

Why blog?

Blogging began as a way for individuals to express opinions, share news and build a following for their ideas. Businesses are now reading and using blogs to see what people are saying about their businesses online, to position their company as a thought leader in a given area(s) and to provide ongoing proactive support for technical applications. Consultants especially benefit from blogging as their credibility is often tied to their knowledge of the field they work in. Blogs also help raise your profile with search engines as you increase the number of pages on your site and include recently-updated content.

Blogs are a powerful way to create credibility and, if used properly, a sales tool. An attorney client of mine says his blog saves time in relieving him from doing the “dog and pony show” on the phone or in person with his clients. He updates his blog every few weeks with topics related to criminal defense such as his thoughts on criminal activity items in the news, recent or pending legislation, “how tos” such as what you should do if you are pulled over as a DWI suspect, etc. He says that prospective clients often see his site before they talk to him and will now call him and outright say that they want to be his client. No meeting or phone selling is necessary – the site and blog did it for him. But what makes this client so successful with his blogging where others are less successful? He follows a lot of “Best Practices.”

Best Practices for Consultants and Businesses who Blog **The Basics – What you should do at a minimum...**

- 1. Blog often – approximately once a week or at minimum twice a month.** A stale blog that shows the last update occurring months ago is worse than no blog at all – it looks as if you aren’t paying attention to your business. If this is hard for you, get a digital voice recorder and record your blog in your car or elsewhere. Or a simple microphone addition to your computer will work as well. You then use a software program like Dragon Naturally Speaking to translate what you record to text. Edit the text to make sure your thoughts were captured correctly, then copy and paste into your blog.
- 2. Be relevant, timely and interesting.** If you struggle with finding topics, consider the following:
 - 1.** Poll your clients via email (or install a polling feature on your blog) to ask for their hot topics/concerns.
 - 2.** Provide how-to information – short tips
 - 3.** Mention common mistakes/solutions you see clients making.
 - 4.** Touch on hot topics on any industry listserves you belong to.
 - 5.** Read what other bloggers in the industry or related industries are talking about. (See item #5 below for more info on this.)
 - 6.** Describe the pros and cons regarding the hot topic in your industry, then pose a question.
 - 7.** Think of what speaking topics you’d like to hear at the next convention you attend and muse on that.
 - 8.** Mention interesting speakers you heard recently if they had something to say that would be relevant to your clients.
 - 9.** Tag onto the latest headlines of the day or week that relate to something you can do for your clients.
 - 10.** Tell an engaging story and/or upload images/photos related to a project you are working on or recently finished.
- 3. Don’t hesitate to be controversial.** It will get you more comments assuming that you have readers. But don’t make negative comments about clients or potential clients. If your client reads your blog (and we hope they all do) and sees herself or her company mentioned in a negative light, you may lose that client.
- 4. Keep it short.** Everyone is suffering from information overload these days. Save the rambling for your personal blog if you have one. 250 words is a pretty good size for most blog entries. 500 is o.k. too. If your entries are consistently long, you may not get read as much or at all by busier people. And long posts don’t allow people to see that there are comments as easily as short posts do. People are more likely to comment when they see others commenting.

5. **Write in the first person and in active voice.** Unless you are moderating a technical support blog where you announce product development releases, updates, issues, etc., you should probably write in the first person. Active, first person statements have more impact and are more interesting. And more controversial (which is more likely to get you comments on your blog entries). When you say, “I believe xyz,” it’s more powerful than someone passively saying, “It is believed that xyz.”
6. **Write titles and content with keyword appeal.** For example, if you are a media training professional, using the words *media training* or other related terms in blog entry titles and content will help drive traffic to your site. Your blog entries can help drive search engine traffic to your site in two ways. First, if you use the same key words in your blog entry titles that prospective clients are likely to use in searching for services such as yours, they are more likely to be directed to your site by the search engines. Second, having frequent postings drives up your search engine ranking as search engines weigh recently updated content more heavily than stale content. Don’t be overzealous about it though – you don’t want to appear obvious about it or your titles will all read the same and won’t appeal to your target customer (who may seek to see the breadth of your knowledge).
7. **Decide -- will you allow comments or not?** Some bloggers do not care about getting comments, while others do. Either is fine. My most successful blogging client in terms of what it does for his business (the criminal defense attorney) doesn’t even allow comments. But if you do want to create an online discussion, which is really one of the true benefits of a blog and is a more meaningful level of communication, you should allow comments. You can start with one decision and change your mind later on this.

