For leads, offer a course or access to a personalized demo of your product or service.

Step 4: Organize your content.

Sometimes, blog posts can have an overwhelming amount of information -- for the reader and the writer. The trick is to organize the info so readers are not intimidated by the length or



How else do you use calls-to-action on your blog?



Working with Developers

When **working with developers** to create your first successful blog, make sure to include them in the planning process as early as possible. Your developer teammate may note up front that developing in WordPress may not be compatible with your CMS or tracking. Then, if your team had already decided on features, templates, or styles, you would have to start from square one with your developer's recommendation for a CMS.

Make sure to give plenty of time for development and give yourself a cushion for unforeseen technical difficulties. Present your developer with a vision for the blog and be clear about what you'll need. List out requests like:

- Slide-in CTAs
- The ability to tag posts
- A featured image for each post
- Comments/no comments
- A feed of recent posts
- Social shares on each post

Use a project management software or another way to organize the plan for your blog launch, and make sure it's clear who will manage the blog moving forward. Work with your developer(s) to ensure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to updating the blog, being able to edit and publish posts, and who should be trained on how to manage the backend or any templates.



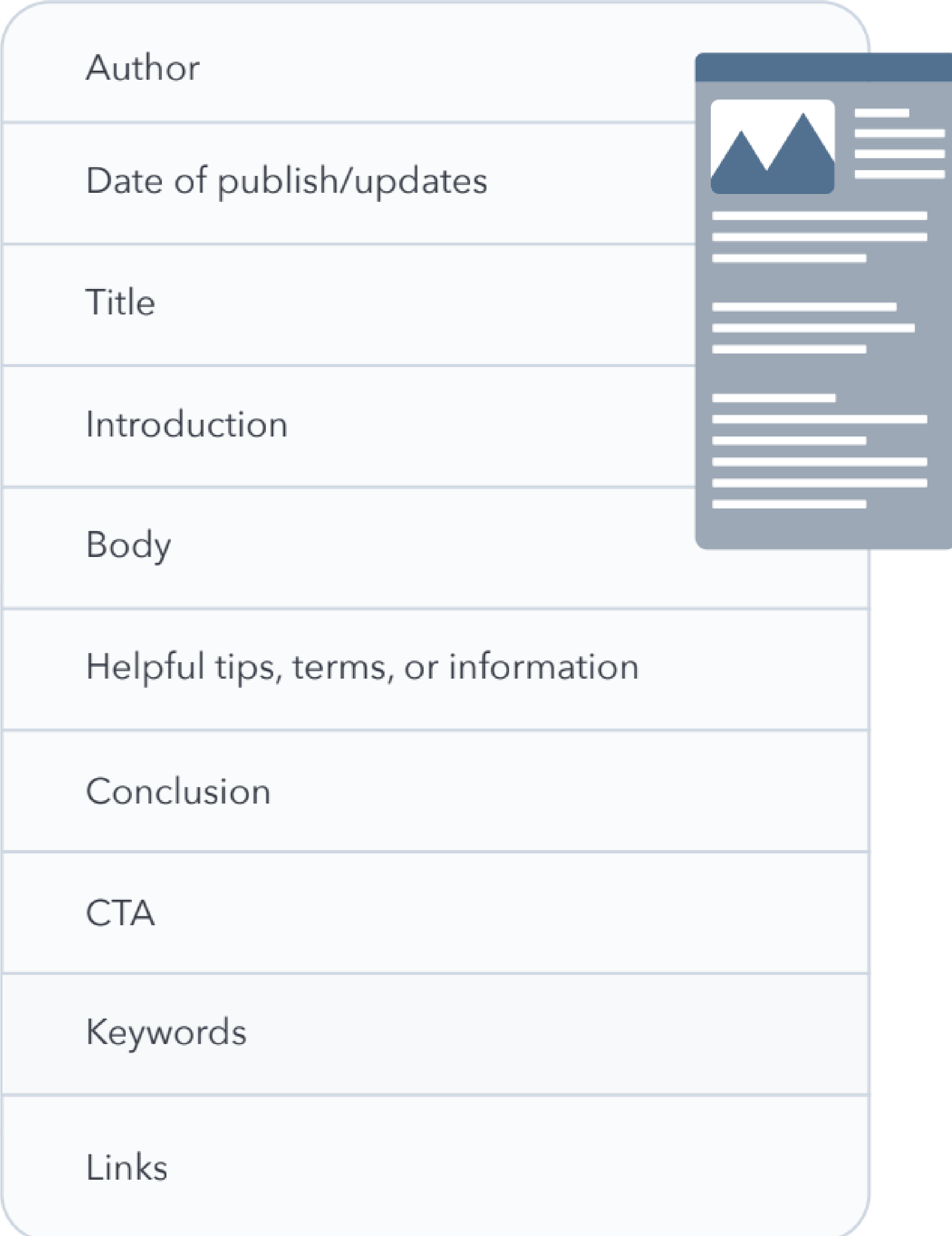
Creating Your First Blog Posts

It's time to get down to business, writing the first posts. When sitting down to write a blog post, center yourself and remember your keywords or topic, pillar page or umbrella category, and buyer persona or audience. Use [these blog post templates](#) for specific formats that can help you get in the groove of writing list-based posts, newsjacking posts, infographics, pillar pages, and "How To" style blog posts.

Once you've chosen keywords, it's time to optimize each blog post for SEO. Make sure you're optimizing your meta description, page title, keywords, URLs, etc. for the keywords you're trying to rank for.

