

Blog Profit Strategy



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Introduction To Blogging

Marketing on the web has evolved from the days of simple websites and e-mail communications, to a complete interactive experience for prospects and customers. Not only is it important to attract visitors to your site, but providing valuable information on a regular basis is a goal of many entrepreneurs and web-based businesses.

Even offline businesses are learning about the value in having an online presence, and establishing a website or blog is a part of this process.

This eBook identifies the critical components of blogging, and how a simple blog can help you launch your business marketing program. Internet marketing is becoming easier and more efficient with free and low-cost tools readily available, and setting up a blog is one of the easiest ways to get started.

More people turn to websites and the Internet to find information and products and your business can benefit from having an established blog and website presence.

After launching your blog, you'll need to work on marketing and promotions. Even though you may have extremely valuable information on your sites, making sure people are actually reading it on a regular basis will help you build traffic.

Building traffic is the first step in increasing your sales potential. Think about how valuable it would be to have a steady stream of traffic to your website; the more often people are visiting your site and browsing, the higher the chances of making a sale.

You can start to earn revenue from your blog both directly and indirectly; directly from a product purchase or online sale, and indirectly through ad revenue and building up a network of affiliate products.

Some business owners choose to make their blog an extension of their current website, while others create a standalone entity instead.

Whatever the case may be, it's important that you distinguish and identify what the goals of your blog and website are, and how you plan to create something valuable for your target market.

Blogging can be used for a variety of purposes, but when you have a specific goal in mind, the entire process can be much easier, efficient, and more productive.

What Is A Blog?

The word 'blog' was first coined in 1997 by John Barger as a shortened version of the 'web log.' Since then, web logs, or blogs, have quickly become an effective journaling method and information-sharing opportunity for dozens of industries.

Independent website owners, small online retailers, mid-sized e-businesses, and even corporations are jumping on board the blog revolution as a new way to reach out to customers.

Blogs are a simple journalistic style of sharing information on the web, and are set up in a similar way as a basic website.

Most of them are made in a standard template, and you'll notice that even though the basic layout is the same for most blogs across the internet, many are also customized to mirror a website or create a unique entity of their own. In either case, simple journal-style entries are common across all blogs, and many are filled with pictures, video clips, and even pod casts.

Blogs are designed in this simple format so that they can deliver a small and concise piece of information. They are sometimes considered to be online journals, although a business blog is generally not so personalized. Consider them to be snapshots of information, providing key news, updates, or insights on particular topics. For a

business, this type of online presence can be especially effective for providing visitors with a unique point of view.

Blogs consist of a few key elements that make them stand apart from traditional websites, and each segment of the blog is designed for easy reading and simple navigation. Blogs are made of:

- ☐ Blog entries
- ☐ Date of entries
- ☐ A permalink
- ☐ RSS Syndication modules
- ☐ Archives
- ☐ XML icons
- ☐ Blogrolls
- ☐ Timestamps
- ☐ Calendars

Each blog entry is the piece of content for a given day, and this is usually time stamped to let readers know when it was published. The entry title is the key area that will draw your readers in, and can be followed by an excerpt that leads to further reading, or the entire post can be presented below it.

Blog entries can have multiple links within the entry, and these are usually added to keywords and tags. It's an effective way to lead readers to additional information, or simply direct them to another entry on the blog.

The date of each entry is hyperlinked to the calendar on the website, and this can be accessed as an archived collection of all of your blog entries. The permalink is a permanent link to that blog entry that can be bookmarked in one step. If you or another reader is interested in linking to your site, they can use this permalink as a source.

“Real Simple Syndication” or RSS feeds and XML icons are usually found on the sidebar or bottom of the blog, and these can help you syndicate your content.

Syndication means that you can send your information to web aggregators where people can read the information with a newsreader or content aggregator. It’s an effective way to help avid readers get your information in their preferred format and delivery.

Instead of visiting your blog directly for information, these readers will subscribe to the RSS feed so they receive a headline every time you publish something new on the blog.

