

# Best Practices: Blogging

Blogging began in 1998 as a form of online journal — a frequently updated site in reverse chronological order to discuss whatever was on the author's mind. Blogs, short for “weblogs,” have exploded since those early days and new blogs are launching at a rate of over 120,000 per day, adding to the 74.6 million already in existence.

Focused on every imaginable topic, these sites are run by individuals and groups all over the world. As they have grown in popularity and readership, more and more people are turning to current events-centered blogs for daily news updates. A handful of powerful blogs now have daily readership exceeding that of medium-sized city newspapers.

Most blog readers scan dozens of blogs everyday, but they actually spend very little time on any one blog—thus your goal is to grab them quickly and hold them. Readers have only a handful of blogs that they read carefully. You want to be one of them.

There are three basic keys to building a successful blog:

- Engage with other blogs and your own readers
- Keep the material fresh and exciting
- Give people a reason to return

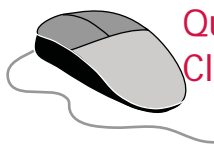
Here are some things to keep in mind when blogging:

- **It's OK to say what you think.** Bloggers tend to have opinions; otherwise most of them wouldn't have blogs. Blog readers want to hear opinions; otherwise most wouldn't read blogs. It's OK to ease up on the journalistic “objectivity” and say what you really think. In fact, it's preferred.
- **Engage from the beginning.** Blog readers generally pay attention to the title and the first two paragraphs of any given post, and then decide whether to read the rest. This means your title, and your first two paragraphs are your chance to entice them to read the rest of the post. Humorous, playful, and even whimsical titles are OK because they catch readers' attention. Sometimes, if it concerns a particularly hot news item, a straightforward title will do the same. Posts with compelling titles get read more often, and get more comments.

In the first two paragraphs, try to give the reader an idea of what you're talking about, what you think about the subject, and — towards the end of the second paragraph — a teaser to get them to read more.

- **Be casual.** Most blog readers don't generally respond to a formal, authoritative tone. They want to know that they're talking to a human being much like themselves, who happens to know a bit more about the subject than they do, or who shares their views on the subject. Try to write in a tone that's natural, casual, and almost conversational. Imagine that you're writing for a guy who's sitting in his cubicle during his lunch break, or in his pajamas before bedtime, looking for engaging conversation online.
- **Remember, it's a conversation.** Keep the discussion open. You don't have to be a closer; meaning you don't have to tie up all the loose ends and answer all questions by the end of a blog post. In fact, it's better to leave some questions asked and unanswered. If the first few paragraphs of a post are the open door inviting readers into the post, the last couple of paragraphs are the open door inviting them into the conversation.

- **Never forget, it's personal.** People don't just read a blog; they respond to it by leaving comments or linking to it from another site. People also inherently connect not just to the blog but also to the author. Blogs live, breathe, and die based on the level of involvement with their readers and other blogs. Personality is key in this kind of engagement. Developing a voice and persona for your blog is important, but should come naturally.
- **Link or trackback to other blogs whenever possible.** There are some important reason for this. First, it builds community across blogs, and expands the conversation. Second, it gets bloggers' attention. Linking is what creates the blogosphere. Bloggers link to blogs they like and blog posts they like and want to comment on. Bloggers also check their site statistics for referrer links, to find out who's linking to them. They tend to check out sites that link to their blogs or their posts, read them, and link back to them if they like them.
- **Trackbacks are another way of linking to a blog.** Instead of commenting on a blog post you can post your comment on your own blog, and trackback to the initial post. This creates a link on the initial post, so when people read that post, they see that you commented on it and it increases the likelihood that they will click on the link to read your post. And if they like it, they might explore the rest of your blog and come back to read it again.
- **Read other blogs, and write about what you read.** Keep a list of blogs, however short or long, and read them on a regular basis. This will give you an idea what people are talking about in the blogosphere, and bring your blog into the conversation. If you want to comment on something use your blog web address to direct people back to your blog. If you want to write about and/or trackback to another post, link to the initial post in what you write.
- **Turn-around matters.** Things move fast in the blogosphere. A story might catch on with a few blogs, and spread like wildfire to the rest. If you take more than 24 hours to have your say, you might miss an opportunity to attract links, trackbacks, and new readers. Whenever possible, if you want to write about a hot news story that's all over the blogosphere, turn it around by the next day at the latest. And don't forget to link and trackback to other blog posts whenever possible.
- **It doesn't have to be perfect.** One of the great things about the blogosphere is that you don't have to be right all the time. Most bloggers understand the desire to run with a story as soon as you get it. There's something to be said for being first, but sometimes that means risking being wrong if further information is revealed later. In that situation, it's standard to post a brief update. Bloggers understand that, and will forgive you for being wrong as long as you're up front about it.
- **Use syndicating technologies.** XML and RSS feeds are a technical ways of syndicating your blog to other blogs, a sort of personal AP Wire for your campaign. It is a standard feature of most blogs, but make sure your blog has it, either through RSS (Really Simple Syndication) or Atom.



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