db practice

Getting started with your business blog

Running a successful blog for your business, large or small, requires a bit of discipline and habit forming before anything else. These are our recommendations for getting you in the groove.

Getting started

A blog acts like a keystone in any content and social media strategy. It is a structured way of putting additional content on the site (great for PageRank and long tail traffic). At the same time as increasing conversion rates, it can also help to give the company a more human face. On larger sites, a blog can be a useful tool for directing attention to content around the site which might otherwise be hard to find or buried deep in the archives.

But if you're reading this document, you probably already know *why* to run a blog for your business. Let's get into *how*.

A successful blog is:

- **Regularly updated**

  This point cannot be stated strongly enough. We recommend updating the blog at least once per week (preferably more often) and sticking to specific dates and times for doing this (always publishing a new post on Friday afternoons at 3pm, for example).

- **Substantial**

  Posts should usually be 500 words or more in length and give genuinely useful information, advice or opinion.

- **Informal in tone**

  This doesn't mean adopting any "cool" or "casual" style that doesn't come naturally to you. Just keep in mind that a blog is the place where you can address potential clients and customers more personally than you do on the rest of your site. People don't go to a blog to read company press releases or anything that resembles them (although it's fine to post company news in addition to more informal content).

Forming the blogging habit

While the idea may seem daunting at first, blogging gets easier and easier as you form habits around it. **Habit** is the operative word here: once blogging has become a familiar fixture in your working routine, no longer just squeezed in amongst your other tasks, it won't feel like a chore.

As with all training and habit forming, it is best to start small, with something you know you can accomplish. Success at the beginning encourages you to build and drive yourself further, whereas failure at an over-ambitious task or schedule you have set yourself usually leads to its being dropped entirely, rather than sensibly scaled back; those of us who have started demanding diets or exercise regimes, only to abandon them after a few days or weeks, will have discovered this.

The exercise analogy can be extended even further with blogging. Muscles and fitness improve with usage and training, and the same goes for your creative and writing faculties. Initially, it may feel difficult to come up with new ideas for blog posts every week. However, the more you use those particular parts of your brain, the more you use those particular parts of your brain, the more
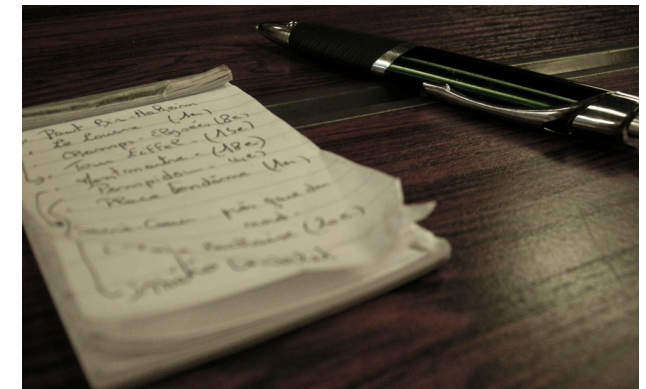

Image courtesy of Nicole_N

they will yield. Before long, you'll probably have more ideas than you can use!

Maintaining the habit

These are our guidelines to help you stay on top of your blog it as it develops:

- **Communication**

  If more than one person is going to be updating the blog, everyone needs to know exactly where their responsibilities lie, in terms of when and what they should be posting, who will be proofreading their posts, etc.

- **Organisation**

  Develop a posting schedule, specifying when new posts will be published and what they will be (Mondays for posting tutorials or tips, Fridays for fun/offbeat content, for example).

- **Regularity**

  Make sure you stick to your posting schedule, at least in the early days of the blog. Later, once blogging has become better integrated with the rest of your work, you can allow some flexibility. Keeping to your schedule at the beginning, though, can help to turn blogging into a matter of habit. Note that most blogging software allows you to write your posts in advance and schedule them for release at a specific date and time, so a schedule of one post a week need not mean that you actually write one every week: posts can be written in batches ahead of time if that works better for you.

- **Forward-thinking**

  Keep a list of ideas for new posts which everyone involved in the blog can access (a spreadsheet on Google Docs can work well for this). Add ideas to the list as soon as you have them: you will forget them if you put it off till later! Even ideas that seem a bit silly or irrelevant should be added – you never know when they could provide stimulus on another occasion.

- **Saving**

  Keep a selection of draft or unfinished posts in your blogging platform. If you've made a start on a subject but don't have the inspiration to carry on with it, it's always a good habit to save your work, even if only a rough paragraph or two. Subsequently reviewing and perhaps finishing off old drafts into new posts can be a great way to beat writer's block.

Software

The truth of the matter is that your choice of blogging software doesn't actually make that much difference to the final results. Some platforms are better than others, but these differences are far less important than the organisational and content issues covered above.

That said, do be sure to host your blog on your own web site. Using a third party blogging service, such as Typepad or Blogspot, will cause you to lose most of the search engine optimisation benefit. If you don't have a blogging platform built into your web site already, download and install a package such as WordPress. There are other decent platforms available if you shop around, though we usually recommend WordPress as it is easy to use, well supported and customisable.

Image courtesy of Patrick Hajzler

We strongly recommend making a start on your blog right away, even though it may take you a while to get your WordPress (or other platform) install looking and working perfectly. You can spend forever tinkering, but Google and other search engines will reward you for having good quality content on your site now, no matter what it looks like. It's sad to say, but there are plenty of people making good money from imperfect web sites,

and a lot more people making no money from perfect sites forever waiting to be launched…

Summing up

Once you have been blogging for a while, you will realise that there is a lot more to it than these simple rules (and even these "rules" are more than slightly flexible!) There are loads of tips and tricks you will come across and develop for yourself, from in depth traffic analysis on your blog's pages to moderating user comments.

But the main thing that we're getting at here is that you have to start walking before you can run. And that means creating regular habits and processes around your blog, and sticking with them at all costs.

But once blogging has become absolute second nature to you, then you can really start to run!

About db and the author

db is a search engine optimisation (SEO) and on-line marketing company, based in Cambridge, UK. We provide successful SEO and pay per click (PPC) campaign management services to sole traders and small to medium sized businesses throughout the UK. Additional services include blogging support, conversion rate optimisation, newsletter management and social media strategy.

Rob Chant has been working on the web for over 10 years in various roles, first as a designer and developer, and more recently in web marketing. He is a regular contributor to searchenginewatch.com and runs many projects on the side.