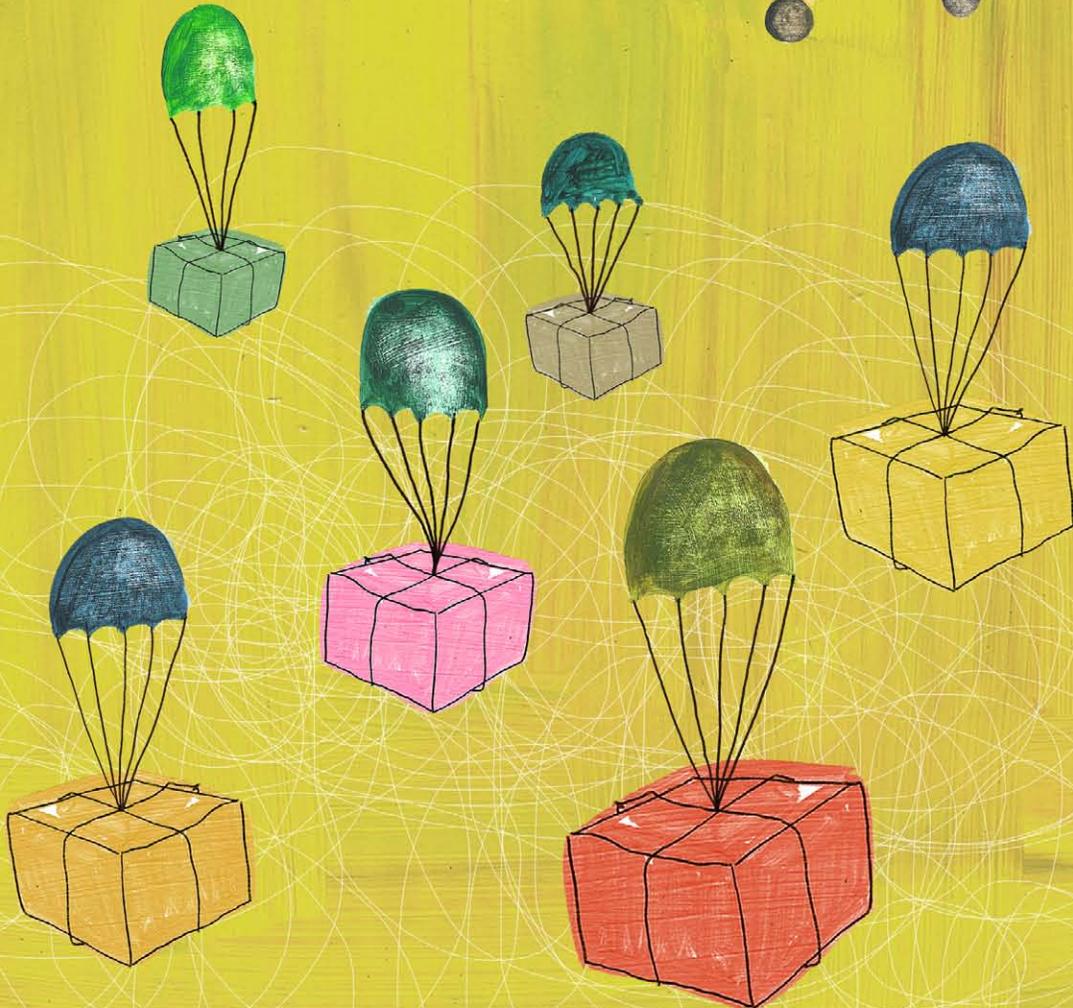


The Art of Corporate Blogging





CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The corporate blog is a bit of a sneaky beast; it seems like an easy thing to get underway, but as you start to plan you find that creating and maintaining a blog that properly represents your brand and appeals to your market may not be as easy to do as you'd originally thought.

Those of you who've ventured far into the corporate blogging waters are well aware of the work it takes to nurture a company blog, but those of you who are just beginning to wade into the shallow waves are still in learning mode, right? If you're just starting out, this eBook is for you. Even if you're a seasoned corporate blogger, a refresher never hurts. But before we get into the weeds, let's frame up the discussion first.

