

Blogging for Beginners

Blogging for a Target Market

Blogging is an effective way to earn an income while writing about something you are passionate about. It is sometimes too easy to let your blog run astray so make sure you always have your target market in mind.

The most effective blogs stay true to their main focus and primary target market. Your ability to keep your blog's focus on your target market will be result in greater loyalty from your readers as well as greater opportunities to earn money on or through your blog.

You should try to get as specific as you can when determining who your target market is. For example, the criteria you may consider when determining your target market may include:

- Age
- Children or no children
- Ethnic background
- Gender
- Geographic area
- Income bracket
- Marital status
- Religious background
- Sexual orientation, etc.

These are just some of the characteristics you can consider when identifying your target market.

Identify Interests of Target Market

Once you have identified your target market and described them you need to start to determine what interests them and what does not. You can use social media sites like Facebook to gain some insight into your target market.

Remember, your target market will have diverse interests so you want to try to identify trends and similarities. Try to stay as close to your blog's primary purpose as possible. Identifying their interests will enable you to make appropriate references in your blog rather than add entirely new subjects that have little relevance to your primary subject.

Invite Feedback from Target Market

You can invite feedback about your blog from your target market on your blog or on social media sites. Input from your target market is a great way to make sure you are on point and will help you make sure your blog is serving your target market well.

Blogs should be viewed as conversations not monologues. Your readers will feel more loyalty if they can contribute to your blog and start dialogues with you and other followers of your blog.

Do not get in the habit of thinking you are the only one that should offer commentary on your blog or you will have very few followers.

Identify your target market, focus on their needs and welcome them as part of your blog and you can be well on your way to successful blogging.

Blogging - Choosing a Theme

One of the most exciting things for new bloggers to do is to set up their blog. They look forward to coming up with a catchy name and a snappy looking design. The enthusiasm is great but make sure it does not lead you astray.

When you choose your theme, you want to make sure the theme has the functionality you want before you focus on the aesthetics.

Choosing a Blog Theme with Functionality

It is important that you choose a theme that has all the features you want. Perhaps the most important is to make sure your theme allows you to place advertisements on your blog if that is one of your goals.

If your blog is part of an affiliate marketing program or some other type of program that will allow you to monetize the blog you have to make sure the theme you choose is appropriate for that goal.

Some themes allow ads to be more prominently placed than other themes. Location of the ads is one of the keys on a blog. In fact, you should view your blog as real estate and determine its most valuable places and use them for maximum impact.

If you plan to have a “tag cloud” on your blog, make sure the theme supports it well. The bottom line is you must make sure the theme you choose can handle the various things you want to accomplish.

Choosing a Blog Theme - Cleanliness is Next to Godliness

A clean, easy to read and easy to navigate blog is a successful blog. There are many themes available that are high on design and low on effectiveness. People visiting blogs are not looking for tons of bells and whistles (unless of course the blog is about bells and whistles). They want a clean blog that is easy to navigate.

Check the themes you are considering carefully and make sure you think it is easy to find all the different navigation options. Make sure the colours are not too harsh or your readers will not be able to stay on your blog long. Do not have too many moving components on your blog or it will be unappealing to blog readers.

You want to choose a theme that is comfortable for your readers. The goal is to keep them on your blog so take the time to compare different themes and ask for help if needed.

Blogging - Length of Posts

Bloggers often wonder how long a blog posting should be. Oddly most bloggers err on the side of posting overly long posts rather than posts that they may think are too short. The reality is you are better off with frequent shorter posts rather than longer posts less frequently.

Keep it Short and Simple

Blog postings should be relatively short (typically under 400 words). Topics that require longer postings can be and should be split over several postings rather than being in one longer blog post.

Many bloggers find that postings under 200 words are the most effective. Most online users skim content. Blog postings or web pages with too much content can overwhelm the reader and cause them to become uncomfortable or lose interest in your blog.

As a general rule, you should keep your sentences short. Try to have one thought per sentence. Also try to keep your paragraphs to four sentences or less. Long paragraphs can turn off readers. You want to keep your readers on your blog as long as possible.

