

# 10 Tips for a Blog that Builds Readership and Business

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At dinner recently, a friend (Dave's) began to kvetch about her adulting son. He had lived with her and her husband for a year after college. Finally, the grumpy, underemployed ingrate had moved out. And taken his half-trained dog and shedding cat with him.

"We love him but we don't miss him," Dave's friend said. "And we certainly don't miss the hair from his pets. It was time."

She then said, "I've thought about starting a blog for parents whose kids won't leave the nest. Maybe something like, 'How to Survive Life with Your Boomerang Kid.' We learned a few things during Brett's year back home."

Yes.

She absolutely should start a blog. Never has there been a better time for her (or your) blog, even with more than 600 million blogs in the online universe and more than 7 million blog posts per day (plus or minus).<sup>[1]</sup>(denied:applewebdata://387F5BBE-E07A-47AC-A747-81E0A958ADD8#\_ftn1)

So why does the world need another blog? Because it needs your thinking.

The currency of influence is ideas. And blogs are one of the small but mighty ways that leaders can begin to affect change in the world. Some small business leaders even discover new prospects as a result. One of our clients in wealth management began blogging, and within a year, she had landed two large clients who found her blog via Google search. As a financial advisor, she specialized in helping divorced women manage their investments, and her posts on how to negotiate during a divorce settlement attracted significant readership.

Even in a world in which more than 80 percent of the

global internet traffic comes from video streaming and downloads, a regular old blog can still affect change and increase your influence. Here are 10 ideas for starting your next blog (or restarting an old one):

## 1. Write for a small audience.

Writing is intensely personal, even if you're publishing a business blog. And the best blogs are shot through with personality and opinion. So, if you're putting energy into standing up a blog and making the commitment to publish regularly, you should write what you know about and what you feel some passion around. That said, you're always writing to an audience, real people. It's important to know their beliefs and worldview. Outside your mum, your great aunt Elma, and your cousins back in the Old Country, who do you want to read your blog?

What do they worry about in the middle of the night? What excites them? What do you share in common with them?

Yes, write about what you know. But tap into the hearts and minds of your readers.

Seth Godin, the entrepreneur, best-selling author, and speaker, came up with the phrase "smallest viable audience." Ergo, don't attempt to write for the masses. Write for a few people who want and need to hear from you. Think small as it relates to your target audience. Doing so will give you focus.

And don't be surprised when your writing touches that audience so deeply they forward your post to a friend. Small becomes a little bigger. Good writing gets passed along. Your clients or customers will pass it along to their team members – and colleagues. This is how great ideas spread.

## 2. Build a high wall between church and state.

This should be patently obvious, but if you're writing a blog, you should never, ever promote your products or services. There's an old concept in magazine publishing called the "wall between Church and State." Ergo, never confuse the reader about which piece of content is an ad and which is pure editorial.

The Church is holy (editorial), the State is a necessary evil (advertising).

Therefore, an ad should look like an ad. And an article should never promote the author or others. A blog is value-added content. Not promotional. A blog educates and informs. A blog provides insight into trends or culture. People will continue to read (and forward) your blog if it makes them smarter, better informed, or even makes them laugh.

But if you self-promote or point readers to a specific product or service, you risk losing their trust. Once you've lost their trust, you may as well shut down your blog.

### 3. Be consistent.

Most of us who write want to build a following. We want more readers, not less. More readers equals greater influence.

The only shortcut to building a following of readers is regular, consistent publishing. Several years ago, a friend and I published one podcast episode and one blog post weekly on the subject of fly fishing. We did it week in and week out for four and a half years. We never missed a week.

Mind you, this was purely avocational, a hobby. We did it because of the pure joy of working together. When we began, we had no podcast listeners. When we stopped, we had 10,000 subscribers to the podcast and 5,000 visitors to our blog each month.

Our podcast and blog will not go down in the annals of greatness in podcast and blog history. For sure. But 10,000 listeners thought it was worth putting on their list of favs.

The point is that anything that you do consistently and reasonably well – over time – will attract readership or listenership. So, decide your rhythm. And then never miss a deadline.

## 4. Pay attention to how people search for your blog.

If you're blogging consistently, you're producing fresh content for your web site. The bots (short for "robots") of Google (and other search engines) love fresh content. They crawl your website whenever you publish something new. Bots perform the automated task of organizing your content so that people who search the web find what they need.

So, if you want to new visitors to your blog, it's wise to give Google some clear direction on how to index your content. The acronym for this process is SEO or "search engine optimization."

You give SEO some love so you get some love back: new visitors to your blog via search. If you give Google the right signals, over time your audience will find you as they search for content like yours. The idea is that as you post new blog content to your web site, you will want to "instrument your page for SEO." Ergo, give Google the right signals to slurp up the new content that you just posted.

You don't need to be technically minded for this. First, come up with a key phrase for each blog post. The phrase should fit with the editorial grid or content plan for your blog. Second, for that post, make sure the exact same phrase appears in these key places:

- In the page title of your post
- In the title of your post
- In the first sentence of the first paragraph of your post
- In the meta-description of your post
- Several times throughout your post.

There's a bit more to SEO than the above, but this is a good start, a place to begin. The anecdote I mentioned in the introduction to this article is a specific example of how people search online and find your content.

