

Blogging Essentials

How To Make The Most Use of
Blogging For Your Business

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GETTING SETUP

Blog Platforms: An Introduction

Setting up your blog will require a little research and review; you'll need to consider the factors of cost, the time and skills you currently have, and your readiness to learn some new software. Almost all blog software is very easy to use and offers a variety of plug-ins and other resources to make yours unique. You don't necessarily need to hire a professional or specialist to start publishing; most blogs can be setup with a few hours, and you can learn how to use them as you go.

We'll discuss how to make use of today's leading blog platforms. The three most widely used platforms include:

- WordPress
- Blogger
- TypePad

Choosing the Right Blog Platform for Your Business

You'll find a number of free and low-cost fee-based blog platforms available, and most of them use a simple text editor box for publishing. The cost differences vary depending on the type of blog you are running; if you are going to host the blog on your own domain, you will need to manage hosting fees. Blogs run within the blog's domain are usually free, but you will not have a simple address to work with. If you want a unique URL, it's better to consider the different packages, even if you're starting out with the very basic.

Most basic packages allow you to add your own design elements and start making money with advertisements immediately. Most free hosts will not allow advertising, which limits your ability to start generating a separate stream of income from ad-clicks and sales. If you're just starting out, it's best to pick the basic version so you can at least start driving traffic to advertisements.

Next, you'll need to consider how much you know about blog design. If you're already proficient with web design and templates, this will be fairly easy, but if you do not know where to start there are plenty of blog templates available. Blog templates can help you construct your basic site, and then change it later when you need to. These can be easily replaced with a more comprehensive design, but most blog platforms provide a variety of options, colors, and basic attributes to make your blog stand out.

Blog platforms such as WordPress can be very helpful in getting you setup with a professional look, especially if you have limited design skills and are not working with a web or graphic designer immediately. Blogger also offers customizable options, and you'll find a range of colors and styles to choose from. Moveable type is somewhat limited, but you can still find a basic, well-organized template.

Basics of Blog Setup

Even though each blog platform has different elements and plug-ins available, you'll need to come up with some ideas of your basic blog setup and structure. This is comprised of the types and categories of information you intend to share with the audience. For example, you will need to create content for your:

- Profile page/About Us section
- A contact page
- Resources
- Blog categories for each type of news
- Deciding whether to accept comments
- Basic marketing elements such as a blogroll or link exchange
- Space for advertising
- Feeds
- Ad Sense sections
- Logos
- Blog archives

- Page headers

After identifying the basic elements of your blog, it's time to choose the actual platform you will be using. It's not a good idea to switch platforms at a later date, since you'll probably end up reformatting and editing every piece of content. Choosing the right fit from the start is the best way to keep things moving along smooth and simply.

Using Blogger

Blogger is a widely-used blogging platform because of its ease of use and simple templates. You'll find a number of startup blogs that use blogger to publish online, and anything with a '.blogspot.com' extension indicates that it is a Blogger blog. Blogger is free to use, and only requires a username and password for setup and access.

You won't need to install any special software to get started, this blog platform uses a simple WYSIWIG editor. Once you've registered for your free account, you can choose a template and just start copying and pasting content into the publishing toolbar. If you need to add images, just use the upload image tool and paste it right in. Blogger is one of the most user-friendly blogging platforms available and very useful for beginners. You'll find enough fonts and color options to make your blog stand out from other sites, and can upgrade to your own domain very easily.

Steps to Create Your First Blog Post with Blogger

You can start blogging with a Blogger blog in just a few minutes; after registration and choosing a template, you can start posting immediately.

- **Step 1: Registration**

The first step is to register with your name and e-mail address; using your Gmail account will help make this step much easier.

- **Step 2: Enter your basic information**

This is where you will enter your e-mail address, a nickname, and set your password. You will also be asked to agree to the terms of service.

- **Step 3: Naming the blog**

This is where you will enter the blog's title, and you can see how it appears as an extension of the .blogspot.com URL. If your first choice is taken, Blogger will make some recommendations or ask you to try something else.

- **Step 4: Choosing a template**

This is where you'll choose from the gallery of templates; look for something that complements your brand, or start with a basic black and white design. Remember that you can always change this later.

- **Step 5: Start publishing**

You can start posting right away, and a good place to start is your contact information. Make sure to include all relevant contact information, website URL's, and other information that you think your readers will find valuable.

- **Step 6: Publish with one click!**

After entering your title, you will be all set to publish and can see the results immediately.

Using WordPress

WordPress is quickly becoming a leader of blog platforms, and offers a more professional look and easier navigation than blogger. WordPress is also compatible with a variety of content management systems, so if you are looking for something

that may integrate with your commercial website at a later date, WordPress will be your best choice out of the three.

WordPress makes it easy to upload images, create categories, and works well in different browsers. It may also have some SEO benefits since each posting can be easily tagged and therefore searched by the search engines.

From a blog setup point of view, WordPress also takes just minutes to set up. You'll want to start at the WordPress homepage and can download and install the WordPress software for free. WordPress makes it very easy to add text, images, and even movie files so if you're looking for something that can offers media-rich content, this will be your best choice.

You can choose a free blog on the WordPress domain at wordpress.com, or set up a blog on your own web host. WordPress offers a variety of quality hosting programs and services right on the site; take some time to review costs and benefits of DreamHost, HostICan, Laughing Squid, and BlueHost to find out what works best for you. Most of them offer a high amount of disk storage space, competitive monthly transfer rates, and unlimited domains under one account.