Want to learn more about SEO?
Check out this [On-Page SEO template](#).

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN AN IDEAL BLOG POST



Author
Date of publish/updates
Title
Introduction
Body
Helpful tips, terms, or information
Conclusion
CTA
Keywords
Links

Creating and Planning Content

Mapping and Planning Your Content

Creating and publishing a blog for a certain goal is a strategic move and requires planning and research. You can search which keywords are most popular in your industry or niche and how people search for your brand, then tailor your content and marketing strategies accordingly. Since **Google is the top search engine around the world** with around 85% of the search market share, we'll focus on their algorithm when it comes to ranking.

When thinking about keywords, Google's algorithm considers a lot when surfacing content—beyond the blog post itself. You'll need a comprehensive blog strategy and a willing team to set yourself up for success later down the line.

You'll need to think about:

- How frequently you can create content
- What types of content will you post
- Your goals for the blog
- How social media will factor in



Keyword Research

SEO (search engine optimization) starts with ranking for keywords that your target audience is searching for. The best way to rank for keywords is by designing your blog posts based on the keywords you're trying to rank for. Start with keyword research, and use those keywords to brainstorm and tailor your posts.

Keyword Research 101

- Make a list of relevant topics and terms associated with your business or product
- Create 5-10 main categories of topics
- List as many keywords/search terms you think your buyer persona would search
- Research monthly search volume for each keyword and related keywords using an SEO tool like Google's webmaster tools

FREE RESOURCE
Keyword Research Template



While researching, you'll probably notice that some keywords have very high search volume with high competition. This makes them very difficult for any new publication to rank for right off the bat. Look for long-tailed, niche keywords with low competition to start. You may not generate high search volume right away, but the more niche your keywords are, the better qualified your visitors will be.

