



BLOGGING BASICS

WHY BLOG?

It is a simple question with a complex answer. A strong blog is the core of your Internet marketing strategy. It provides content to fuel your social media updates, helps you build credibility and develop content which you can use elsewhere.

Blog posts provide a place to showcase work samples, case studies, product updates and company news. In addition, your blog can support your public relations and other offline activities.

Your blog shortens your sales cycle as it helps customers get to know you, your employees and your approach to solving problems just like theirs.

Finally, blog posts give you a steady stream of rich, relevant content which increases the chances your site will show up in Google searches.

Are you ready to get started? We'll show you how!

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GETTING STARTED

Your blog is integral part to your marketing program. Treat it that way by starting with a plan.

Goals and Measurement:

As you think about what you want to accomplish, try to be specific. When you start with clear goals, it's easier to measure the effectiveness of your blog. Everyone's goals are different, but here are a few common blogging goals:

- Increase awareness of your company
- Educate potential customers about your unique skill set or product
- Generate leads or referrals
- Increase customer engagement
- Schedule appointments, accept submissions
- Reduce service questions
- Improve your search position on Google.

Measure your results by tracking any or all of the following:

- Web traffic
- Form downloads
- Requests for more information
- Traffic to your contact page and a corresponding increase in calls
- Fewer service issues
- Invitations to speak at meetings and conferences

Whatever your unique blogging goal, make it specific, especially if your goal is something nebulous like increasing awareness. What does that really mean? Use concrete numbers to measure success.

Why are you blogging?

Know Your Audience

This is your blog, but if you want people to read it, then you need to start with a clear picture of your readers. Who is in your audience and what are their reasons for reading your material?

Having a target audience in mind helps you decide what you should be writing about, how to phrase those stories and how you should promote them once they're written.

It is fine to have more than one audience for the overall blog, but individual posts should focus on a specific group or section of your target population.

Who is your audience?

WHAT DO WE WRITE ABOUT?

The easy answer is whatever your customers are interested in. The harder answer might include:

Industry trends and news – Customers like to know you're staying up on the latest industry information. Show that you're in the know.

Frequently asked questions – What questions do customers ask you again and again? Use these as the basis for individual blog topics so in the future, you can direct customers there, as well as capture the SEO benefits of people asking the same questions.

New employees - This is a great place to showcase the human side of your business. Remember that at the end of the day, people do business with people they like, so help customers get to know your employees.

New products and services - Offering something revolutionary or simply an enhanced version of your previous product? Tell people about it on your blog. Give them examples of how to use your product and make it part of their daily routine.

Case studies and testimonials – It's easier for prospective customers to envision how your product or service might help them when they learn about specific examples. The added benefit of using the customer's own words to describe your service is improved SEO. They'll use the words others are likely to use to find you.

Events - Are you speaking at a conference or sponsoring a little league team? These events are a great source of pictures, video and written blog posts.

What will you write about?

WRITING TIPS

Start with a Good Title

Choosing the right title is a challenge. You have to find a balance between something which will catch the attention of a reader while still including important keywords. Tips for titles that help sell your content:

Keep it short. One of the best ways to promote your blog post is via social media ,where brevity is everything. If your headline is a bloated monster, it won't fit into a tweet and isn't easily shareable. But even more than that, readers have short attention spans. If you can't tell me in a few words why we should read your blog post, how good can the main point be?

Lists. Lots of social media expert types are rolling their eyes at this suggestion, but trust me, numbered list blog posts always perform well. People understand exactly what they're getting, and know they'll be getting it in short bites instead of huge text boxes. Are they cliché? Maybe. But they're clichés that get clicks.

Negative. This goes against what a lot of people innately feel, but negativity rules in blog headlines. Go ahead, do some A-B testing with two blog titles. For instance, we could say “Do Your Blog Headlines Suck?” vs. “Does Your Blog Headline Rule?” Same content. We'll put folding money on the sucking headline getting more traffic. Why? It plays on people's fear of failure or their interest in seeing other people's failings. Failure is just more interesting than success.

