

How to Make a Business Blog that Works for You (And Not the Other Way Around)

Have you ever come across a website whose blog only has one or two posts? Or only includes posts over a year old? Most of us have. That's because blogging takes a lot of work. Whether you do it yourself or <u>hire someone</u> to help out, you can expect it to require a considerable investment.

Many businesses underestimate just what it takes to make a blog successful and never take it to the level required to start getting something back from it.

You don't want to be one of them. I don't want you to be one of them either.

A blog can offer a number of really valuable benefits. It's a great tactic for improving <u>SEO (Search Engine Optimization)</u>. It gives you fuel for a <u>social media strategy</u>. It helps you establish yourself as an authority in your industry.

Those marketing-friendly benefits aside, it gives you a way to directly connect with your customers and potential customers, and prove your value to them before they even know they need what you sell.

Good blogging isn't about sales (although it does help with that). It's about building relationships and trust with your audience.

As people shift more and more of their shopping and problem-solving activities online, a blog can help you replicate in the online space the great customer service and community-oriented experience small businesses have long offered in person. The values haven't changed, just the delivery.



Here's What Not to Do

Blogs fail for many reasons. Some of the most common errors can be easily avoided.

- **Don't start a blog just to start a blog.** Know what you want to get out of it.
- **Don't start a blog unless you're ready to commit.** You don't want to end up with one of those ghost town blogs that only has year-old posts. That just makes the company look sloppy.
- **Don't write for yourself.** When you're trying to come up with regular topics, it can be tempting to just think about whatever's interesting to you. You need to think first and foremost about what your audience wants, needs and will appreciate. There will probably be some overlap between that and your own interests, but don't take it for granted.
- **Don't just sell.** The whole concept behind content marketing is to build trust by adding value. People get sold to everywhere they turn. We've stopped caring about what salespeople say in a pitch. We like buying from customers we trust. Focus on becoming that.
- **Don't expect results immediately.** Sorry. It just doesn't work that way. As in most things in life, turning a blog into a valuable marketing tool takes time. Don't give up if traffic and sales numbers don't double in your first 3 months. Good content marketing and blogging means playing the long game, but it does pay off.

Enough With the Negatives, Here's What To Do

Don't you hate those discussions that are all about problems, without any focus on solutions?

While it's important to address what mistakes to avoid, this report is more about what you can do right to develop a successful blog.



DO Develop a Strategy

<u>84% of marketers</u> without a content marketing strategy consider their efforts ineffective, compared to the 66% with a strategy who feel they get results.

Blogging is a significant part of the larger category of <u>content marketing</u>, so the same logic supplies. A blog without a strategy lacks the focus needed to turn it into a tool for improving your business.



You need to start by determining the goals you want the blog to achieve. Is your priority gaining traffic? Authority? Engagement? Higher search-engine rankings? Conversions? You'll probably want to achieve all of these, but picking a couple of primary goals to focus on will help you create a more focused, manageable strategy and allow you to

better track your progress as you go.

Next, consider how much of a budget you're willing to allocate. Your budget should address both the amount of time and money you're willing to commit. You don't want to overload your already busy employees, but you do want to make sure to use any skills and knowledge they can provide. You just need to figure out the right balance between what you can do yourself, and what you can afford to spend money on.

The budget will help you determine the frequency of posts you can handle. With that decided you can work up a calendar. Brainstorm topics with your team and create a calendar of post ideas and their publish dates for the next 2-3 months.

Writing, editing, finding images, crafting good headlines - they all take time. If you find you can't keep up with the original schedule and frequency you planned on, it's ok to scale back and refine your strategy. Managing your plan is far preferable to giving up and neglecting it entirely.

DO Write Topics People Care About

The first and most important step to accomplishing this is deciding who your audience is. Every topic you choose should be based on what your audience is interested in reading about. You need to think carefully about who your potential customers are, what topics they care about, what kind of problems they have, and what needs you can help them solve.

The entire blog needs to be based on them. If they're more inclined to read shorter posts than longer ones, then stick to that. Think about what language they use and speak to them in a way they can understand.

