

Blogging 101

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The most successful blogs have a very specific angle, topic, or audience. This makes it easier to attract attention and build a community around common interests or perspectives.

The more you work your blog, the more value you build for readers over time and the more they find you. Your blog is a body of work, like anything else you might create. Don't think: "I'm going to create blog (a thing)." Think: What is my purpose? What are my goals? Ideally, before you start blog, you think about who'll send you traffic. You identify or know community players, who you'll build relationships with.

Overall Must-Haves

- **Benefit-oriented head** (title and tagline). This identifies what the blog is about. The best heads offer a benefit and identify who the audience is. The benefit/value should be clear to visitors within the first few seconds of viewing.
- **About page.** You must have a well-constructed and complete about page (or bio), where people can read more about what the purpose of the blog is, as well as who you are. Don't emphasize who you are; emphasize why people should care or what value they're getting from you.
- **Readability.** Assuming your blog is text-driven (you're not curating images/videos), the blog design or theme should be very readable. Avoid white text on black background. The best blog designs complement your subject matter and personality.
- **Calendar/archive.** There should be an easy way for visitors to find posts.
- **Comments.** Every blog must offer **commenting functionality**. You should review and moderate comments, and be active in the comments with responses.
- **Social media integration** (e.g., Facebook & Twitter) helps people share your blog posts more easily, and also allows people to follow you elsewhere.

For Each Post

- All posts must have a headline. Headlines should be clear, specific, and compelling about what the post is about, and make sense when appearing in search results. Remember that the headline will end up being link copy across all aggregators, search engines, archives, indexes, etc. **Do not underestimate the importance of this.**
- All posts should offer substantive information or content; and/or should provide thoughtful viewpoints; and/or should provide entertainment.
- All posts should be easy to read and scannable, through use of frequent paragraph breaks, subheads when appropriate, and bulleted/numbered lists. **Do not underestimate the importance of this.**
- Always categorize each post, and consider using tags (necessary for discoverability).
- Most professional bloggers agree that all posts should include at least one visual, usually at the very opening of the post. This increases reader engagement, and some say it increases favorability in search engines.
- All posts should be relatively free of grammatical and spelling errors (that is, errors should not be so numerous that they distract from your credibility/authority).

To Grow Your Audience

- Update consistently and on a regular schedule so readers know when to expect new material. If you're not going to post for a time (during a vacation for example) let your readers know.
- Frequently link to other sites/blogs/resources, and use embedded links with descriptive text, rather than just pasting the URL into the body of the post.
- Try out a series, weekly feature, or round-up of links that would interest your target audience.
- Comment on major blogs and sites that have some relevance to you and/or your blog. (You're almost always allowed to leave a URL as part of the comment, which is why this helps grow your audience.)
- Allow readers to sign up for delivery of blog posts via e-mail. (FeedBurner is a good and free service.)

- Post links to your new posts on Facebook, Twitter, and other places where you're active. Don't simply say, "New post! [link]" Give people a reason to visit—tell them the value or benefit of the post.
- Offer to guest blog for other people who have larger audiences than you. Give them your absolute best work so you'll be invited back.
- Accept guest posts from credible sources; they'll start promoting your blog to their audience when their content appears.
- Be patient. You won't have 500 blog followers and thousands of readers overnight—your blog traffic will build over time. Keep posting, linking, commenting and promoting. Use a stat counter to chart your progress, noting which topics or types of posts attract the most readers.
- Don't worry too much about search engine tactics—just keep offering great content and perspective. High-powered business people—and others who are online to make lots of money—will often talk about SEO, SEM, analytics, Google Rank, etc. Don't be intimidated, and don't think you can goose the system. You know you're doing well if: you get good comments on your posts; people ask you questions that spur new posts and great content; you start to meet strangers who say "I read your blog!"
- For more info on growing traffic to your site/blog:
<http://blog.writersdigest.com/norules/2011/02/15/HowToMeaningfullyGrowTrafficToYourSiteBlog.aspx>