Make sure you write succinctly. The ability to quickly convey a point will keep your readers happy and on your blog.

How Many Posts Per Day

If you are adding short blog posts of under 150 words you will probably want to add at least 2 or 3 per day. If your blog postings are 300 or 400 words in length you can add just one or two per day.

When it comes to the frequency of postings, the more often you post the better. Again, you do not want to add posts for the sake of adding posts. Each post on your blog should meet the criteria you established for your blog. Make sure it adds value for your blog before you publish it.

If your blog postings are primarily videos or images with very little text you will want to make sure you have several postings per day. You may appear lazy to your readers if you only put one or two very short postings on your blog each day.

Not all the posts need to be from you. You can invite contributors to post on your blog. Having others write for your blog is a good way to alleviate some of the stress associated with maintaining a blog.

Keep these things in mind when you are considering the length and frequency of your blog postings.

Blogging - How Often do I Post?

Many bloggers, especially new bloggers wonder how often they should post on their blog. Do they post at a furious pace until their fingers bleed? Do they post only when the spirit moves them? The answer is somewhere in between.

Bloggers need to have a general idea of how often they plan to post. Consistency is more important than volume when it comes to posting. If you start off with great passion and post 5 or 10 postings every day for a month then suddenly lose steam your followers will recognize this and wonder if you are losing interest in your own blog. If you lose interest so will they.

How Often to Post - Gain Momentum

You are always better off gaining momentum rather than losing steam. Start off your blog by adding postings at a pace you know you can keep up with. On days that you are feeling particularly prolific you should create extra posts and save them in your admin panel without actually publishing them.

You can build a stockpile of posts that can be used on days you have nothing to say or are unable to sit down and focus on your blog at all. This is a good way to make sure that you are prepared for any unplanned writing absences.

How many posts you start off with per day will depend on your blog's focus. If you are a corporate blog you can likely start with one very good post per day. If you have an entertainment blog you probably want at least four or five short postings per day.

What is my Starting Off Point?

The best way to determine your starting off point is to look at the competition. See how often they post and how long their postings are. You do not have to duplicate their effort but you do not want to be too far below it.

You must also consider quality. Quality should not suffer for the sake of quantity. If you find that some of your posts are not good enough for your blog because you were focused on getting out extra posts you should consider scaling back a bit and sustain a volume that is comfortable for you.

The bottom line is you need to keep your blog updated and current with content but you do not want to become a slave to it. Try to find a realistic pace that can grow over time.

Multi-Purpose Blog Content

Writing for your blog can be a part-time or full-time job. Whether you are paying a professional blog writer or writing the content yourself you want to make sure you get the most out of the resources you have devoted to your blog.

Multi-purposing your blog content is a good way to maximize the value of your efforts. You may not think about blog content as something that can be multi-purposed but it certainly can and likely should be.

Adding Content to Your Blog

The first thing you want to do is add the newly written content to your blog. Google, Yahoo and the other search engines typically give the most value to the first-place content is

added. You want the most value to be your blog so make sure you post your content there first.

Once you have added the content to your blog you want to wait to confirm it has been indexed by Google, Yahoo and Bing. You do this by doing a search for the title of your blog and seeing if your blog comes up in the search results.

If your blog posting has been indexed you can distribute the posting in other ways including on article distribution websites, social bookmarking sites, social media sites and your own e-mail marketing database.

Content Distribution

Before you begin distributing the content you may want to consider making some simple changes to the content so it is not identical to the content on your blog. You should also consider getting your newly added content licensed with Creative Commons in order to protect yourself from duplicate content issues.

The most important places to distribute your blog content is on social media sites like Facebook, twitter, LinkedIn etc.

Blog Style and Tone

The style and tone you use on your blog is important. Not every blog will have or should have the same style and tone. Both the tone and style of your blog is determined by your topic and your target market.