Steps to Create Your First Blog Post with WordPress

You'll need to start by downloading and installing the WordPress software program, and then get started with the signup process.

- **Step 1: Registration**

You'll start by entering a username, password, and an e-mail address. After accepting the terms of service, you'll be asked to name and describe your blog.

- **Step 2: Choosing a blog name**

This is where you can choose the title and header of your blog, along with a brief 2-3 line description. Keep in mind that this will be added to the

WordPress database immediately, and will be viewable to the audience whether or not you publish content right away.

- **Step 3: Verify your authentication code**

WordPress will send you an e-mail to verify your identity and introduce you to your new blog.

- **Step 4: Choose a template**

You can choose from over ten attractive WordPress themes and templates, and can switch these out whenever you choose. WordPress also allows you to upload logos or your own design if you choose.

- **Step 5: Navigating the dashboard**

After confirming your site, you will have a chance to enter through the dashboard. Just login with your username and password.

- **Step 6: Review the Manage, Posts, and Categories links**

The 'Write' tab is located in the top-left hand corner. This is where you'll be able to post content directly into the editor, and the easiest way to do this is to copy and paste directly from your favorite word processing program, or enter the information as you go along.

- **Step 7: Adding images**

WordPress allows you upload image files by clicking on the 'upload' button at the bottom of the page, and attaching the image. After you have uploaded it, you will need to select it for appropriate placement.

- **Step 8: Save and Publish**

It's important to always save your work as WordPress does not do this automatically. When you save a draft it will be available for viewing in the 'Manage' tab and you can go in and edit for publishing later. Pushing 'Publish' will send the information immediately to your blog.

WordPress offers a variety of plug-ins and other tools as you get more comfortable with the overall format and design. It's a good idea to spend a few hours navigating through your options for setup and design, and there are also many WordPress forums and resource sites available when you're ready to upgrade. WordPress offers great value for businesses of all sizes, and can be customized very easily.

Using TypePad

Many business professionals choose TypePad for a simple yet sophisticated blogging platform. This is not a free service, but does offer you a free 14-day trial to test it out. It's easy to use, and you can use simple drag-and-drop tools for organizing your content, images, and other site elements.

If you want to build your own template, TypePad also lets you create a customized template with colors, fonts, borders and your header image. This blog platform also uses a basic WYSIWYG editor so you don't need to worry about HTML and coding. It's a great choice if you're looking to include a videoblog, upload podcasts, or publish other media files easily. You can also tag all content, and publish with an RSS feed. A basic level package starts at just \$4.95 per month, while the Premium level with maximum storage costs \$29.95 per month.

Setting up your TypePad blog is simple; you'll need to register with a member name, password, and set up your blog address. The .typepad.com extension will be added if you are not hosting the blog on your own domain, and after agreeing to the Terms of Service, you will be all set up.

TypePad offers a clean and smooth layout, and definitely makes your business site look professional. It's a great choice if you have a budget to work with as you set up your blogs, and offers plenty of features for upgrading and customizing as your site grows.

Other Considerations

Another important consideration after setting up your blog is the amount and frequency of your postings. It may be helpful to create a schedule for posting, and almost all blog platforms allow you set a time and date stamp so you can control when things appear on your blog. This can be helpful when you want to pull together a batch of posts and release them one by one. Doing this will make sure that your blog is continuously updated, and you can choose to do this once per week, once per day, or even every hour if you want to!

This strategy will help you to plan ahead and provide quality content on a regular basis. Remember that many readers simply subscribe to your blog through the RSS reader, and having something fresh and new available on a regular basis will help them stay 'in touch.' You'll also be able to earn recognition from search engines, since the crawlers are constantly looking for websites that are constantly updated.

HOW YOUR BLOG SHOULD BE ORGANIZED

Understanding how each element of your blog comes together is essential for the long-term success for your business blog. After you've gained some experience with using the platform you've chosen, it's a good idea to take a close look at each area and learn what can, and perhaps cannot be, optimized to suit you best. Besides the visitor traffic counts, the overall structure and pieces of your blog can help to increase exposure.

Do keep in mind that every area of the blog can help your site become more search engine-friendly. Not only does this reduce overall marketing costs when you are

trying to obtain search engine rankings, but you'll also start to see more 'organic' traffic simply by tweaking a few areas.

Everything from the blog layout, the template you choose, and the fonts and colors you use will have an impact on your final blog. You'll want to choose wisely when it comes to each area, especially paying attention to color schemes and other themes that may help with branding purposes.

Layout and Basic Composition

The layout is a part of your blog design, and your goal is to create something that will leave a lasting impression. More and more blog networks are creating 'generic' blogs that have very little creativity and are focused more on the new content instead. Even though the content of your blog is the critical element, what the visitor sees and feels as they explore your blog is just as important.

If you choose a simple layout and design, just makes sure to navigate it yourself and see what your focal point is. Are you focusing too much on the sidebars? Is the header distracting? Can you easily read the content, or do you have to squint to make sense of the font and style? All of these elements will be unique to your blog, and since it may be an extension of your company and brand, it's vital that you use something that will make a lasting impression.

The blog layout consists of:

- Fonts
- Color themes
- Line spacing
- Header styles
- Image boxes
- Advertising space
- Columns (one-, two-, or three-columns)

Picking Appropriate Color Themes and Palettes

The first step in constructing an appropriate layout involves the color theme. You want to use colors that either match or complement your main website, or even just go along with your printed materials. Remember the value in branding, especially if you have traditionally been an offline company and are now moving things ahead on the web.