Why Blog?

If maintaining a blog takes so much planning and time, what's the point of starting one in the first place? Especially when many feel there's little direct value in blogging at all.

The truth is, there are clearly trackable results from blogging that do tie to that seemingly elusive social media ROI equation. By providing valuable information to your market—not just your customers—you can establish your company as a useful resource and source of expertise, and motivate folks to sign up for a demo of or even purchase one of your products (rather than a similar product from one of your competitors).

If done right, your blog can act as an effective marketing, customer service, sales, product development, and business development channel. But none of this will happen if you don't start from the very beginning: Identifying why a blog would be valuable to your company at all.

How Do You Know a Corporate Blog is Right For Your Company?

Whether you're the one giving the blogging orders or the one receiving them, there are a few things you need to consider before digging into the blog planning process.

Why?

Why do you want to start a blog? What do you hope to achieve by adding a corporate blog to your already-extensive roster of business initiatives? There will be numerous additional questions you'll have to answer throughout the planning process, but you won't get very far without tackling these two first.

Are your customers clamoring for more information about your products? Is there a good amount of online conversation happening around the problems your products or services help solve? Are your products and services so deep that additional, easily accessible information about them could be truly helpful to users (or even prospects looking to get a better feel for your offering)?

On the other end of the spectrum, if there aren't obvious signs that a blog is right for your company, ask the market directly for feedback. Survey current customers to get a feel for whether they'd find a blog valuable, and ask those who are in favor what kind of information they'd like to see. Getting your customers involved from the beginning can also create anticipation and buy-in from that community, which will help propel your corporate blog forward right out the gate.

A Word of Caution

While a blog can help promote your organization, it probably shouldn't be used as a promotional engine, at least not exclusively. Yes, many companies leverage their blog to gain exposure for new product launches and other buzz-worthy moments, but the truth is that customers will care less about what's happening with your company than about how you can help them.

Company and product promotion can be built into your blog in many ways, but that blog probably shouldn't exist solely to house your press releases.

Another thing to think about is that this ebook talks to the creation and nurturing of an external-facing blog. Many of the recommendations made in here translate across blog types, but the focus and goals of an internal blog will be different from that of an external blog, and will impact the nuanced bits of your blog planning. If you want to chat about building an internal blog, just **give us a shout**.

Ready to Get Started?

We've walked through the caveats, and if you've done all the necessary soul searching and are ready to dive into the nitty gritty, read on. If not, though, go ahead and do that, then come back; we'll be here waiting.

Ready? Let's dive in.



CHAPTER 2: Creating a Blog Vision

Even though this blog you want to launch is for business purposes, that fact doesn't take away from the inherent creativity that's needed to build it. You'll have to draft a comprehensive blog vision or strategy to develop a blog that's dynamic, valuable, and sustainable.

A dynamic, valuable, and sustainable corporate blog is supported by and comprised of a few things, including:

1. *Clear but flexible goals;*

2. *Well-defined metrics for tracking progress;*
3. *A clear focus or mission that maps to blog goals and brand character;*
4. *A flexible editorial calendar that accommodates your resources and the priority level of your blog;*
5. *Content that appeals and is valuable and useful to your target readership;*
6. *A feedback/commenting mechanism;*
7. *A “managing editor” to maintain grammatical consistency, oversee posting an editorial calendar adherence, and generally herd the writing cats.*

We'll be talking to those first two points up there in more detail in the next chapter, so let's walk through the others and define what each one means in the context of your business.

Blog Focus

Before getting too far down the corporate blogging rabbit hole, you must define a mission or focus for your blog. Without some parameters for topic coverage in place, even broad ones, there's a good chance your bloggers will be overwhelmed by the creative freedom you've given them and freeze up.

So, ask yourself: With whom are we talking to? What does our audience want to hear from us? Once you've identified your target readership, put yourself in their shoes and honestly answer that second question. Then frame out a mission statement that incorporates your brand promise, your blog goals, and the topics your readers most want to hear, and you'll be on your way.

Honing in on what your readers want to see—rather than what you think they want to see—will help you create a mission statement for your blog that naturally connects with your readers.