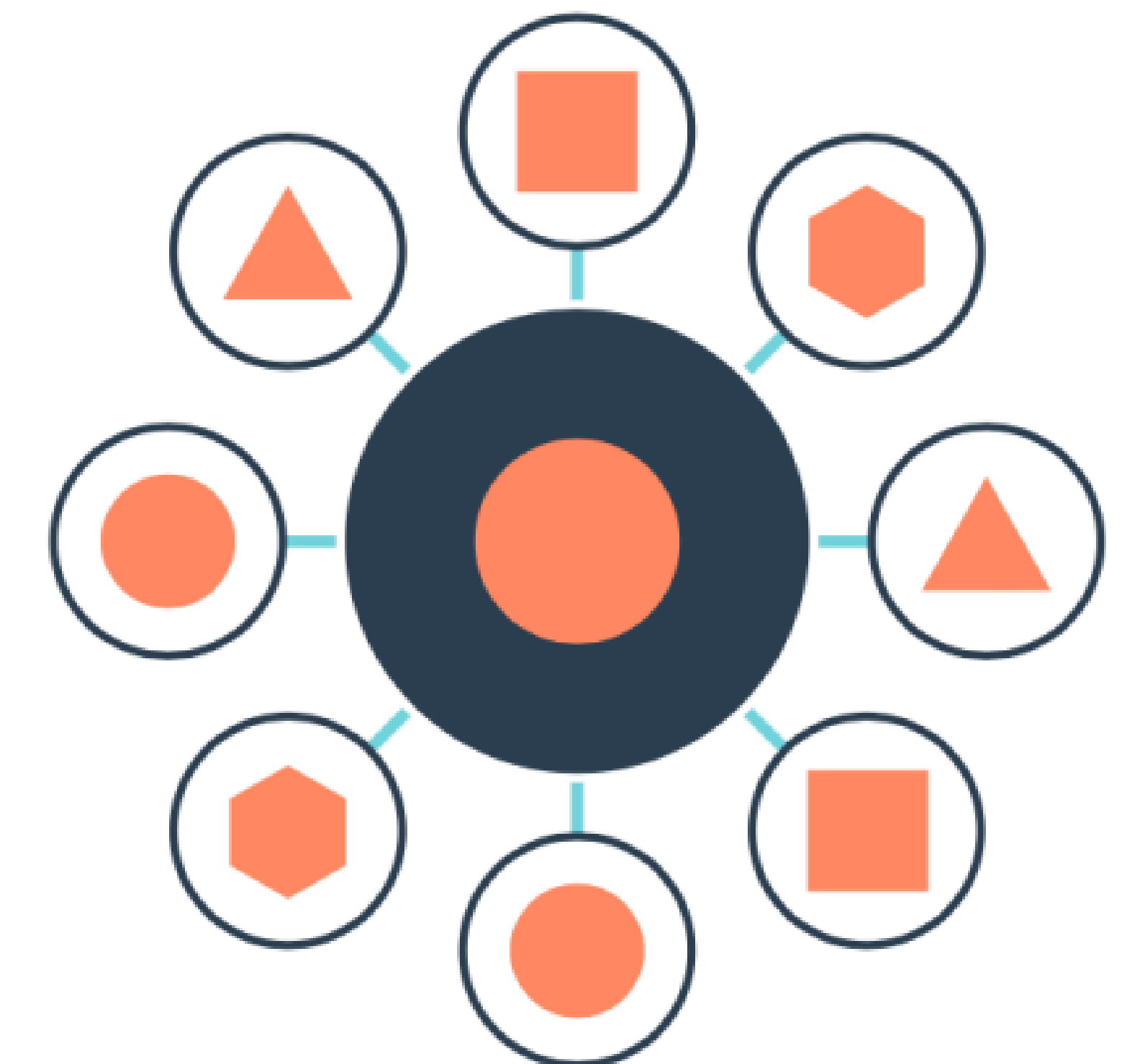
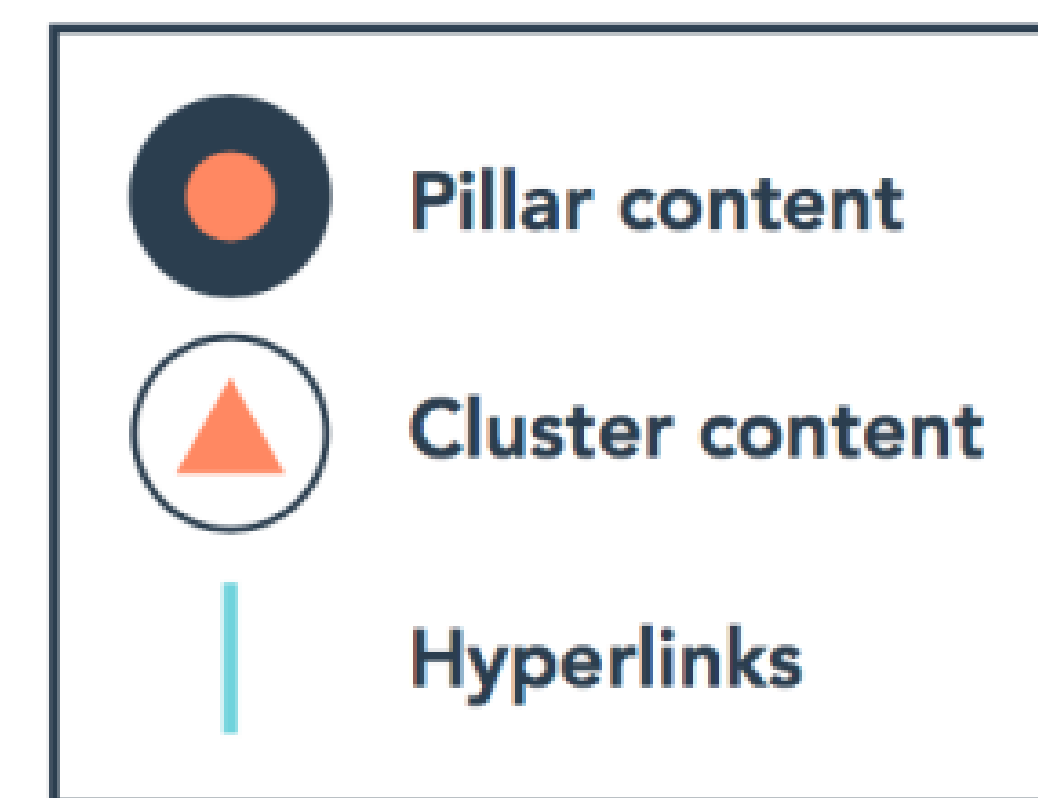
Topic Clusters and Pillar Pages