For the most part blogs should be conversational in tone. You want people to feel comfortable on your blog and not feel that they are being lectured to or “spoken” down to. The more conversational in tone your blog is the more comfortable your followers will feel. Of course, this does not mean that every blog should be casual in nature. Do not confuse conversational with casual. Though it is perfectly acceptable for some blogs to be casual in tone, not all blogs should be.

Take for example blogs by professionals such as doctors and lawyers. Though the style of the blog should be conversational in tone, the style should not be too casual. Consumers expect a professional to remain professional without being didactic.

Slang, Expletives and Humour

The use of slang is often considered casual. Though this is appropriate for some blogs it is typically not acceptable for corporate blogs. You want to be conversational without crossing the line and becoming overly casual. Avoid the use of slang on professional blogs.

Expletives are never appropriate for corporate or professional blogs. You should avoid them at all costs. In fact, you should avoid using any inflammatory language on your blog including racial slurs, slurs about gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, disability or religion.

Humour is certainly something you can use on a blog including professional and corporate blogs. Humour can be appropriate but again do not use humour based on gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, disability, etc.

Put the Conversation in Conversational

Your blog should invite commentary from your readers. Invite them into the conversation and you will get many more loyal followers. You may have heard of the expression Web 2.0. This basically refers to user-created content and experiences. As a blogger, you are engaging in a Web 2.0 environment if you invite input from your readers.

It is important to let your readers know the rules for commenting on your blog. You can specifically forbid flaming (attacking other readers); abusive language; expletives, etc. It is perfectly acceptable for you to expect your readers' comments to fit the style and tone you set up for your blog.

Blogging Non-Original Content

Bloggers sometimes fear posting or re-posting content from other sources on their blog. A successful blogger will not want to solely post information from other sources on their blog without any original postings. However, it is perfectly acceptable for you to put these types of postings on a blog from time to time.

If you are going to re-post content that appears elsewhere online you want to make sure you give proper credit to the original source. You should also introduce the posting with your own words or give some other commentary on the posting.

Every blogger will need to decide on their own when they need to provide a source and when they do not. Typically, if you are going to copy content directly from another source (without paraphrasing) you should give proper reference.

Your followers will appreciate the fact that you are alerting them to content that they may find interesting and it will avoid someone reading a story on your blog that they read previously and wonder why you did not credit the original source.

Videos & Images

Videos and images can be added to your blog even if you are not the creator of the image or video. If you obtain the content from sources like YouTube and Flickr you can safely add

the videos or images to your blog. If you think the original poster of the content is in violation of any copyright laws then you should avoid adding the content to your site. You can contact video sources directly and ask them for permission to post a video clip on your blog.

Some bloggers rather beg for forgiveness rather than ask for permission. That is a judgment call a blogger will need to make directly. For the most part if you posted a video or image that you should not have posted you will be requested to remove it and you should immediately remove it.

Bottom Line about Non-Original Content

The bottom line is that you can add non-original content to your blog when appropriate. Make sure you give proper citations and are not in violation of any copyright laws. If the content is created by and posted by the creator on a site like YouTube or Flickr you should have no problem adding it to your blog.

Be careful but do not be afraid to add non-original content to your blog when you deem appropriate.

Blogging Absences

Experienced bloggers know and novice bloggers quickly learn that the fastest way to lose followers is to stop posting on your blog. Even a short absence that is unannounced can make your followers lose faith and move on. Make sure you handle your blogging absences properly so you do not lose all the momentum you have built up.

Planned Absences

Planned absences are easy to handle. You can announce on your blog when the absence will happen and you can even announce why. This will prepare your followers for the anticipated silence. You may want to consider recruiting a guest blogger if your absence will be for more than a few days.

Depending on the topic of your blog you can also consider pre-posting your blog entries. You can pre-date blog entries that will not appear on your blog until the date specified. Doing this will make it appear as if you are behind your computer screen blogging away when perhaps you are laying on the beach drinking a daiquiri.