Color psychology can have a positive or negative effect on every single visitor that reaches your site, and you can make the most of your branding strategy by using special colors that evoke specific feelings. The following colors are generally associated with different emotions, feelings, and reactions in both positive and negative ways:

- **Red:**
excitement, warmth, energy, and stimulating in the positive, but aggression and excessive visual impact in the negative. Red is a strong and powerful color, and can be used properly in subtle ways. It demands attraction and recognition, but can also be perceived as overly aggressive.
- **Blue:**
intelligent, cool, efficient, and trustworthy in the positive, but unfriendly and aloof in the negative. Blue is essentially soothing, and the different hues can create a peaceful and serene feeling. However, it can also be perceived as cold and unemotional so you will need to pick the right tone to deliver the appropriate message.
- **Yellow:**
confident, creative, strong, and friendly in the positive; depressing, irrational, and even fearful in the negative. Yellow is a very stimulating and energizing color, but overusing it or using the wrong tone can work against you.

- **Green:**
balance, rest, peace, environmentally friendly in the positive, but bored, bland, and stagnant in the negative. Green can be used in very positive ways for a refreshing and energizing color palette, but too many dark tones can be perceived negatively.
- **Orange:**
warmth, security, fun, and abundance in the positive, but frivolity and disorder in the negative. Orange is a very energizing color, and can also attract immediate attention; however, too much of it can indicate foolishness or not being taken seriously enough.
- **Pink:**
femininity, love, tranquility in the positive, but weakness and inhibition in the negative. Pink can be soothing and attractive, but can be draining and overdone very easily. Avoid using it unless it clearly matches and represents your brand.
- **Brown:**
seriousness and warmth in the positive, but lacking in 'flavor' or taste in the negative. Strong browns can be helpful as accents, but a site completely done in brown can indicate boredom or lack of creativity.

Using powerful color combinations is very helpful when choosing the layout of your blog, and most blog platforms offer 'color combos' so you make the right choice. If you are designing your palette from scratch, just remember the principles of each color's psychological impact and proceed accordingly.

Choosing the Number of Columns

The number of columns in a blog has been debated time and time again, and there are both advantages and disadvantages of each. All blogs are set up in as one-column, two-column, or three-column structures. The best way to pick one is to simply choose something that suites your blog's purpose. For example, if you plan on linking out to partner sites or other blogs, you'll need a three-column structure. This will give you enough space to create a blogroll and relevant links on the right sidebar, include your blog commentary down the middle, and then put advertising and other links on the left side bar.

A two-column blog is most advantageous for a blog that has limited advertising. You will still have space for an extensive link roll and perhaps some contact information, but all reading will take place on the left side of the page.

A one-column blog is very basic, and is a good place to start if you want the blog to stand alone and *not* link out to different areas. This will help you create immediate interest to the content itself, and will definitely be less distracting for most web visitors and readers. Sometimes a minimal look works better, especially if you have a lot of content that requires attention.

Font Styles and Your Blog

Unless you are using a customized blog template, there are only a few standard font styles to choose from. This is not necessarily a bad thing, since most web users are becoming with the typical font styles such as Arial, Times New Roman, and Verdana. These are easy to read, and can help people 'scan' blogs much more easily. Choose a style that complements your website and company image, and you'll easily avoid using something that may not even download correctly on all web browsers. Just keep in mind the impact and readability of the text on screen, and you'll be making it much easier for all readers to continue reading.

Formatting Text

Blog posting works under a similar format as writing articles, and the more SEO-friendly you can make each entry, the higher the chances of reaching the top of the

major search engines. When you are writing your headings and titles, be sure to include keywords as often as possible. Each title of your blog will become an extension of the URL, and this is what search engines can find and rank accordingly.

A well-formatted blog entry will also include bullet points and headings. Even though blog posts are generally much shorter than articles, developing a well-organized post will help increase readership and be more favorable to search engines. It's a simple step that many startup bloggers overlook, and can help significantly as you make your presence online.

Making sure that you tag and organize all blog entries is another important element of your blog site design and overall layout. Archives of each blog entry are automatically created for review, but you can organize each entry by adding 'Categories' and posting each item into the appropriate section. This makes it easy for people to find specific keyword-based posts, and will also help with search engine rankings.

Designing a Customized Blog Template

If you decide to do something a little more creative, you may want to pursue a customized blog template instead. Customized blog template services are offered by many web designers and companies, and give you the chance to pick exactly the colors you want from your own website's color palette. If you want to include a special font, logo, or other artwork of your own, this is your best choice.

If you have web design skills, try developing your own blog template with the basic layout elements in mind. A customized template can be made with the same elements of a typical blog, but you will have the freedom to place and organize it as you would like to. Alternatively, there are upgraded versions of blogger platforms available.

A Few Notes on Squarespace for a Customized Blog

Squarespace is another valuable blogging and content management system platform. Squarespace is very similar in setup to WordPress, but gives you more freedom to set up your basic blog layout, include specialty items such as catalogs, media galleries, and discussion forums, and works with a simple drag-and-drop format.

If you're new to web design, this is a great choice when you're looking for something professional but unique. Squarespace offers different packages depending on the bandwidth and customized options you need, but even the basic plan is comprehensive enough to develop something that will stand apart from your competitors. You don't need special software to use it, and everything is very clean and efficient.

