



BLOG DEFINED

A "blog" (derived from the term "Web log") is basically just a Web site (or sub-site) with two key differences: First, it's extremely easy to add information to it. A blog is like an online journal, so you just log in, type what happened today, post it, and you're done! Second, you can add a simple little feature that automatically tells a whole bunch of other Web sites that you've made an update to your blog -- every time you make a change. This is typically done through an RSS Feed.

RSS Feed

RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication", and is a standard way to provide content to other sites and software that want to carry your "content" (often Blog entries), much as a news feed works.

Blogs as Marketing Tools

What you may not know is that a blog can also be a very powerful marketing tool for your business, and some people actually earn an income just from blogging alone.

The fact is, blogging is fast becoming an extremely important strategy for any online marketer. An effective blog can: drive swarms of traffic to your main Web site; generate more product sales; create an additional stream of advertising income; be a great customer-service tool; and much more!

Blogs have an informal, conversational style, and readers can join in by commenting on each post. Blogs can be chatty, informative, opinionated and often humorous, and it's this "human" aspect of blogs that draws many people to them.

But the best part about blogs is how accessible they are to everyone. Blogs are free (or very inexpensive) to set up using services like Blogger or TypePad. They're also easy to use (you can literally create your own blog in less than five minutes) and easy to promote with all the new tools and resources that have been created specifically for blogs.

The fact is, blogs are no longer just online diaries of people's personal lives. Both online and offline businesses can use blogs to take their products and services to a wider audience, increasing their traffic, leads and sales.

Specific Uses and Benefits to Your Business

Let's look more closely at a few of the extremely powerful ways your business can benefit from a blog. With an effective business blog, you can:

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Humanize your business. Because a blog is much more informal than other Web sites, you can write posts in your own voice and give your business more of a human face. This helps reassure prospective customers that there's a "real person" behind the Web site who'll take care of their needs. It also allows you to inject much more of your own personality into your online business than your main sales site could do.

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Your blog can act as a kind of interactive FAQ, allowing your customers to submit questions and you to answer them. You can also provide product updates, how-to articles and other information of relevance to your customers. Prospective customers who see your blog will be encouraged by your commitment to good customer service.

With its automatic archiving feature -- by date and category -- a blog is a fantastic content-management system. It's easy for you to post new information on a regular basis, and it's easy for your visitors to find the information they want. With a well-written, regularly updated blog, you can become a reliable resource in your industry and build a following of loyal readers who depend on your content. These people will be your best potential customers.

If you already have a Web site, **a blog can give your traffic levels a real boost.** For starters, your blog will attract new visitors that you can then redirect to your main sales Web site through links and special offers. But an even more effective technique is to use strategic keywords and links to specific sales pages to dramatically improve the search engine rankings of both your blog and your main Web site.

You can **give your credibility a real boost** by regularly posting valuable and relevant information on your blog. It's a great way to establish yourself as an expert in your subject area, and allow your visitors to feel much more comfortable buying from you.

You can actually **sell products directly from a blog,** or you can use your blog to mention new products and direct visitors to your sales Web site.

There are several advertising programs available, such as Google AdSense, that allow you to monetize your blog and generate an extra revenue stream.

Excited yet? You should be -- blogging's not just a winning strategy, it's also a lot of fun! The beauty of blogging is that you can easily incorporate it into your daily schedule of tasks. You can even blog when you're on the road.

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Successful Blogging

But what does it take to become a really successful blogger?

If your content isn't interesting and relevant to your target market, your blog won't work. It's as simple as that. You'll be surprised, however, how easy it is to find things to write about if you really put your mind to it. It could be news articles about your industry, product updates, interviews, personal insights into topics of importance to your target audience, and much more.

I won't lie to you: there are some days when I really find it hard to find the time to post a new article. But if I don't post, no one will come back. It's like subscribing to a daily newspaper but only getting a copy delivered now and then! Post often and your audience will keep coming back. And regularly adding fresh content to your blog also gives you a boost in the search-engine rankings.

It's important that you write in your own voice. A blog is no place for formality and corporate speak. It's more of a forum, a place where ideas can flourish and topics of current interest can be debated. You don't even need to be a brilliant writer; you just need to be able to relate to your audience and give them good content.

Starting a blog can take as little as five minutes. Of course, starting a blog is the easy part; turning your blog into a strategic tool that drives traffic and sales to your online business is a completely different matter.

Building a truly effective blog that keeps people coming back again and again takes a lot more than five minutes; it takes time and dedication to develop a blog that keeps your audience coming back for more.

About the Author

Edward Rees is a Partner at The Still and has over 25 years experience as a business owner and President of several companies. Ed has consulted for businesses in data analysis for the SBDC at the Wharton School, as well as co-authored a patent. He has presented to diverse groups at technology development, medical, and pharmaceutical conferences.

About The Still

An intellectual property creation, marketing, and media consulting firm, The Still handles all aspects of your company's branding and positioning efforts. The Still provides media metrics analysis, marketing audits, and market research, as well as marketing execution and idea creation. See

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