Editorial Calendar

Writing isn't easy; it takes discipline and dedication, no matter who you are or what walk of life you come from, and often, without accountability, someone tasked to write won't do it. To create accountability and make sure your blog is being updated consistently with fresh content, put an editorial calendar in place and live by it.

One thing to consider is how rigid or loose you want your editorial calendar to be. For some companies, it'll make sense to maintain a calendar that has every day and blog

post topic accounted for three months in advance. For others, that format might be too stifling, so a weekly call for posts might make more sense.

Figuring out which scenario best fits your blog will take some trial and error, so make note of that and be ready to adjust your tack if you see your progress start to slide backward. Also, consider sharing your editorial calendar with numerous internal teams, or even the entire company; the various perspectives that each team and team member brings to the table can feed your topic coverage and blog post idea generation.

Valuable Content

As we stated in Chapter 1, there are better ways to use your blog than as a promotional engine for your company. Make sure everyone contributing to the blog keeps in mind who makes up your reader base and what kind of information they're looking for.

While you might feel compelled to tout that industry award your company received last week, your readers probably have little to no context for why that award matters. More importantly, they probably don't care.

Provide tips, advice, and guidance that your readers find valuable and useful.

Feedback Mechanism

If you want real participation on your blog, make a commenting function available for your readers. Let them talk to you and to one another out in the open. By doing this, you give your readers a readily available community to generate ideas around your blog posts and provide you great feedback about your products, services, and/or industry.

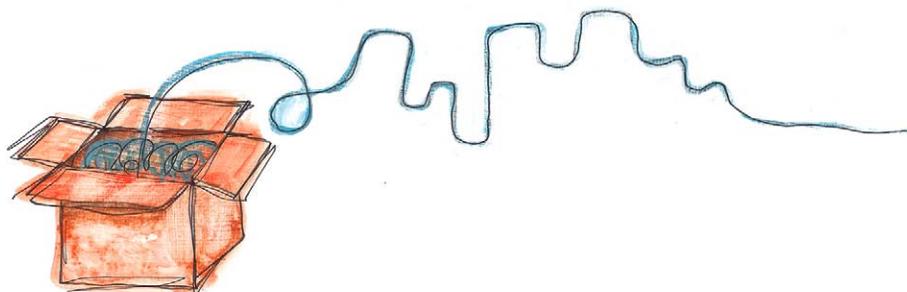
If you decide to make comments unavailable, consider including another feedback mechanism like an email link or feedback form to give your readers a chance to speak up. Do what you can to keep connected to your audience.

Managing Editor

You've probably guessed already that a successful corporate blog is a fairly big ship, which means you need someone to steer and keep it on course. Enter your blog's managing editor. In the case of corporate blogging, a managing editor creates and regularly updates the blog editorial calendar, acts as point person for contributing writers (that includes reaching out to writers to keep them on schedule), edits content according to brand guidelines and grammar rules, and oversees the actual posting of blog content.

In some instances, this person also keeps tabs on the blog's overall health and works closely with designers to make sure any blog hiccups are taken care of quickly and smoothly.

So, now that we've covered the basics of the anatomy of a blog vision, let's dig a little deeper into setting goals for your blog and defining the metrics that you'll use to track its progress.



CHAPTER 3:

Goals, Metrics, Measurement, and Benchmarking

Goals and Benchmarks

Setting goals for your blog requires some higher-level goal and objective assessment. What are your business' overall goals? Again, what brought about this desire to launch a blog? Are there certain pieces of your current strategies that aren't performing as well as you'd like and you believe a blog would help? In what ways do you want your blog to contribute to your business?

Contrary to popular belief, your blog can contribute directly to your bottom line. It can also help build brand reputation, develop a passionate community around your company and cause, act as a customer support engine to answer questions and concerns, and do much more. What that blog of yours is going to achieve is up to you. Some fairly common goals for blogs include:

1. *Increase lead generation/product purchasing;*

2. *Increase brand recognition and, more specifically, positive word of mouth around ABC product;*
3. *Answer calls from our customer base to provide tips and advice around our products and the problems they help solve;*
4. *Provide a common community playground for brand fans and advocates to come and contribute to our company conversation, offer us feedback, and meet one another;*
5. *Develop reputation as a thought leader and educational resource within industry and market, respectively.*

Notice that these goals are fairly broad; for all the goals you identify, you'll need to set specific objectives to work toward, as well as benchmarks for each objective. So, for example, let's take the example goal of increasing lead generation and work with it (since, really, we're all in business to make money, right?).