Why a Free Template Might Be a Better Choice

Still, if you're new to blogging or simply can't decide how the color scheme and layout should come together, a free template will save you time and upfront investments. You can always change your color choices later, and can try different types as you go along. WordPress, TypePad, and Blogger make it very easy to switch between themes as you start publishing, but you'll want to settle on something well before you start marketing and promoting your blog. Changing themes and colors too often may lead to confused visitors, so be sure to make some final decisions before you move ahead with promotions.

A free template will be your best choice when you want to:

- Save time
- Start publishing immediately
- Cut down on initial startup costs
- Create a simple accompaniment to your website

Blog Layout and Pageviews: understanding the Connection

The visible layout and overall look of your blog has a strong impact on steady web traffic, and there are many elements of basic web design to consider as you piece together the blog. Making sure that all the graphics, logos, headers, and fonts of your blog are consistent with your message will help you deliver information clearly. Avoid the temptation to fill your blog with random content and images; the quality of your postings is always important.

Making sure you are posting frequently is another easy way to increase page views. The more that people realize you are updating the blog regularly, the higher the chances of regular subscribers. You want to make sure your layout is attractive and can transmit the right message on every visit. This will create a unique experience, and help you develop steady readership over a period of just a few months.

BUILDING SOCIAL AUTHORITY

Establishing credibility is both a short-term and long-term goal for your business blog, and more valuable information that you provide for your audience, the higher the chances of success.

Toady's competitive blogosphere makes it challenging to meet the needs of your target market if you do not pay attention to quality and maintaining some consistent standards as you start posting.

People who are turned off by your blog are less likely to return; with thousands of blogs on similar subjects, it is easy to lose traffic because of a lack of experience, poor writing, or simply not updating your blog enough.

Valuable blogs receive ongoing traffic as they start showing up on directories and indexes across the web. These include sites such as:

- Technorati
- Daypop
- Blogdex
- Blogstreet
- Digg

All of these directories receive thousands, even millions, of visitors each day. Each item that is listed on the site receives ratings or reviews from other users, and you can start establishing credibility simply by joining. These sites also contain thousands of articles and topic matter related to your subject; they can serve as effective research tools when you are developing blog content, and can give you some valuable links to work with as you start developing fresh ideas.

When your overall site is indexed on these directories in the appropriate category, this also provides some credibility. People who are searching across these networks can see that your blog may be more worthy of attention, especially when you include a logo, title, or description for the catalog.

Elements for Credibility: What Your Blog MUST Have

There are some essential elements that your blog must have in order to be credible. These are a combination of the site structure and design, as well as the style and type of content you start posting. Each one is discussed in detail below, and the blog must include:

- Author name and company (if any)
- Contact information
- A brief Bio or About Us section
- Blogroll
- Links to resources
- Well-balanced visual elements
- A steady amount of ads
- No spam in comment boxes
- Compelling language and headlines
- Proper language, free from typos
- References to sources
- Carefully placed affiliate links (if any at all)
- Author responses on comments
- Appropriate language and conduct

You'll start with providing the author name and company; this is essential for helping your readers make a 'human' connection to your blog, and they should be able to contact you directly with any questions. Blog readers are looking for an 'insider' perspective on most issues, and it is very helpful for them to be able to

distinguish company marketing materials from an actual first-person perspective. Knowing who the author is will help to bring the message of the blog closer to home.

This goes hand-in-hand with the contact information. You can include your e-mail address or even a phone number if necessary. The goal is to make sure users can trust that the information is coming from a real person, and they have the freedom to contact the author if necessary. This can help you create a connection with both customers and random visitors, providing credibility for your content.

Next it's a good idea to provide a brief bio. This can also take the form of an 'About Us' section that briefly summarizes who you are, why the blog exists, and what you plan to include. This can be helpful for anyone who simply stumbles across the blog and needs a quick summary of what your blog is about. This information may also be included on the homepage, as it can help direct users to the appropriate resources—your main website, for example—instead.

The blogroll is a very effective marketing tool, as it helps readers see who else is linking to your blog, and where to find more information. The blogroll is your connection to other blogs in the blogosphere, and credible blogs listed here will in turn help you earn some credibility. A blogroll should be comprised of at least ten to fifteen different blogs or websites.

It's a good idea to send out e-mails to everyone on the blogroll notifying them of the inclusion, and hopefully listing you on their blogroll as well. This will help boost traffic from other resources, while helping you link up to some valuable blogs for referencing as well.

The Resource Links section is another area that will demonstrate credibility; a solid resource list will inform your readers that you are using various resources for research and keeping up to date with news in your industry, and also provide them with other navigation options as they browse your site.

The resources links section can also be followed up with an e-mail to each website notifying them of the inclusion. They may choose to participate in a link exchange program as a result, furthering your chances of increased traffic.

The importance of visual elements was discussed in Chapter 4, and it's important to remember that an attractive layout will help to boost your credibility naturally. The visual design and navigability of your site are important for your overall presentation, and making sure that there are no major errors in site design is an ongoing project.

The opportunity to include ads on your blog makes the site more valuable to advertisers, but it is important to remember balance during the selection and implementation of ads.

Overwhelming readers with ads, or simply bombarding random advertisements throughout your site can easily turn off a fair amount of first-time visitors. Even when you start joining affiliate programs and other networks, maintain a steady amount of ads that complement your site instead of distracting your readers from the content.