Topic clusters are the latest and greatest in search engine algorithm changes. Basically, the algorithm looks not only at a given page or topic, but how it relates to other topics that fall under the same “umbrella” or pillar.

To plan out your own pillar pages and map out your topic clusters, you can reuse some of your keyword research. Start by listing out your most broad search terms. Come up with 5-10 pillar pages. Then, brainstorm 15-20 content clusters for each pillar page. Make sure they are specific, long-tail keywords for the topic clusters.

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TOPIC CLUSTERS



Pillar pages should be a comprehensive, long-form blog post that include everything someone would want to learn about the main subject. For “Pairing Wine with Food” as a pillar page, you could include sections on types of white wines, types of red wines, common flavor palettes in each, pairing wines with foods, how to set up a wine tasting, and more.

Publishing Cadence

How often and when to post will largely depend on what your company does, how big your company is, and how much of an audience you're looking to attract. That being said, the more you blog, the more traffic you'll attract over time.

And more traffic means more leads and more customers. As a team, it's your job to decide how much time you're willing to invest in your blog. But as a general rule of thumb, once a day or a few times a week is a good place to start.

Prior to launch, you can build up a bank of evergreen content (content that is always relevant and isn't tied to anything time-based) which will give you a cushion to get a team or process up and running to keep up with your publishing cadence. Try a CMS (content management system) like [HubSpot](#) where you can schedule and plan content as drafts or as scheduled posts for the future.