The Next Step: Promoting Your Blog – Getting Readers and Subscribers

Once you have gotten the hang of posting your blog and feel that you have a decent handle on how blogs work, consider the following traffic-driving tools.

1. **Comment on other blogs.** Commenting on other blogs will help drive traffic to your blog if you are including links back to entries on your blog. **How this works:** Read blogs that your potential clients might be reading. If you don’t know where to find these blogs, check out Technorati.com and use key words in their search engine to locate blogs of interest. Then subscribe to these blogs using MyYahoo, MyGoogle or similar. Read them regularly. (Also check out your favorite bloggers’ blogrolls for other blogs that may be of interest.) The blogs you may choose to add your thoughts to could be written by vendors, blogging journalists, or just someone else who blogs on your industry/field. If another blog author writes on a topic that you know a lot about, comment and add to the discussion. It is o.k. to include a link (the permalink) in your comment back to your blog entry (current or past) that relates to the topic. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** *Don’t comment just for the sake of linking back to your blog. Those efforts are transparent and will get your comment deleted. Really join in the discussion and add value if you are going to comment at all.*
2. **Add links to your favorite bloggers to your blogroll if you have one (also known as “link list” for Blogger.com platform users).** It helps build goodwill toward your blog, and maybe they will link back to you. Only add links to blogs that would have content you would like for your clients to read. The sites you choose to include say something about you. If you have a custom site template, you may need to get trained on doing this as it can be an HTML task.
3. **Give clients who are not blog readers an option.** Some businesses have a blog instead of doing an e-newsletter. For clients of yours who may not be in the habit of checking out your site regularly, you can “push” your content to them by emailing them your blog post when you have a new entry. Sign up for a service like Feedblitz.com or Feedburner.com, who will publish your blog entries to your subscribers via email. Visitors to your site will be able to subscribe via a simple form in the sidebar. The basic level is free, but you may want to customize the email that is sent out (removing the feedblitz.com branding info and putting on your own header costs extra). See <http://www.feedblitz.com/> or <http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/publishers/fbemail> for more details. We can set this up for you with a custom header and colors, or you can do the work yourself.

Glossary

Aggregator – See Blogreader

Backlinks – These are Blogger.com’s version of the trackback feature. They enable you to keep track of other pages on the web that link to your posts. *See trackback*

Blogger – a blog author. It is also a web site, www.blogger.com, which is a platform for blogging.

Blogreader – Also known as news readers or content aggregators. These services (almost always free) gather the RSS feeds from any blog you indicate you want to read and put the latest updates from your favorite blogs all in one place for you to read at your leisure. *Bloglines.com* is a popular one. Google Reader and MyYahoo are also RSS readers.

Blogroll – a list of other blog sites that the blog author likes and links to; the blogroll is usually a sidebar item

Permalink – a link that provides a permanent link to a particular blog entry

Ping - Many blog authoring tools automatically alert one or more servers each time a blog author creates a new post (or updates an old one.) That is, the tool sends an alert signal to one or more "ping servers," which can then generate a list of blogs that have new material. Because of pinging, blog search engines (like Technorati) can provide fresh search results to their users. Similarly, aggregators (like bloglines) use results from ping servers to tell subscribers which items on their subscription lists have fresh material. Pingoat.com and pingomatic.com are two of the free services that will help you with this, but blogger.com does this for you.

RSS – Stands for Really Simple Syndication. Syndication means that when you publish your blog, your blog platform automatically generates a machine-readable representation of your blog that can be picked up and displayed on other web sites and information aggregation tools. Special pieces of software called blogreaders (aka newsreaders or aggregators) can scan these feeds from blogs such as yours, automatically letting subscribers know when the sites have updated. One reason to syndicate your site is to gain a wider audience by attracting aggregator users

Trackback (or Backlink for Blogger.com blogs) – The purpose of a trackback is to let another blog site know that you are referencing them on your own site. The reverse is true as well. If someone mentions your site, they can post a trackback to their site to let you know that they are referencing you. This allows for conversations to span blogs as bloggers link to each other. Blogging platforms that support trackbacks display a "trackback URL" or "Links to this post" along with every entry. Backlinks enable you to keep track of other pages on the web that link to your posts. For instance, suppose Alice writes a blog entry that Bob finds interesting. Bob then goes to his own blog and writes a post of his own about it, linking back to Alice's original post. Now Alice's post will automatically show that Bob has linked to it, and it will provide a short snippet of his text and a link to his post. What it all works out to is a way of expanding the comment feature such that related discussions on other sites/blogs can be included along with the regular comments on a post.