Monitoring spam comments is essential to keeping your blog in good standing, and will have a higher chance of reaching the top rankings of search engines when it is free of clutter and spam-related materials.

Spam blockers are often a part of most blog platforms, but even the filters can overlook some types of comment spam on occasion. Monitoring your blog regularly will ensure that you are keeping track of visitor comments, and you can select an option to moderate all comments before they are published if necessary.

This prevents spam bloggers 'sploggers' from overloading your site with unnecessary material without authorization, and can help you post the appropriate comments and feedback to keep your blog as interactive as possible.

Ensuring that your headlines are compelling, original, and creative will also help to reach out to your readers. Credible blogs make an extra effort to provide unique and engaging content, and your efforts will pay off when you are posting relevant information on a consistent basis.

In addition to the headlines, watch the quality of the content you are posting; use strong and effective language to deliver your message, and provide links and references to material as necessary. Editing your blog regularly is just as important as writing it and it should always be free of typos and grammatical errors.

Blog entries are designed to be short, concise, and compelling; avoid turning the blog into an article repository, and write blog posts that are only 300-500 words in length at max.

If you do want readers to read an article, direct them to your company website where they can view it in a different format, or provide a link to its home on the web. It's best to maintain consistency throughout your blog so that readers can become accustomed to your voice, tone, and style.

As you develop each piece of content, make sure you are providing references to sources. Even if you are redirecting users away from your blog homepage, you can use settings where the link opens in a new window. This will help them stay on your blog page if they need to, and providing the right references will help you establish credibility and authority on the subject naturally.

Watching how and where you place affiliate link ads is another element of credibility for your blog. If readers feel that you are simply using the blog as a vehicle for affiliate links, they are much less likely to believe that your content is coming from

experience and not just a marketing ploy instead. We discussed the value of affiliate link programs in the previous chapter, and it is very important to keep this in mind as you start to introduce visitors to the blog. Affiliate links are only valuable to your readers if you have found the products valuable yourself; if readers detect that there are ulterior motives to the placement of these links, they may simply stop visiting.

Keeping up with your blog also involves responding to comments in a timely manner, and appropriately managing negativity. Starting a 'flaming war' (Written online arguments with your contributors), will not help your reputation, and many startup bloggers make the mistake of losing focus when responding to comments on their blog. At best, it can be helpful to simply moderate comments before publishing so you can control the interactions on the site.

It is difficult to earn your reputation back after communicating publicly on sensitive issues, so be weary of this during your responses.

In addition to appropriate commenting, it's essential to use the right language and tone. Even though blogging is naturally conversational in style, it can be 'read' the wrong way without context.

Make sure you are using politically correct terms when necessary, and avoid writing posts that require reading between the lines. Offending large groups of people after writing seemingly simple posts can take its toll on readership; make sure to review and edit content as needed.

Blog Credibility and SEO

Search engines today are becoming even more refined and smarter at finding relevant and informative sites and blogs to index, and your blog will receive a higher credibility status when it encompasses most of the important elements. Search engines and directories are looking for:

- Relevant content
- Appropriate formatting and titles
- Steady visitor traffic
- Linking in from other sites
- Regular posting and updating
- Consistency in blog content
- Sites free of spam and excessive advertising
- Effective use of Ad Sense

How Visitors Determine Credibility

Making yourself a trustworthy and credible resource on the web takes time, but becoming an expert in your niche industry is an essential step towards regular readership. Even if your blog is an extension of your website, you can use it as a subsidiary resource platform that can help introduce readers to your company, and encourage them to continue reading. From the customer or visitor's perspective, there are essential signs of credibility that help distinguish one source from another. This includes:

- **Longevity of the blog**

How long has it been active, how many posts are there?

- **Experience**

Does the author have other sites and experience published around the web? If so, what are they? Expertise – can the author verify their expertise?

- **Design**

Is the site well-constructed and updated according to industry standards?

- **Writing style**

Is the author a strong writer, or do they seem to post poorly written content on a regular basis?

- **Readership**

Has the blog or site reached a high amount of readers? Many people turn to ranking indexes such as Alexa to determine this.

- **Consistency**

Are the posts regular and arranged in the appropriate categories, or are they simply submitted to the blog randomly?

- **Transparency**

Is the voice natural and friendly, or does it sound like it is coming from the marketing/PR department of the company?

Gaining steady readership will take time, but establishing credibility is a long-term goal for any blogger regardless of experience. Knowing how to convey a message that matches with your reader's interests is a necessary step; take the time to research, review, and edit your blog posts each time and make sure that the overall blog setup and design is in line with the competition.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Earning blog credibility, increasing traffic, and promoting your blog in the process are all part of your marketing strategy. The only way you can build your brand is by becoming highly visible across a variety of domains; this includes blogging communities, social networking groups, and even discussion forums where your target market can be found on a regular basis.

Marketing and branding go hand in hand with your company website, and even more so if your blog is the only online entity of your business. There are a number of ways to develop a cohesive marketing strategy as you shift into the online world; this involves:

- Developing Relationships with other bloggers
- Identifying top blogging communities
- Determining a brand identity, and tracking its impact on your business

Developing Relationships with Other Bloggers

No matter what type of visitor reaches your site—from the average guest to another blogger in your industry—there are many ways you can develop an ongoing relationship. Relationships are important in both the online and offline world, and a successful blog is often based on the first impression. Making sure you've taken the time to invest in site design and layout can help considerably with attracting a large audience. A blog can make a good first impression when it is:

- Easy to read
- Easy to navigate
- Provides useful and timely content
- Is built with categories and organized appropriately

- Offers archives filled with keyword content (easily indexed by search engines)
- Offers related posts
- Is consistent

Always remember that the blog represents your brand and is a virtual representation of your company. Communicating with your visitors and readers regularly involves your content, and understanding what they may be interested in reading will help you develop quality postings. When you are looking for fresh content to share, working with other bloggers will give you a chance to reach out beyond your scope of knowledge and make use of all of your resources.