Unplanned Absences

By their nature, unplanned absences will require you to think on the fly. You can set up your blog to allow you to blog via email. This will let you post to your blog no matter where you

are. Even if you just want to post a quick message letting people know that you will be offline for a bit it is better than complete silence.

Canned Postings

If appropriate for your blog, you can have some pre-written, generic postings that you keep in your admin panel but do not post. You can then use those postings when you are out of town unexpectedly or unable to blog for any other reason.

It is a good idea to teach someone else your admin panel and let them know about any canned postings you have available. This is especially important for blogs that have a loyal following who may become concerned if they do not hear from you.

Typically, you want to update your blog followers and social media followers anytime you will be silent for a period of time or have someone else update them in case you are unable to do it directly.

Silence on a blog can be costly. Make sure you plan in advance for potential or planned absences from blogging. Your pre-planning can help you sustain your followers and keep your momentum going in the right direction.

Using Video on Your Blog

Using video on your blog is a good way to keep it interesting. You can both inform and entertain your blog followers by incorporating video onto your blog. It is important to keep some basic rules in mind in order to make it effective.

Video Hosting

Some blogs allow you to post video directly on your blog by first uploading the file to the blog's server. The file will then be embedded in your posting so your readers can click on the video and watch it.

You can also host videos on YouTube. This is a very common practice and is perfectly acceptable. Basically, you want to create a YouTube account that will be used for all the videos you want to use on your blog.

The major blogs have an easy process for adding a YouTube video to a blog posting. Typically, all you need to do is copy and paste the URL of the video into the blog posting editor. Some specifically have an icon you can use to add a YouTube video to a posting with just a couple of clicks of your mouse.

Video - What is Appropriate?

Your goal is not to add video for the sake of adding video. You want to make sure the videos you choose make sense for your blog. They should appeal to your target market and be relevant based on the content you typically put on your blog.

It is perfectly acceptable to add YouTube videos created by and posted by other people. You can credit the source though there is typically no specific need to.

If you are going to add other people's videos to your site you want to watch them carefully and make sure there is nothing inappropriate in the video. Watch it several times to make sure.

You do not want to be embarrassed by having video on your site that has something inappropriate in it.

Video - How Many is Too Many?

There is really no definitive number of videos that can be considered too many. It will depend on your blog and the videos you are adding. Short video clips tend to be better than longer clips.

A good rule of thumb is to only add one or two videos per posting. More than that can become confusing or cumbersome.

Go ahead and experiment with video on your blog and see how your followers react.

The Use of Images on Your Blog

The use of images on a blog is a good way to add more interest and impact to your postings. The right image can highlight a point or make a point all on its own. A picture is certainly worth a thousand words. It is perfectly appropriate to add one or more pictures to any and every blog posting.

When Images are a Must

There are some times that images are a must to add to your blog. If you are blogging about a particular person, place or thing an image is a must. For example, if you are talking about a new car model on the market you should have one or more images of the model with the posting.

You do not want to leave your followers disappointed that they are unable to see what you are talking about.

How to Get Images

You can find images online. You need to check and make sure you can use the images on your blog without there being a copyright infringement. Give the sources of the image or images when you post them as well.

A Google image search or a Flickr image search should help you find images for just about anything you are blogging about. You can also use drawings, cartoons and other images to highlight a point.

Size and Placement

If you are adding images to your blog you want to make sure they are sufficient size to convey what you are intending to convey. Typically, a blog posting will contain a thumbnail or smaller size of the image that appears embedded in the posting. When someone clicks on the image it should increase to its fullest size to show greater detail.

Images can be put in various places within a blog posting. For the most impact, you want to consider putting the image in the top right corner of the blog posting. Centred on the bottom of your posting is another good option for an image.

The Bottom Line About Images

The bottom line is you should try to use images to convey a point or emphasize a point on your blog. Images make a blog more appealing while adding greater impact. Make sure the images you use are appropriate for your readers and that you have permission to post them on your blog. Follow these guidelines and add some images to your blog.