Balancing Content Types

When it comes to content matter and post style, blogs are extremely versatile. You can post infographics, how-to posts, list posts, newsjacking posts, slideshares, editorials, etc. Evergreen content means posts that are always relevant. These types of posts are helpful for growth, but too many and folks will think a robot is publishing your content. Make sure to mix it up with topical posts, newsjacking articles (jumping on a news trend and quickly relating it to your industry), and announcements. The team over at Flying Hippo swears by the **80% rule**—80% evergreen content and 20% topical/editorial/time-sensitive content—as the best breakdown.

Both post types are beneficial to your business. Evergreen content gains momentum over time and can grow to rank as a top article for a given topic. Editorial or newsjacking posts tend to perform well at the start and tail off after a couple of weeks. The combination of these types of posts will help your blog grow and keep growing over time.

Over time, analyze which formats perform best to tailor your content strategy toward your audience. The more formats you try out from the beginning, the better your data will be.

Analytics and Measuring Success

Promoting Your Blog

To boost your SEO efforts and get your content out to a larger audience, get your posts far and wide to audiences (your buyer persona) who are interested and will share your content.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Work with your social media teams to see how you can leverage Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube. Create custom imagery to share on social and remember to always be testing—see where and how your blog posts perform best.

PR

Your public relations team may be able to pitch cutting edge, topical pieces from your blog to industry publications. Links from popular magazines and other blogs can be huge traffic drivers to your blog and website. Try pitching to sites like Forbes, Harvard Business Review, and TechCrunch.

PARTNER MARKETING/COMARKETING

Any time you can get others to write content for your blog, you can guarantee another audience's worth of eyes on the post. Work with any partners your company has and work out a content sharing agreement. For comarketing, try featuring a comarketing partner CTA or shared comarketing offer on a blog post in exchange for them doing the same.

INFLUENCERS/GUEST BLOGGERS

Having guest bloggers on your site is free content and allows your content and brand to be shared to a new audience. You can try content sharing, which is trading a guest post for a guest post. With influencers, you can either pay for your content to be shared or create a deal where you feature them as an exchange. [Here's a guide](#) on working with influencers to help grow your business.