Top Blogging Communities

Participating in blogging communities will ensure that you are deeply networked with other bloggers, and will help you increase your visibility as well. Blogging communities are rapidly growing across the web, but knowing which ones to join can be a challenge.

Some communities are simply not a valuable use of your time, and you can spend hours participating in discussions and comments with little or no traffic increases. A few blogging communities that can help you grow your business, however, do exist. You may try setting up profiles on:

- MyBlogLog
- Blogger
- WordPress Groups
- Google Groups

MyBlogLog is one of the web's largest communities for blogs, and can help you track down a variety of related blogs in your industry, as well as setting up a profile for other users to visit review regularly. The biggest value of MyBlogLog is its ability to tag and identify relevant industries based on keywords; the front page will list the most popular blogs at any given time, and simply reaching the front page can offer a significant traffic increase—completely automatically. Building a community on this site largely depends on your level of interaction.

Since MyBlogLog requires users to 'invite' others to each community, it can be especially helpful in reaching out to a specific audience. You can search and refine the entire group of readers on the site by keyword; once your URL and description is uploaded to the site, it's possible to use this as your profile and network with others.

MyBlogLog offers several advantages for any startup blog, and even though it is free when you register, there are also paid services and programs available. A premium service will allow you to create a more comprehensive profile, and include images and photos as you grow. Even though this is not necessary as you begin, it can be a valuable community-building tool in the future.

MyBlogLog also makes it easy to track down individual authors behind a blog; instead of having to do an organic search using the major search engines, MyBlogLog authors are listed right within the site, along with author names and profiles. Simply joining another author's fan club can give you a chance to browse and explore related content and material easily.

Blogger and WordPress both offer unique blog communities that you are automatically registered in once the blog is published. Since the social networks on these sites are so large, it can be difficult to make an impact immediately. The best strategy here is to use them as a resource for related blog content and identifying other niche subjects. Both of them are easily searchable and indexed and tagged by keyword categories.

Google Groups offers you an opportunity to create your own set of community users and 'fans.' Although this is generally casual in nature, you may find some value for your business based on a significant subject or topic.

Identifying a theme for your group is the first step; after registering, you will be able to recruit group members and can easily start promoting your blog and website links in an unobtrusive way.

Brand Identity and its Value for Business

Your blog serves as your virtual 'branding stamp' and can help your business or company gain visibility far more easily than even direct marketing. The more involved and well-linked you are within your industry, the higher the chances of you gaining visibility, traffic, and ongoing readers. Developing readership and subscribers is a valuable goal for any blog, especially when you are building one as an extension of an already-established website.

Blogs are becoming more and more interactive and acceptable to visitors; instead of shying away from websites that are full of advertising, more people are showing interested in specialized niches presented on a blog. Using this to your advantage is vital for enhancing your brand, and the more credibility you have, the higher your rate of success.

Customers and consumers that identify with your brand will have a unique set of expectations for items that you develop and promote. Making sure that your blog is aligned with your company's values, mission statement, and overall design will be in your best interest for building an audience.

Marketing and promoting your blog with this in mind can be the key to a successful marketing strategy, and one that simply gets lost in the growing blogosphere.

Summary of Marketing Essentials for Promoting Your Blog

Now that you've covered the key elements of promoting, social networking, and joining blog communities, it may be helpful to reduce the concepts down for a summary. Here are the marketing essentials for promoting your blog; combining at least eight to nine of these as a basis for your first marketing effort will help you get ahead and start promoting your blog with much higher chances of success:

- **Post high quality content on a regular basis**

If you are providing news on your site, average post amounts range from 3-5 posts *per day*. Make the most of your postings by only posting unique and high quality content. If you are looking to entertain or engage readers, aim for at least one posting per day.

- **Enable automatic trackbacks and ping**

Pings are a valuable way to notify search engines that your blog has been updated. Increase the chances of sharing blog content by enabling trackbacks on your blog.

- **Make sure all posts are formatted and archived correctly**

When you first start out, it can be helpful to leave this as a future project until you have developed some solid content. After that, take the time to sort through your content and make sure it is placed in the appropriate category. Also keep in mind that categories need to be based on keywords; you can gain a significant advantage with the search engines when you include high-ranking keywords on your category section.

- **Develop your own link building campaign**

Whether this involves contacting other bloggers, responding to comments and providing linkbacks, or simply making a 'call out' for links as you post, make sure you are keeping track of results and try a variety of strategies.

- **Make sure your blog is optimized**

Template optimization involves the URLs, RSS subscription buttons, and title tags are embedded appropriately. While most blogging platforms can help you do this automatically, you will need to pay attention to these areas on an ongoing basis.

- **Submit any podcasts and media files to the appropriate directories**

If you do start developing podcasts for your blog, make sure you are submitting them to the appropriate directories. Most are free, and can help you gain even higher rankings on the search engines.