Be true to yourself. We've been told some people like to play a game with our multi-author blog where they guess who wrote the post based on the headline alone. Everyone has a

unique voice all their own when it comes to writing headlines. Embrace it! Don't force yourself to conform to any one kind of headline. Write what makes sense for you and your brand, and the rest will fall into place.

Finding Source Material and Inspiration

You sit at the keyboard, ready to blog. But nothing comes out. You're running on empty. It happens to every blogger. Chase writer's block away with a few simple tips.

Brainstorm topics with colleagues. Sometimes, you just need to talk a problem out. Ask your colleagues what they're working on, what questions they're being asked, what they think might make good blog posts. And if you get an idea during the day, don't forget to write it down!

Do new stuff. Sometimes, ideas and inspiration come from the most unlikely sources, like a trip to Jungle Jim's, an afternoon spent with a two-year old or a walk through an art gallery. One of our favorite writing challenges is to select an image and find a way to weave a story or blog post around the image.

Collect background information. Use Google Reader or another RSS tool to search for fresh content on specific topics. You might use these blog posts as the basis for your own original work. As long as you give proper attribution and link back to the site, there's no reason not to use someone else's great post as a jumping off point for your own masterpiece.

Record it. No matter how busy life is, we all have pockets of dead time. Driving in the car, waiting for our oil change, doing the laundry. Make the most of these pockets of time by recording a blog post. Almost all phones include a recording app, so fire it up and start talking.

Even if the words don't drop from your lips fully formed and ready to be put into a blog post, you'll still have a strong starting point to work from, cutting down your time spent staring at a white blank page and wondering what to write about.

- **Keep writing.** Even when you don't feel particularly creative, just keep writing, sometimes you might surprise yourself
- **Email is Great Source Material** Too busy responding to customer email inquiries to find the time to write? Try this trick. The next time you respond to a question in an email, copy it as a draft for your blog. With a little editing, you'll have the foundation for a blog post that's applicable to a wider audience.

Blog Schedule

While frequent blog posts are beneficial it is important to set a schedule that you can support. So decide the following and stick with it:

How often: Monthly, weekly or daily?

Who will write? Owner, employee, guest?

Notes:

WHAT'S NEXT?

The objective of each blog post is to inform, persuade and encourage the reader to begin the discovery process which will eventually lead to a sale. Each blog post should have a clear next step. It isn't usually "BUY NOW"

Ask yourself, what's the next intermediate step? It's reasonable to hope they will share the link, download a report, fill out a survey, ask for more information, subscribe to your newsletter or blog or RSS feed or simply call you.

List possible intermediate steps

1. Learn more (link to other relevant content)
2. Download this (link to resources)
3. Read more on this topic (link to other blog posts)
4. Listen now /Watch Now (link to podcasts or video)
5. Complete and assessment (link to self assessment).

What will your next step be?

MAKE YOUR BLOG SOCIAL

In the early days of social media, before Twitter and before Facebook was open to non-students, there were blogs. And blogs were social. Bloggers built communities and got to know each other by posting comments on each other's sites and using trackbacks. These same strategies still work today if you're willing to invest the time.

- Say hello. Take the time to respond to every comment on your blog. Until you are getting hundreds of comments, this simple touch will encourage conversation, showing readers you care about what they have to say.
- Drop an email to people who take the time to comment, thank them for dropping by and invite them back. We use a WordPress plug in called Thank Me Later which sends emails periodically to visitors, reminding them to come see us again soon. If you use this tool, spend the time writing the notes so they sound casual and warm.
- Return the visit. Turnabout's fair play. Besides, you might learn something!
- Take advantage of trackbacks. When you talk about someone or reference their content, be sure to include trackbacks to their content. A trackback alerts someone that you've written about them so they can come check it out. Many times, your subject will leave a comment and get to know you. It could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?

Stop the excuses. Stop the hand wringing. Stop the over-thinking. Your small business needs to be blogging, and if you're not, you're missing out on a huge opportunity to reap benefits from organic search engine optimization, social media and client good will.

Questions? Give us a call. We'd love to talk to you about your business blog

Call 317-569-1396 or visit www.roundpeg.biz