So, a specific objective for this goal might look like: Achieve a 5% share in overall lead generation within 90 days tracked directly from the blog to demo sign-up.

If you're just starting out, your baseline is going to start at 0%, and you'll work from there. It's okay that you're starting from 0, but recognize that you have to start somewhere to have something to measure against. From your baseline, set reasonable benchmarks that you will track regularly. In this case, those benchmarks might look like:

- *Month 1: 1% overall share*
- *Month 2: 3% overall share*
- *Month 3: 5% overall share*

Once these numbers are set, you'll need to define the specific blogging tactics you'll use to reach your benchmarks, and also select how you will track and measure your progress.

Tactics, Metrics and Measurement

So, now's the time to select the ways you're going to achieve your blogging objectives. Inspiring folks with your content to believe in the value of your product and ultimately buy it is going to take some trial and error to achieve, but that's okay; that's what all this tracking and measurement is for.

The tactics you employ within your blog will need to appeal to the human side of commerce. That means creating a tactic roster that looks a bit like this:

1. *Post 3-5 times per week, and dedicate one post per week to directly addressing market issues and, more specifically, customer concerns.*
2. *Share a minimum of 2 blog posts per week on brand-owned social networks.*
3. *Invite one “super user” or fan per month to contribute to your blog with their success story or tips and advice for other fans.*
4. *Vary blog post formats by incorporating short videos, photos, and podcasts into content mix.*
5. *Include subtle calls to action and links to demo sign-up and/or product overview pages within each blog post.*

When your list of tactics is complete, set up metrics and tracking mechanisms that map to your objectives and properly monitor your activity. If you're monitoring lead generation, draw out and review the path that people take to sign up for your demos or head over to your purchase pages, and measure metrics like blog conversions, blog post shares, and direct recommendations of your company or products.

Enlist web analytics platforms like Google Analytics, WebTrends, or Omniture to see which of your posts are converting and what topics are getting the most attention. Use a social media monitoring platform like Radian6 to watch where your blog posts travel across the Internet and see how many people positively speak about or even recommend your company and/or products in conjunction with sharing or talking about your blog.

While some of what you measure will directly show what you're achieving with your blog, consider tracking other metrics that help you formulate future blog content. Pay attention to not only what you're accomplishing but also to the outlying information (business intelligence, really) that will help you continue to shape and adapt your blog to meet your market's needs.

Hopefully this goal setting and tracking overview has answered your most burning questions, because it's time to move on.



CHAPTER 4: Resource Needs

We've laid the groundwork for creating a blog, but what does it take to actually get one up and running? How many people need to be blogging for your company? And what kind of hours will your blog team be spending writing and maintaining that blog? Let's start from the beginning: People.

People

The number of folks you pull together to create and maintain your blog is contingent on the goals you've set for your blog, the number of days per week you've decided to post, and the human capital you've got available. Most often, blog teams will start out fairly small, with just a couple people writing and managing, then grow as a company sees returns from and increased interest in the blog.

If you're planning to update your blog daily (e.g., Monday through Friday), you will need at least one person to act as managing editor and two to three people to contribute blog posts (that number can include your managing editor, mind you).

While it'd be great to say one person can do it all, the truth is that corporate blogs thrive from a variety of viewpoints and voices. A business blog can become stale if it only houses a single perspective, and it can also become taxing on your solo writer to blog daily if they're not used to that kind of writing commitment.

Assess the growth and capacity of your blog and blogging team, respectively, every six

months to see if you need to get more folks involved in blog maintenance and content creation. If you need to add to your team and don't have the internal resources to do so, consider inviting brand advocates and influencers from your external community to contribute.

Time

Taking into consideration editorial calendar planning, correspondence and collaboration, blog post writing, editing, the time it takes to code and publish a blog post, and measurement and tracking, you should dedicate a minimum of 20 hours per week to blog maintenance, spread across the team.