## 5. Use stories.

This is where business blogs tend to fail miserably. For some writers, a blog is the place to dump voluminous amounts of information, as if the world needs more content. Only the most motivated reader will stay with a

blog that reads like a car manual.

In the postmodern world (just like the pre-modern world), most of us learn through storytelling. Stories keep readers engaged. Stories create tension that needs to be resolved. And tension is what keeps a reader reading to the end. And best of all, story can transform readers.

See if you can begin and end your next blog with an anecdote, perhaps, even, the same story. Relay the first part of the story but don't give away the ending as you introduce your topic. At the end of your blog, provide the rest of the story – what happened and why.

There are many ways to begin your next blog post. Try opening with a story, one that captures the imagination of your reader.

## 6. Writer longer rather than shorter.

Blogs can range from a single paragraph to thousands of words. Conventional wisdom says that blogs should range between 600 to 800 words. There's some data to suggest, though, that these days, longer blogs get a higher ranking by Google and also get shared more. Go figure. That seems counter-intuitive, given how most readers barely can stay focused on a 150-word social media post.

Once a blog hits 1,500 words or more, it becomes "longform." Longform is harder to write, because the author has to grapple with structure. In some of today's techy blogs (for example, a blog on some arcane aspect of cryptocurrency), word counts can run as high as 10,000 words.

Start with an 800-word post. See if you can sustain 800 words week after week (or whatever rhythm you choose). If you choose to write longform content (more words than less), your prose had better be good. See point #5 – "Use stories."

## 7. Add an audio version.

I (Dave) have a friend who has been blogging weekly for more than ten years. When he added audio to the post, he noticed a spike in traffic, and he also observed higher open rates in the email that he sent out each to alert readers of the new post. He purchased a podcast mic and connected it to his computer, read his blog, and posted the audio file next to the written post.

The addition of an audio version adds another way to consume the content.

A simple way to add audio is to use one of the many podcast publishing platforms, such as Podbean (podbean.com), Buzzsprout (buzzsprout.com), or Libsyn (libsyn.com). Record your blog, upload the file to the podcast platform, and simply add the podcast player to your blog. You're not podcasting. You're simply using the technology of podcasts to record and publish the reading of your blog.

## 8. Build an email list.

This is a corollary to our point about writing for an audience. Most likely, if you are just starting out, you have no followers to your blog. And no email list to alert readers of your latest post.

Building an email list is a worthy goal. It's how you expand your reach. As soon as a new post is published, send out an email alert to your list. One way to subscribe new people to your list is by adding a form on your site to subscribe visitors to the blog. We recommend that you give something away free (a "prize") for subscribing. The key is that this free prize needs to be valuable to your audience. For example, perhaps provide your blog visitors with a free whitepaper or ebook if they subscribe to your blog. Once they subscribe, an automated email with a link to the white paper or ebook can be set up.

At Journey Sixty6, we publish a weekly email called "Tipster." It's a short blog that we stuff inside an email. We also post the content to the blog area on our website. We created a form that people see when they open our website. By simply adding their name and email address, they say, "Yes! Send me a weekly tip!" and are automatically subscribed to the weekly email.

There are specific and varying rules regarding sending email, such as the European Union's GDPR law, which makes sending unsolicited email a criminal offense. If you plan to build and use your email list, be sure to know the laws of your country.

## 9. Make white space your friend.

We miss the golden era of print magazines. Today, there are only a fraction of the magazines that there were in the late days of the twentieth century. We love the four-color spreads, the photos and illustrations, the creative titles and subtitles, the subheads, and many

types of articles in each publication.

The content in a magazine is tightly packaged. It has to be. Space is limited. Every element on a page must work together with the other elements to move the reader from the start of the article to the end. And from the first page of the magazine to the last.

In magazine publishing, white space is essential to the design of the publication. White space is a design element that helps draw the reader in and guide readers from one idea to the next.

White space is also vital to the layout of your blog.

To make your prose imminently readable in your blog, use short “subheads” or “subheds” to separate sections of your post. Write with shorter sentences. Use one-sentence paragraphs every so often. Limit the number of sentences in each paragraph. Take a look at how this blog post is structured (10 points to break up the copy and create relief for the reader).

These are all little hacks to create white space.

In short, blow some visual air through your copy. Don't fill up every space with words. Make it so reading your post isn't a task.

## 10. Add a photo to your post.

A friend (Dave's) says that finding the perfect photo to fit with his weekly blog takes almost as much time as writing the 800-word post. There's a reason social media is so powerful – images and videos capture stories in a way that words can't. On Instagram, those types of images are called “scroll stoppers.” They tap into human emotion and curiosity.

There's a reason a “picture is worth a thousand words” has become cliché. In a flash, an image helps the reader immediately understand what you want to convey.

If you're a word person, more passionate about language than imagery, that's understandable. But adding a simple photo or illustration to your post will at the very least give some visual relief to your reader. There are several free or low-cost stock imagery sites, including [www.unsplash.com](http://www.unsplash.com). If you can add photos that illustrate the emotion or content of your post, even better. Think of the primary emotion of your post or its big idea – and then look for an image that connects with your reader.

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