- **Comment on other blogs to develop expertise**

Researching is just as important as writing for your blog, and you can search other blogs relevant to your industry and start commenting appropriately. Keep in mind the rules of the forum or group, and make sure your posts are relevant to the discussion. Always remember that your credibility is an important part of this, so be resourceful and post accordingly.

- **Develop a glossary section**

This is an often-overlooked opportunity for increasing search engine rankings, and can be a valuable resource section for your readers as well. A glossary can be as simple as keywords with definitions, and you can also start inter-linking the definitions to actual posts within your blog.

- **Customize your blog and design it with your logo in mind**

Even if you aren't launching with an exact replica of your website colors, choose something similar that will be attractive to your readers. Customized designs and templates are the best way to make a valuable first impression, but you may choose to wait until a later date.

- **Setup a Google sitemap**

Google sitemaps are designed to capture the key elements of your blog and

validate them for search engines. This is one valuable step toward web optimization, and can significantly impact search engine rankings.

- **Identify a list of authoritative blogs and other web sites**

Even if you are not using these on your blogroll or link exchange program, knowing where to consult information can help you develop content on a regular basis. Create a comprehensive list of at least 15-20 sites that can help you post unique and relevant content.

- **Make use of statistics**

Statistics will help you track results and easily see fluctuations in visitor traffic. Most blog platforms are equipped with statistical analysis programs, and you can watch trends and patterns daily.

- **Promote yourself on social networking platforms**

These are essential for gaining exposure and a strong presence alongside your target market, and you can join different groups and communities very easily. Setting up the right profile will take some strategy (see Chapter 7), but is an important element of building your social community presence.

- **Submit links to social bookmarking sites**

This is a very effective way to promote individual pieces of content. As soon as you have created a URL of your submission, that link can be promoted across multiple channels and networks in just a few steps. Try submitting to the major social bookmarking sites such as Technorati, Digg, and StumbleUpon for increased exposure on highly valuable topics and content. Even interacting on these networks can help you learn what types of content and topics your audience may be looking for.

- **Position yourself as an authority**

Consult valuable resources and give appropriate credit on your blog. This is

not only helpful for your readers, but can help you establish yourself as an expert within your field.

- **Focus on building credibility**

You can build credibility by communicating directly with other bloggers in the industry; establish a guest blogging opportunity for other bloggers to participate, and encourage them to market their contributions in the process.

- **Make contact with bloggers offline as well**

You can still build credibility and enjoy networking in the offline world, and attract some new visitors the 'traditional' way.

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY

As you establish yourself across a variety of viewing channels and networks of blogs, it's still important to optimize your blog and ensure that all of your posts can be found easily. Submitting to sites such as Technorati, Digg, and StumbleUpon can help you earn respect from new readers, especially if you are providing quality information on a regular basis.

Increasing credibility takes time, but also requires developing a cohesive strategy across multiple online platforms and avenues. Some of the best ways to get found on the internet are simply to join multiple networks, social networking communities, and publishing platforms. You can start by:

- Developing blog content that works
- Launching a Squidoo lens
- Promoting fresh content through article databases
- Increasing social networking presence, such as through Yahoo! Answers
- Link baiting on discussion forums and other blogs
- Introducing other authors on your blog or website, and coordinating a variety of PR tactics

Developing Blog Content That Works

Making changes on the type and style of posts that you submit can also be helpful; take a look at sites such as Lifehacker and even the Digg blog itself for some ideas on how to present a variety of posts and styles. Images are important, and linking out to videos or other examples across the web can also improve the quality of your submission. Working with different writing styles and presenting information in a new way are just as valuable to readers as a simple article, and can increase readership easily over time.

Writing content for your blog is similar as developing articles for a website, but still requires a few other steps. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you start to generate quality blog posts:

- **Research first-hand information to reference**

Nothing can help you create a unique post better than first-hand information, whether it is an interview, a local publication, or other information that is hard to find. Avoid simply copying themes and ideas from other blogs, as you will simply be a 'follower' and not a resource for your industry. Remember that the goal is to become an expert in your field, and people need to feel that you are a resource, not simply an 'echo' on the web.

- **Break your own news story**

Start adapting a press-release type of tone for fresh news and insights about your company. These can then be later adapted to full-fledged press releases and posted elsewhere on your website—with links—later on.

- **Write short, clear, and concise posts**

This makes it very easy for readers to follow your topic, and gives you a chance to present information in a conversational style. Avoid making posts *too* casual, however; the readers do not necessarily want to learn all about you, but are looking for a fresh voice from the company instead. You should be able to make room for a profile page and perhaps a picture of the author, but keeping it simple and professional will help you make a better impact.

- **Make sure you tag all your posts**

The next chapter goes into detail on what this means for your blog, but even at a very basic level, it is very important that all your posts are tagged appropriately.

- **Develop your own 'coined words'**

This may be a part of your business culture, your office 'inside jokes,' or anything else that adds some uniqueness and humor to your site. Coining words will also help you become recognized throughout your blogging communities; this can be a highly effective viral marketing tool, and you'll start gaining recognition in a variety of circles.

- **Encourage readers to Digg**

If you can implement a Digg button right next to every post, even better. Otherwise, simply encourage readers to Digg you by making a small request at the bottom of the page.

- **Start implementing relevant ads if you want to work with advertising networks**

This can help you boost search engine rankings easily, and will also help your readers find relevant information on your topic.

- **Create a new topic for each day of the week**

Themed posts can be changed out per season and you'll have many opportunities to share something new by incorporating a recent news subject or topic.