Addressing Competitors on Your Blog

Blogs, especially corporate blogs, will have competitors (either a competing blog or a competing business). How you handle or address competitors on your blog will speak volumes about you as a person and as a business.

For the most part, always take the high road and never get caught up in a public and nasty feud with another blog or business.

Addressing the Competition in General

You should rarely mention a competitor by name. Though it is acceptable to name them when comparing aspects of a product or service make sure you keep a professional tone. Consumers are turned off when they see another company's products being disparaged.

If you think your product or service is better, than focus your postings on the highlights of your products or services. Do not focus on pointing out problems with your competition.

Sometimes your best option is to mention competitors in a generic way. For example, "other products on the market", or "similar types of products" are better terms for blogging purposes because they enable you to differentiate your products without specifically naming the competition.

Your readers may not even have known that a certain competitor existed so do not be quick to give them some free press on your blog.

Addressing Negative Postings from Competition

Addressing negative postings from your competition is a somewhat sticky subject. On one hand, you want to address the posting, on the other hand your readers may not know the posting was even made. Addressing a posting may alert your readers to its existence for the first time.

How you handle negative postings will depend on the comments that were made by the competitor. Some comments can be ignored while other comments will need to be addressed.

Your first course of action may be to contact the competitor and request they remove any defamatory comments on their blog. You may be surprised at how many will honour the request, especially if it is made in a professional manor. If the comments at question appear on their blog but were not written directly by them they may be more than willing to remove the offending comments.

If the competitor refuses to remove a negative posting you can respond on your blog by addressing the accusations without indicating where they were made. This way you are able to respond without giving any unnecessary power to their blog posting.

Keep these things in mind when addressing the competition on your blog.

A Flaming on Your Blog

Flaming is something that every blogger will see from time to time. Basically, flaming is when someone viciously attacks you or someone else that posts something on your blog. Typically, a flaming is very personal and quite vicious.

It is important that you handle flaming in fact you probably want to have a written policy about inappropriate behaviour on your blog including flaming.

How to Handle a Flaming on Your Blog

First and foremost, you want to make sure you address any flaming or other personal attacks that appear on your blog. This is especially true if someone is attacking another reader of your blog. Your failure to handle these types of postings will make it appear as if you condone them. You want your readers to know that you value them and will make sure they are not attacked for participating on your blog.

The first thing you should do is delete the flaming post. Once it is deleted you should contact the person who was flamed and apologize for the behaviour or the person who flamed them and let them know the offensive posting was removed.

After contacting the person who was flamed you need to contact the person who posted the inflammatory posting. You should let them know the offensive posting was removed and that you do not tolerate that type of behaviour on your blog.

If their post was extremely offensive you can immediately ban them from your blog. The alternative is to warn them that if they post anything in the future that violates your blog policies they will be banned.

How to Handle You Being Flamed

If the personal attacks are directed at you, it is important to take action. Just as you would protect any member of your blog you need to protect yourself as well. Though you should always invite feedback and commentary, including negative commentary, you should not accept flaming.

Remove any inappropriate comments and provide a warning to the person who posted it. You can even invite them to post an edited version of their comments if appropriate. Most will probably not take you up on the offer but some may.

If you protect yourself and your readers from flaming you will be promoting a healthy environment where topics can be discussed and heated debates can ensue without rising to the level of inappropriate flaming on your blog.

Keep SPAM Off Your Blog

If you are starting a blog you may be surprised to learn that you can expect SPAM and quite a bit of it. Blogs are notorious magnets for spammers looking to post links to their websites, especially gambling sites, adult sites and prescription drug sites.

Primarily SPAM will be posted in the comments of your blog postings rather than as a new blog posting. Unless you have set up your blog to notify you any time someone makes a comment you may not even know they are there.

Why SPAM Should be Deleted

SPAM hurts the overall impact of your blog and can lead some of your followers to stop reading your blog completely. For the most part the nature of SPAM postings is not what most blog readers want to see and it is important you remove it fast.

Links off of your blog to porn, gambling and other such sites can also hurt your ranking in Google unless you catch the links and remove them.