If you have trouble with this step, turn to your customers. Look at the emails they've sent, the questions they've asked, and the problems they've discussed. Talk to everyone who handles customer service in your company about what they hear from the customers, and use it. Don't hesitate to pick up the phone and talk to them directly.

DO Optimize for Search Engines and Social Media

The most important thing to remember when thinking about SEO and social media is that the posts that do the best in both these contexts will be the ones that do the best with people. Making sure you write a good post of value to people in your target audience is paramount.

As long as you've got that part down though, there are some tips and tricks to help strengthen a good post in terms of how it performs in search engines and social media.

1. Have a Keyword Strategy

You can use one of the many keyword research tools on the market to gain a sense of the popular terms being searched in your niche. This lets you know what kind of topics people are interested in, what questions they're asking, and the specific words they're using.

You'll also want to pay attention to how competitive the terms are. A small business will have a very hard time competing on highly competitive keywords, but figuring out more specialized versions of them (often referred to as "long-tail keywords") gives you something you can get real traction with. As an example: don't think "lawyer," think "austin divorce lawyer."

You do want to incorporate keywords into your blog posts. You do *not* want to force them into posts in a way that is clearly unnatural. Only use them where relevant, but you can strategize which topics to focus on and choose the best of several synonyms to stick with based on your research.

2. Make Good Headlines a Priority



EXTER THE STARS AND STRIPS EXTER Headlines are important. Personally, I wish they weren't, because I like focusing on the meatier parts of writing, but a great post with a mediocre headline just won't get read as much. It won't get clicked on as much. It won't get shared as much.

> A good headline is your best bet for optimizing posts for social media shares. There's a lot of advice over at Copyblogger on what kind of headlines get the best results. Study up on what works and give some time to figuring out

the best headlines.

Helpful tip: if you aren't sure which of several headlines will work best, use twitter to test them. Tweet the same post with different headlines and see if one gets better results.

DO Prioritize Promotion

This might be the most important, but regularly neglected rule of successful blogging. There are hundreds of millions of blogs in existence today and putting one up and publishing regular posts is not enough to get noticed, even if those regular posts are awesome.

You have to get out there and let people know you exist.

The most obvious route for this is social media. Pick two or three platforms



to build up a presence on so you don't exhaust your efforts trying to be everywhere at once. You cannot use social media purely as a means for promotion. You've got to devote time to building community and valuable connections. (Helpful tip: Include time

for this in that budget you make in the strategy section.)

Another pretty tried and true method is strategic guest posting. Whatever industry you're in, there's someone out there who has already built up a following of people that fall into your target audience. If you can manage to build up a relationship with them and publish a post on their blog (with

your name and a link to your site in the byline, of course), that can boost your online credibility considerably and gain you new readers.

These are by no means the only options for promoting blog posts, but they're two of the most effective methods. The main thing you need to keep in mind for any promotion method you choose to pursue is: go where your audience is. If you're targeting young, single women with a knack for home decoration, you'll get more out of Pinterest than Reddit. In this step, as in many of the others, make it all about your audience.

DO track, test and refine.

If you do everything right on the first try and all of your posts get great views, shares, engagement and win you new business, you are absolutely the exception and not the norm (and go ahead and start your own marketing business, cause you're basically a prodigy).

Most of us have to learn as we go. Trying out different topics, headline types and promotion efforts and tracking what works will give you the information you need to improve your strategy over time.

If you don't track what's working, you won't know what to keep doing and what to cut out. Your time is too valuable to keep making repeated mistakes, simply because you don't recognize them as mistakes.

Set up <u>Google Analytics</u> on your site and blog. Pay attention to the site stats, to the keywords and other sites that are driving traffic to your site, and to the number of conversions driven by your blog. The only way to get better is to try and to learn.

So...

That should be enough to get you started, but if you have any questions or comments, I'd love to hear them! You can email me any time at <u>kristen@austin-copywriter.com</u>, and see more great content about blogging and content marketing for small businesses at the <u>Austin Copywriter blog</u>.

Good luck!