Ask your team members to track their time carefully and report it back to you on a regular basis to identify any opportunities for streamlining the blogging process

Platform

As you prepare to select a blog platform, make sure to answer these questions first:

1. *What is our budget for this blog? Can we pay for hosting and design?*
2. *How technologically inclined is my team?*
3. *Do we want any special features built into our blog?*

There are countless blog platforms available that range from free, hosted options to paid, self-hosted, customized options. Many companies use Wordpress' paid solution and self-host their blogs, so they can customize the look and feel of it and tweak features as necessary.

Tracking

Tracking the progress of your blog is going to take more than just logging the number of comments you receive on a given blog post. You'll want to watch statistics like where your blog content travels across the Internet, where folks who visit your blog go on your website, and how many subscribers you're gaining each month.

As stated in the previous chapter, the metrics you select to monitor your blog's performance must be tailored to your blog goals and objectives, but no matter which metrics you choose to employ, you'll need some tracking solutions in place to capture that data. You'll also need to assign someone on your blogging or analytics teams to aggregate this data and report it to you on a regular basis.

Commitment

Commitment doesn't really fit nicely within the definition of "resources", per se, but it's a hugely important factor in sustaining a blog, whether corporate or personal.

Your blog "ring leader" will have to spend time and energy on inspiring your team to continue creating even when inspiration is at an all-time low, convincing people (internally and externally) of the value of your blog, and creating a framework for maintenance after you're gone.



CHAPTER 5: Blogging Challenges

As is inevitable with pretty much any effort you take on, be it business or personal, you're going to run into some challenges along the way, and probably more than once.

There are some fairly common challenges you'll face while maintaining your corporate blog, including feeling like you're running out of topics, getting your bloggers to submit their posts on time, and hitting a negative nerve with readers. And, if you don't see the returns you'd hoped for with your blog and are forced to shut down, how do you do that gracefully and without tarnishing your company name?

Running Out of Blog-Worthy Topics

If your blog is up and running long enough, you'll probably hit a creative wall at some point and feel like you've just plain talked yourself out. This is a natural part of writing, and it can be combated a few different ways.

- **Read articles and blog posts about what's happening in your industry.** This is somewhat of a no-brainer, but it bears repeating. To step it up a notch, hunt down posts that are controversial or present arguments you don't agree with. Often, writing inspiration can come when we want to fight back against a specific point. Use those opposing viewpoints to light a creative fire under you, so to speak.
- **Poll your readership about what kind of content they want to read.** Checking in with your readers every now and then is an important part of maintaining your blog health whether you're jonesing for writing topics or not, but tapping into their collective knowledge and various perspectives can provide great inspiration for blogging. Those who regularly participate on your blog will be happy to share their thoughts with you.
- **Monitor social media discussions around your market.** You should be doing this anyway, but broaden your perspective when you're looking through data to start identifying potentially important conversations. As you continue to do this you'll start seeing trends in discussions and hone in on discussion points worth taking to your company blog.
- **Read articles and blog posts totally unrelated to your industry.** Admittedly, it can sometimes be hard to see the forest for the trees when you're wading in the mire of your work. So stepping out of that mire into a totally different world can be helpful in clearing your head and opening up your eyes to new ideas and concepts. When you're feeling stuck, hop out of your work realm and into something totally different for a change of a pace and refresh on your perspective.

Holding People to Blogging Deadlines

In an ideal world you'd be able to recruit enough people to blog for your company that you'd rarely run into missed deadlines or slow blog posting rates. Unfortunately, this world isn't ideal, and many businesses just don't have that many people to contribute. So how do you hold your bloggers accountable?

- **Again with the editorial calendar!** If you can give people a hard deadline, and maybe even a specific writing assignment to accomplish, you're more likely to get their post when you need it. Studies say that getting as specific as possible with project commitments and deadlines will increase the likelihood of meeting those deadlines and objectives. Also, keeping a flexible calendar in which posts can be shifted around can help substantially with accommodating slight delays in post submissions.