Protect Yourself Against SPAM

Most blog sites (including Blogger and WordPress) give you the ability to set up your blog so you are notified anytime a comment is posted. In fact, you can set up your account so a comment does not appear unless you approve the content. This is the most effective way to keep SPAM off your blog.

The major blog sites also offer SPAM guard plug-ins. Basically these plug-ins identify the most common SPAM postings and delete them before they are able to be posted on your site. They also enable you to blackball users, websites, IP addresses, etc. to further combat SPAM.

You should consider one or more of these SPAM protection options if you are going to have a successful, SPAM-free blog. Remember not every link to another website is SPAM. However, you should look at all comments and outgoing links to determine if they are the type of comments and links you want your followers to see.

SPAM protection will be something you want to stay on top of and it is worth the effort. Spammers can be both creative and persistent in their attempts to post links to the websites they are promoting. Take affirmative steps to block the SPAM and keep a close eye on your blog and they will eventually move on to another blog to try to SPAM.

Guest Bloggers on Your Blog

If you are just starting out writing a blog you are probably not thinking about adding guest bloggers. Though it is not something you have to think about from day one it is something you should think about early on.

Guest bloggers can alleviate some of the burden of having to post on your blog frequently. Guest bloggers can also help keep your blog going during a planned or unplanned absence.

Choosing a Guest Blogger

A guest blogger is someone that can write content for your blog that is relevant to your subject and interesting to your readers. Though they do not have to write in exactly the same style and tone as you do, you generally want them to write in a similar tone.

If you know the blogger you want to ask to be a guest blogger on your site then the screening process is simple. Other options include asking writers for a sample blog posting so you can evaluate their style or choosing a guest blogger from someone who contributes to your blog presently.

The reliability of your guest blogger is crucial.

Introducing Your Guest Blogger

A guest blogger should be introduced to your readers. The introduction should include a brief bio of the guest blogger as well as information about when they will be posting and if necessary why they will be posting (e.g. if you have a planned absence from your blog).

You can add a guest blogger for comic relief as well. In that case, your introduction should be humorous and let your readers know they are in for some fun. It is perfectly fine for your guest blogger or guest bloggers to be posting when you are posting as well.

There are many highly successful blogs that have multiple blog writers. It is not necessary for your blog to be in one voice only. You can have writers with different viewpoints or areas of expertise. You can also have different writers for different topics on your site.

The thing to keep in mind is that though you may control your blog and all of its content, it does not mean that you have to be the sole content creator. Guest bloggers or regular contributors can help your blog stay fresh, interesting and frequently updated.

Even if your blog has not yet been started now is a good time to start thinking about additional writers for your blog.

Affiliate Programs and Blogs

Affiliate programs may prove to be your best friend. The right affiliate programs can transform a blog into a cash machine. Affiliate networking should be considered by all bloggers. Try to devote proper resources to joining and maintaining effective affiliate relationships.

Joining Affiliate Programs

Before you rush to join affiliate programs for advertisers you want to first sit down and identify who your blog's target market is. Be as specific as you can. Once you know who your target market is you want to identify what is important to your market.

Join affiliate programs of advertisers that have products or services that will interest your readers. Your goal is to choose advertisers that will likely result in a conversion (sale). Many bloggers lose focus. Do not try to pick ads that make their blog seem important. Pick ads that will generate revenue.

Join only the affiliate programs of advertisers that will genuinely interest your readers.

Integrating Affiliate Links into Blog

Create blog postings about products or services you feel strongly about. Write a well written blog posting that includes one or more links to affiliate websites that offer those products or services.

It is important that the link you add to the blog posting include any tracking code needed so you get credit for the sale through the affiliate network.

Images can include hyperlinks to retailers or suppliers of the product or service you are writing about. In addition, you can invite readers to "read more" with a link to the page on a website that is relevant to your target market.

You do not want to go overboard with promoting products or services with every blog posting or your readers may think you are not being genuine. Your integrity is important to maintain while blogging.

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