How to leave meaningful comments on other blogs

- **Don't be a drive-by shooter.** This is where you post a quick criticism like, "I don't agree; this isn't my experience." This doesn't really engage in a conversation or offer something meaningful to other readers or commenters. It IS helpful to offer an alternative viewpoint, so take the time to elaborate on it.
- **Put your comments in context.** Most people won't know who you are when you're commenting. So it's helpful to relate something about your background, experience, or POV on issues.
- **To really impress, offer a targeted resource.** Some of the best comments I've ever received pointed me to a very specific blog post or resource that I hadn't seen before.
- **Ask questions.** If you didn't understand something that was discussed, there's a good chance someone else didn't understand either. So bring it up in the comments. Get clarification. Most people love the chance to elaborate, or they can address the question in a new blog post.
- **When views differ, look for common ground.** To maintain goodwill wherever you go, it's helpful to look for areas where you agree with a person. While we can all say (in theory) that we're open to disagreement and criticisms, it still helps immensely to figure out where thoughts and beliefs align.

Where you can start a site/blog for free

- Wordpress.com / Wordpress.org (free and best in class)
- Blogger (owned by Google, excellent Google integration)
- Tumblr (more of a curation tool rather than a writing-blogging tool, community-driven)
- Posterous (great for group/team/shared blogs)

Buying a domain

- There are many places to buy your own domain. I use GoDaddy.com. Most domains cost about \$10-\$15/year, unless you have a common name.
- If you need a host for you site, consider buying the domain from where you plan to host. You usually get a better deal and it's less of a headache.
- The first domain you buy should probably be your name or a variation on your name.
- Try to buy .com first (if it makes sense). But it's OK to buy others (like .net/.org).

Hosting [if not using Wordpress.com / Blogger / Tumblr / etc]

- After you buy a domain, you need to pay someone to host your site. Your host stores all the content and files that make up your site, provides a way for you to administrate the site, and makes sure the “lights” are always on.
- There are hundreds if not thousands of hosting services. GoDaddy, Bluehost, Host Gator, and Media Temple are some popular choices. If you have friends who run websites, you may want to ask them for a recommendation.
- Unless you anticipate having very high traffic/visitors right away, a cheap hosting plan should be fine to start. Most basic plans cost less than \$10/month.

I have a domain and a host. Now what?

- Follow your host’s instructions for linking your domain to your host. (You get to skip this step if you bought the domain through the same company who is hosting you.)
- For people new to site management, or those who intend to focus their site on content/writing/blogging, I recommend starting off with Wordpress as your content management system. It is free, continually developed/improved, and most hosts allow for one-click installation of Wordpress. Wordpress requires little knowledge of coding, but also has the flexibility to allow hand-coding as well. There are also thousands upon thousands of widgets, plug-ins, themes and other add-ons for Wordpress-based sites (some free, some premium).

Popular Wordpress premium themes

- Thesis: <http://diythemes.com/>
- I use Headway: <http://headwaythemes.com/>
- The best bloggers in the business offer this: <http://www.studiopress.com/>

Some of the best advice on blogging you’ll find

The Secret Ingredient to an Irresistible Blog
<http://www.copyblogger.com/irresistible-blog/>

4 Foundations of a Successful Blog
<http://www.problogger.net/archives/2010/03/26/4-foundations-of-a-successful-blog/>

23 Essential Elements of Shareable Blog Posts
<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/23-essential-elements-of-sharable-blog-posts/>

The 120 Day Wonder: How to Evangelize a Blog
http://blog.guykawasaki.com/2006/04/the_120_day_won.html#axzz0UOVZPRlr

10 Ways to Create a Better About Page for Your Blog
<http://michaelhyatt.com/10-ways-to-create-a-better-about-page-for-your-blog.html>

How to Grow Traffic to Your Blog
<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/how-to-grow-traffic-to-your-blog/>

One Simple Way to Generate More Comments on Your Blog
<http://www.copyblogger.com/more-blog-comments/>

How I Sold My Blog for \$20,000 in 8 Months
<http://www.blogtyrant.com/how-i-sold-a-blog-for-20000-in-8-months/>