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the importance
**OF BUSINESS
BLOGGING**

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Your business Blog

the ten keys to getting it right

A business Blog can help you communicate with your customers, engaging them on a regular basis with an easy to manage platform on the web. Then, there's the potential to attract a new audience along the way. Here are our top ten tips for Blogging for your business:

1. Have a defined goal

The most important aspect of having a business-related Blog is to define the outcome you want to get from what effectively is a marketing tool.

Your desired outcome should form the basis of how you structure your Blog, what you write about and how you drive your Blog visitor traffic towards achieving your business goal.

For example, you may want more sales leads through your company website to be driven from Blog traffic. Your Blog posts, and any other supplementary content on your Blog, need to attract relevant traffic in the first place, with a 'marketing' message that then filters your visitors onto your website.

Call-to-actions also need to point in the right direction and be written in the appropriate way to encourage your readers to take the next step towards **your goal**.

Any marketing is a form of investment. You need to keep your eye on the return on that investment and how best to achieve it.

2. Understand your audience

It's important to understand the type of audience you want to connect with through your business Blog. The content you write, the language that you use and the benefits you offer to them as readers need to be established to engage them effectively.

Writing industry specific jargon is all well and good when you know what you are talking about, but does your audience use the same words? If not,

you may disenfranchise yourself from them, that is if they can find you through search in the first place.

The more intelligence you have on your potential audience, the more you can refine every aspect of your Blog accordingly.

How often do they use the Internet? Would they be more interested in "Free Offers" or "Top Tips", etc.?

3. What's in it for them?

Despite the fact that you are using your Blog as a tool to market your business, you need to offer your readers value, otherwise they will stop reading, or go somewhere else. In the business-to-business environment the best way of achieving this is through sharing knowledge.

Rather than barricading your quality content, such as white papers, behind opt-in 'walls' on your website, why not give it away free on your Blog?

Sell your value proposition by displaying your knowledge and the open nature of your business. This will get people's attention and although it may seem like you are giving things away with no immediate financial return, you will build a pipeline of potential customers who will have bought into your company by the time they make contact.

4. Write right

One advantage of a Blog over traditional marketing is the way you can write your content.

Your Blog posts can be conversational in nature when you write them. This gives you an amazing amount of freedom, which you need to control.

Your Blog posts can include keywords and key phrases (good for search engine optimisation). You can use terms within your Blog content that you simply can't get away with on your website.

That said, don't go crazy and overload your posts with keywords. Remember, your posts still need to be reader focussed.

You need to remember to write using language your readers would use and if you are posting on a regular basis you can also use combinations of words and phrases in different posts to attract varying search terms.

5. Readable Blog posts

An important aspect of Blogging is to keep your readers engaged. If you post long articles every day, the chances are people will not read them due to overload.

The way people read your Blog posts will vary and some people subscribe to many Blogs, so skim read or quickly scan through posts to 'get the gist'.

Try generating no more than one post per day and never more than one long Blog post per week. Why not throw in the odd small one paragraph post? Perhaps, simply a link to another website you think could benefit your readers. As long as it adds value.

Make sure you split the text in your Blog posts up so if people do scan read, they can get an overview of the content. Sub headings and bullet point lists are good for breaking up text, and a well chosen image or diagram can make the post look more attractive and accessible.

Try and keep your paragraphs short, as long paragraphs have a tendency to put people off with online reading.

6. Link to and credit your peers

Create links to any research or websites that you have referred to. It is good Blog etiquette and also allows your Blog to join in the 'world-wide web'.

If your content is good, people may also link to your Blog. If they see you are linking out, this may encourage the 'link love'.

This may sound like wishful thinking but the Blogging community has a certain unwritten code of conduct, which carries a lot of respect.

Attracting incoming links to your Blog is good for two reasons. The first is that you may get a visitor actually click a link through to your Blog, that could lead to a new reader.

Secondly, an incoming link can benefit your Blog in search engines, depending on the anchor text*. People are becoming better with the words they use for their anchor text, but there are still plenty that use the [waste of time] phrase "click here".

(*Anchor text is the text that is used for the link)

If lots of people link to you with a certain phrase, there is more chance that you will be found for it.

7. Encourage comment and debate

A Blog is a place where you can, and should, have an opinion and allow your personality to shine through. People aren't looking for Blog posts that sit on the fence and don't teach them anything.

Don't be controversial just for the sake of it, but a good strong argument can create debate; and that is good for your Blog and your online reputation.

You could even end your Blog posts with a question, creating an opportunity for someone to answer back, what do you think?

Expect some people not to agree with you, that is a natural occurrence in life. Just remain objective and respectful towards other people's opinions and rise above any personal attacks.

8. Find your audience

Rather than rely on people finding you and your Blog, why not get out and interact with your potential audience?

Find similar Blogs and Forums and start to interact with other users.

Encourage readers to publish your material on social news and bookmarking sites. This can be achieved by simply adding appropriate links to the bottom of each Blog post, eg. Stumble It, del.icio.us, Share on Facebook, etc.

These tactics will extend your reach and your profile.

9. Measure

Like a website, you should measure what your Blog is doing, with regards to web traffic, visitors and potential subscribers.

Where are the visitors coming from? What are they typing in to search engines, or which sites are referring them?

And, when the traffic gets to your Blog, are people moving towards your defined goal?

If not, why not? You will need to make some adjustments to your posts and your sales messages to increase that potential.

However, Blog traffic is harder to measure than traditional website traffic as there are many different ways people can read your Blog posts.

Some of your audience will view your posts through a Feed Reader and never even visit your Blog, so it pays to have some sort of marketing messages within the odd post you write.

Don't make it too sales focussed, otherwise you may be encouraging people to unsubscribe, but the odd, relevant marketing message should be included.

You can also utilise tools such as Google's Feedburner to track subscribers to your Blog's feed.

10. Make Time

This is the one that catches a lot of people out. Creating and managing a Blog is an investment, either in your time, or budget; and it doesn't stop.

You will need to assign time to research and write articles for posting on a regular basis. There is nothing worse than seeing a Blog that has not been updated for a few months.

If you see this as a problem, it may pay to take one of two steps.

Either, refine your expectations and the schedule with which you post, or forget Blogging altogether. Karee

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