- **Reduce blog post frequency.** While quite a few folks advocate posting on a daily basis, sometimes that's just not feasible. If you find your bloggers are missing their deadlines because they've been assigned too many posts in too short a timeframe, scale back posting by a slight margin to accommodate. That being said, make sure you let them know that you're accommodating them and that they must commit to meeting you halfway and meet their new deadlines.
- **Work with bloggers (and their superiors) to carve out daily writing time.** If possible, work with your bloggers (and their bosses, if necessary) to dedicate at least an hour a day to their blogging. This time probably won't stay static and in one place, but if you can get buy-in and commitment from your bloggers and their bosses at the beginning, you can use that commitment as a reminder if things ever start to slip. By making that joint commitment, you'll also be setting the tone of importance around this blog.

Angering the Masses

If you've set out to push the envelope of your industry and share your opinions, on both individual and company levels, then you'll definitely hit a nerve with your readers at one point or another. Hopefully, in most instances, that nerve will be a good one, but don't ignore the possibility that you'll hit a bad nerve and send your readers reeling. Recovering from that nerve hit will take work, but there are some ways you can calm folks down and save face.

- **Stand by your word.** Wait, *what?* Yes, stand by what you say. Take time to clarify your point and make sure that everyone understands the statement you're making, but don't cow to the masses. The clearer you make your brand mission and opinions, the more the "right" customers will come to you. And as a rule people appreciate commitment to a belief or cause, even if they don't agree with it. Don't be rude, but stand firm.
- **Apologize, but do it in the right context.** What do we mean by that? If you made a claim that was completely out of line or incorrect, own that mistake and apologize for it. After all, you were wrong. If a person is just irate because they disagree with your perfectly valid statement, there is no apology necessary.
- **Invite an immediate contribution from the opposing parties.** Healthy discussion and productive discourse are a necessary part of growth and progress. As a company, you should welcome alternative and vastly opposing viewpoints that are voiced intelligently and politely. To show your blog readership that you respect their view, share it with them and let them use it as a forum to speak up. Caveat: Set

loose rules for reader contributions so folks don't run rampant with the opportunity you've given them.

- ***Do not delete blog comments or shut down commenting altogether.*** Unless your readers start making defamatory claims or attacking each other, let them share their thoughts. The truth is that if you shut down those opportunities to speak up on your blog, your readers will find somewhere else to speak out, and they'll be even more upset that you didn't give them the chance to talk. Give them the floor and let them say their piece openly.

Closing Your Blog's Doors

If there is one thing we know for sure in business it's that we will fail before we succeed. Okay, maybe not all the time, but failure is something we have to accept as a distinct possibility whenever we start a new project. If you've tried your hardest with your blog, put in all the blood and sweat and tears you can, and nothing good is coming from it, it is okay to shut it down.

Before shutting down, get approval from all necessary parties to pull the plug. Make sure you've archived any blog content that you can use as educational or marketing collateral. Then draft a final post thanking the readers who have stuck by you.

In your final post, be open and honest about why you're ending your blogging journey, and include links to your company's other web outposts so people can still find you. Also, let people know that, if they'd like access to any of your blog content after the blog has been deleted, they can contact you, and include an appropriate email address.

Decide as a team how long you want to leave your blog live after your final post has been published. And, once your post has gone up, make sure to reply to comments that come your way. There will be folks upset with your leaving the "blogosphere", so take the time to reassure them that they can find you in other places and keep in contact in other ways.

Our hope is that we've equipped you with enough information and advice to make your blog successful, but knowing how to gracefully bow out never hurts. Let's not end this ebook on a sad note, though...

CHAPTER 6: Wrap-Up

Well, that was probably a lot to digest. How do you feel about launching a corporate blog? If you take the time to really build your brand into your blog and talk directly to your target readers, there's a good chance your blog will be successful.

Measure your blog's progress and don't be afraid to toss tactics out the window that aren't working for you. A blog is a living, fluid part of your business, and it's going to change with the tide of your industry, so tweak your strategy accordingly.

Need More Information or Help?

We're big proponents of the value of blogging and are happy to help you figure out if blogging is right for your business. If you've got any questions or comments, just give us a holler.

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