- **Reach out to Technorati**

Technorati is one of the best places to gain instant exposure for your blog, and the more submissions that you post to the site, the stronger your blog can be. If your blog gains a significant presence on Technorati on its own, you'll quickly see a jump in traffic because it will be spotlighted as a resource.

- **Develop a top ten list**

This can be a top ten list of blogs, a top ten list of interesting news at your company, or even top ten insights about a particular topic. Blog readers love

lists, and you'll find it much easier to write these types of posts when you are running out of content ideas. Top ten lists are also easy to share; you'll find many visitors are eager to 'pass around' a top ten list far more readily than a full-fledged article or detailed blog post.

USING TAGS CORRECTLY

As discussed in previous chapters, learning how to optimize each of your entries is essential for search engine rankings and gaining visibility. In order to make sure your blog posts are finding their way to the right communities and categories, it's a good idea to take the time to learn how to tag each post appropriately.

Tagging is relatively new to the internet, and has gained more prominence with the onset of Web 2.0 applications. More and more websites are using tagging as a way to sort and aggregate data found across the web; not only is it visually appealing when it appears on larger aggregator and search engine sites, but it gives people easy access to find relevant information much faster and in a more practical way.

Learning how to use tagging to your advantage can help you develop quality blog posts and a share-able set of content. Tagging systems are also known as 'folksonomies' as they are created by people all over the web; although you will be creating the first set of tags on your own to categorize your data, don't be surprised to come across your post elsewhere on the web that has been tagged with even more keywords. These are simply ways for people to find and search different portals more easily. You can stay one step ahead by using resourceful and easily identifiable keywords.

Categories vs. Tags: Knowing the Difference

Both categories and tags are ways for you to organize your blog entries, but there is a noticeable difference between the two. Categories make use of a 'tree' to organize data, blocking off particular categories into subcategories and identifying content accordingly. They are highly structured, similar to indexing books on a bookshelf.

Tagging offers a different opportunity; instead of organizing content in a linear manner, everything is organized by association with a brainstorm-like effect. It is a

very non-linear way of organizing information, but strings together keywords so you are in essence, 'breaking apart' each submission and identifying it with a simple word.

Many bloggers forego tagging because they think readers can simply search and find the information using the search box. This is true in some cases, but some posts may not be so easily accessible. Tagging helps both the readers *and* the search engines. SEO-friendly blog posts and articles can gain easier recognition when you tag entries appropriately, and also provide users with a simple way to track down information in a few clicks.

Types of Tagging

There are two main types of tagging for blogs: internal and external.

Internal tags are those that are used exclusively within a site. In these cases, you may have set up your own tag cloud, or are creating a database of highly-searched tags for easy reference.

An external tagging system makes use of social bookmarking sites such as Technorati, or del.ici.ous where each submission is picked up by these larger aggregator sites. This helps with dispersing your content much more easily, and you can broaden the reach for a particular piece of content by participating in these external sites as well.

Learning From Tag Clouds

A good place to start when developing tags is to look at tag clouds on your favorite community portals and search engines. High-traffic websites use these clouds as ways to interlink information found throughout the website; this generates an assortment of keywords that are similar or relevant to your topic matter, and can help you gain an understanding of what is popular (or not) at any given time.

The Built-In Search Box

If your website has a built-in search box, tagging will also help users retrieve relevant articles and posts immediately. Using tags with search functions is a great way to provide visitors to your site with easy access to all your articles, posts, and related materials. Not only that, these same tags are posted to larger sites such as Technorati and Digg automatically.

How Do I Implement Tagging In My Blog?

There are various ways to implement a tagging system on your blog, and most blog platforms support the standard tag plug-ins to get started. A few leading plug-ins and options include:

- Ultimate Tag Warrior
 - Jerome's Keywords
 - TechnoratiTags
 - SimpleTags
 - Yahoo! Keyword Tags
-
- **Ultimate Tag Warrior** helps to provide both internal and external tags, especially those that fit right into Technorati, Wikipedia, and social bookmarking sites such as del.ici.ous. The tags are displayed after just a few clicks and can make the tagging process much easier.
 - **Jerome's Keywords** is another tool that displays a list of tags and then makes it easy to simply implement your selection. This tool is ideal for WordPress blogs, and can easily help you find the right topics and keywords with a few tweaks.
 - **TechnoartiTags** are ideal for Moveable Type platforms, and use a similar feed as Ultimate Tag Warrior to send to larger aggregators such as Technorati.

- **SimpleTags** is a very basic plug-in for WordPress that also offers options to post to Technorati as well.
- **Yahoo! Keyword Tags** is actually a generator that you can place right into a WordPress blog as a plug-in. This will list a set of suggested tags and keywords, making it much easier to simply copy and paste, or type the list of tags directly into your tag box. This works hand-in-hand with Technorati and will help you avoid the need to go in and brainstorm tags for each post or subject.

Tagging and Marketing: Effective Market Research

When you are browsing and exploring other blogs and sites of interest, reviewing tag clouds for keywords is a great place to start. Tag clouds give you the benefit of literally 'seeing' which keywords are of prominence; this means that more people are reading and writing about that specific item, and you can develop your content and blog posts accordingly.

Regular market or industry research is essential to developing quality content for your blog. Not only will you be able to create content that is highly-readable, but you'll also have a chance to appear next to other relevant, and often leading blogs, in the industry. No matter what type of business blog you are developing, you'll have a chance to reach out to your target market in a more effective and approachable way when they can track down your information after just a few clicks.