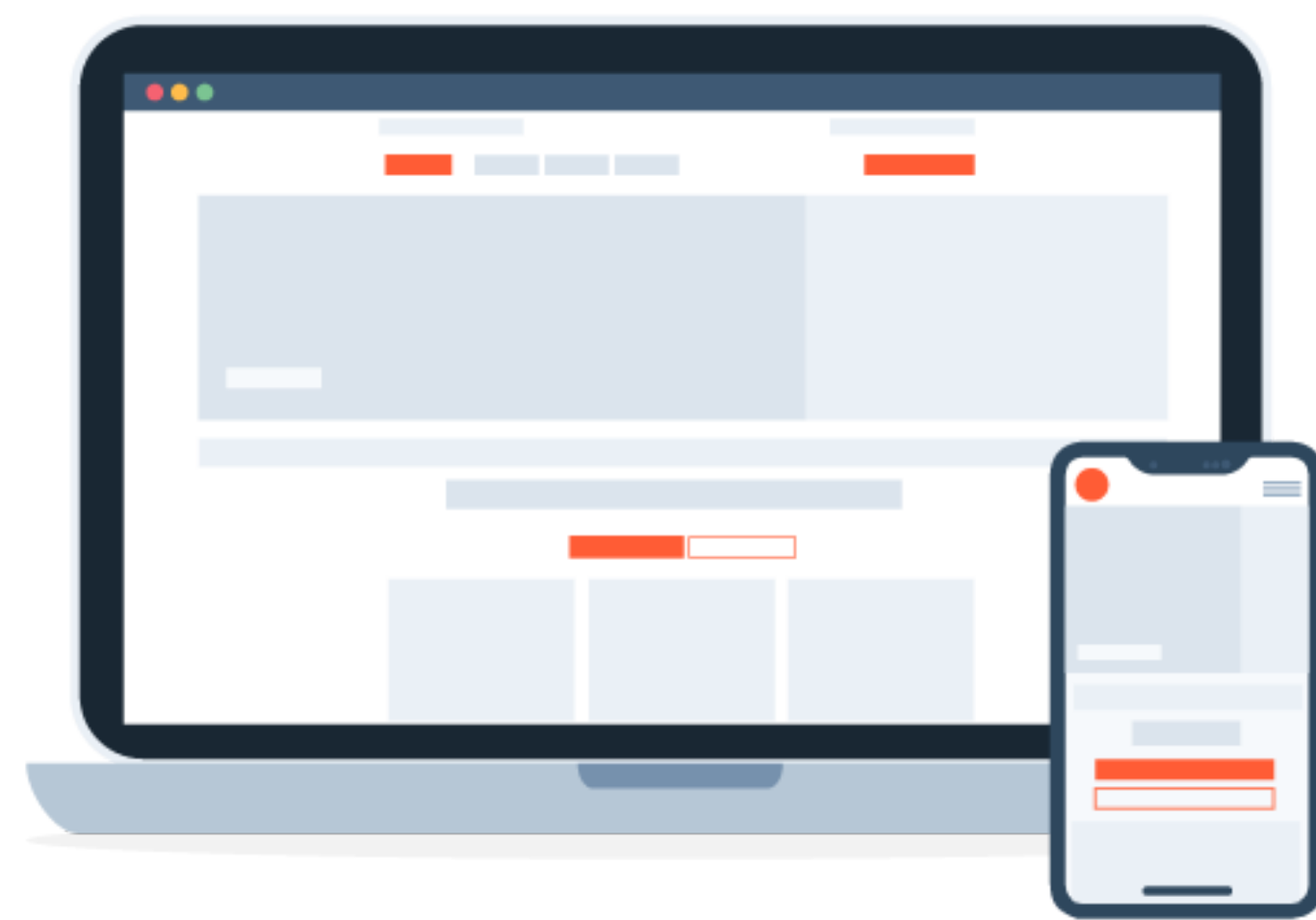
PAID ADVERTISING

Paying for [search and social media ads](#) may sound counterintuitive for organic content, but can provide the amplification your post needs to reach a wider audience. Try boosting posts that are already performing well and retargeting your prospects or subscribers with blog posts and related content. You can also use Google AdWords to bolster your keyword efforts.

Analyzing and Optimizing Blog Performance

Your first blog posts have been written, everything has been planned out, and you've set your blog up for success. Now, it's time to determine how you'll measure that success. When it comes to blogging, it's important to set up and **analyze key blogging metrics** over time since it's a both a short and long-term strategy.

First, reference the goals that you set. Are you trying to drive traffic, generate subscribers, convert leads, retain or convert customers, or improve brand awareness?



Key Blogging Metrics

Now, you'll need to set realistic, **SMART goals** based on the following metrics:

PAGE VIEWS

The main way to measure how much traffic your blog receives is tracking the number of page views each post generates. In other words, how many visitors are coming to and reading your posts?

CLICK-THROUGH RATE (CTR)

One key component of building SEO juice is the click-through rate that each of your posts see. Are people coming to your blog, then clicking on hyperlinks within the post? The more visitors click through and stay on your site, the better it is for the overall authority of your blog.

SOURCES OF TRAFFIC

One important measurement to consider is where you traffic is coming from. Are your promotional efforts paying off? What are the big levers that drive most of your traffic to your blog? Whether it's your social promotion, emails, or paid campaigns, make sure you're tracking which channels drive the most traffic. This information will help you tailor your content strategy over time.

LEADS AND CUSTOMERS GAINED

It's up to you to decide how you track this number. Some companies track leads from their blog on a monthly basis, while others do so each quarter. So, how do you track this data? Most content management systems enable you to track these metrics easily, so make sure you know how to analyze them within your CMS before launch.

Now that you know what and how to track the right metrics, it's time to set post-launch goals for your team, both short-and long-term. Hold a planning meeting with your team to set goals for page views and click-through rates within the first month, six months, and year after launch.

Use analytics to inform future decisions

Once you've analyzed how certain types of posts, topics, and keywords have performed, reevaluate your content strategy and map out your content based on the data. A data-driven approach to blogging works. The blogging team at HubSpot found that **90% of leads coming in every month** were coming from posts published months to years prior. They then adjusted their strategy to prioritize updating older blog posts and optimizing CTAs on those pages.



PRO TIP

Don't stress too much if you don't see high metrics right off the bat. Blogging helps provide exponential growth—the longer you blog, the more authority you will build over time. No blog goes viral overnight. Start small, and set realistic goals for the future. If you don't hit your goals immediately, revisit them and look at your metrics. Are your promotional efforts working? If not, run as many tests and experiments as you can until they do.

Monetizing Your Blog

Traffic and conversions will make your company money in the long run, but there are other ways you can set your blog up for success and its highest earning potential. **Content marketing receives 3x more leads than paid search advertising**, so you'll be starting off strong using the tools provided.

Some strategies listed to the right will take time before they can be put into action, but once you have a steady network of subscribers, your list can become a valuable and marketable asset to other marketers.

SET UP AN RSS FEED FOR SUBSCRIBERS

Most blog software already includes an RSS feed (really simple syndication) option, which is an easy way to make sure your subscribers don't miss out on any new content. You can use an RSS feed to syndicate your content and attract people to your site, generating about \$1 per subscriber per month. Here's how to use RSS feeds and help supplement your promotion effort, effortlessly.

DEVELOP NURTURE STREAMS

After you've collected email addresses from subscribers of your blog, send them relevant or related content and additional valuable offerings like courses, demos, or the opportunity to talk with someone from your team. Here's a quick guide on lead nurturing and how to achieve 50% more sales at a lower cost using nurturing strategies.

DEVELOP NURTURE STREAMS

Sales and sales enablement are your direct links to prospects and customers and they can partner with you in blog strategy. Write persuasive pieces surrounding your prospective customers' biggest pain points, then provide them to your sales enablement team to include in lead nurturing efforts. You'll help them close more deals and they can give you insights to topics that you can be writing more about.

MAKE CONTENT OFFERS FOR HIGH RANKING BLOG POSTS

Bloggers can see which posts have the most traffic, meaning you can monopolize on the interest in a particular topic. Create a related content offer to your high performing blog posts, then add a CTA on the blog post linking it. Then, you can convert your blog readers into tool users or qualified leads.

Starting a Successful Blog Checklist

Research and Channel-Fit

- Create a buyer persona
- Identify your blog's purpose
- Determine your blog's goal

Setting Up Your Blog

- Assign roles on the blog team
- Choose a CMS
- Set up tracking and analytics
- Establish design guidelines for your blog
- Create blog post templates
- Create CTAs for your blog

Planning and Creating Content

- Determine publishing frequency
- Do keyword research and create a shared keyword doc
- Create topic clusters and plan pillar pages
- Write a backlog of blog content

Promotion and Analytics

- Create a promotion strategy
- Analyze + create reporting for the blog
- Implement strategies to monetize your blog

Conclusion

You now have the tools to go and create a successful blog that will benefit your business in every department.

Blogs are a low cost strategy that any business can use, as long as you have a computer and the internet, to grow exponentially.

Because Google's algorithm is a great equalizer, everyone has the opportunity to write incredible content and reap the benefits of ranking #1, Fortune 500 company or not.

HubSpot

CMS Hub®

Content management software that's flexible for marketers, powerful for developers, and gives your customers a personalized, secure experience.

Get Your Free Demo