The archives section of your website is important for maintaining a steady record of all entries, and make sit easy for readers to catch up on previous posts. This is also an indicator of how often the blog is updated—always keep in mind that many blog readers are looking for timely and relevant content on almost a daily basis; building up an archive can help you create interested and continuous readership.

Blogrolls are another important element of a blog as they can help drive traffic from other sites. Blogrolls are most effective when your blog is listed on the other blog's own blogroll. The easiest way to get listed on somebody else's blog is to simply make a request, and let them know that their site is already on your own.

Why Are Businesses Turning to Blogging?

Many businesses choose to create a blog that keeps track of current news or events; others allow authors from within the company to maintain a blog as a 'journal' and update visitors on what they think about current events or simply providing commentary.

Other blogs are set up to highlight a product launch or specific advertising campaign. While creativity can help to generate fresh traffic, you will need to set the tone and overall goal of your blog before you even begin publishing.

Blogs offer a conversational style and tone in their delivery, and the type of presentation you adopt will largely depend on your business and who you are trying to reach.

You may position yourself as an expert in the industry, and start to share content with insights, articles, or recommendations. Your business may hire a professional blogger or writer to update the public on current events or news, and this can be an extension of your website that contains press releases.

Understanding the potential and flexibility of a blog can help you carve out exactly what your business may need. There are a few significant benefits of blogging for your business including:

- ☐ A low-cost solution to communicating with your customers in 'real-time' without having to reorganize or redesign your current website
- ☐ An inexpensive way to launch a new brand campaign or product
- ☐ A simple way to update your subscribers and readers with news
- ☐ The ability to join feed networks and distribute your content, information, and articles to a larger target market
- ☐ The ability to share your individual expertise or knowledge with thousands of people
- ☐ An easy way to start publishing immediately, with limited software required.

Making your blog stand out amongst the 9 million + blogs on the internet today will take some time, and gaining a good search engine presence is critical to your blog's success. In addition to the significant benefits of blogging, even the most basic blog can be a tool for marketing, promotion, advertising, and public relations.

Blogs allow businesses to reach out to customers directly with news and contests, and the 'real-time' insight can be the very reason why customers stay in touch.

A blog can help your business:

- ☐ Answer frequently asked questions
- ☐ Launch contests
- ☐ Start a promotion or offer promotional coupons online
- ☐ Share new information on product releases
- ☐ Start a photo showcase
- ☐ Send out newsbytes or commentary
- ☐ Provide feedback on customer suggestions
- ☐ Share media files, audio, and video content

A blog may also be a valuable resource of employees. It may be set up on a company intranet or server to share a newsletter, set up weekly posts on a particular topic, or provide employees with resources and tools they need as part of the company.

Blogs are an informal and easy-to-navigate platform on the web, and any department may even construct one on their own. With the onset of embedded videos, pod casts, and audio files, visiting a blog can be a complete multimedia experience.

Blogs can help you create a strong community and build traffic; the cost of generating traffic from search engine marketing and traditional direct mail can lead to thousands of dollars in marketing expenses.

A business blog can help you build a community of strong readers and in turn, make your blog and domain much more credible.

In turn, search engine placement becomes easier and helps you capture market share simply based on your ranking. This is possibly the biggest benefit of blogging, helping you grow your customer base and capturing the attention of interested prospects in an innovative way.

Many blog readers subscribe to feeds and newsletters on their own your business can eliminate at least some of the cost of trying to solicit customers, the 'old-fashioned way.'

Additional chapters in this e-Book will help you learn how to make use of each of these areas to your advantage, but you can start understanding the potential of a blog and your efforts to market it, after just a few weeks.

Why People Are Using Blogs to Find Information?

More and more people are turning to blogs to find information they need, especially when they are looking for industry news, insights, commentary, or simply a perspective on an issue.

Instead of consulting only traditional online resources such as newspaper websites, white papers, or magazine articles, subscribing to a blog is proving to provide additional value.

Blogs that are full of new and useful information are also important to search engines; since the blog itself can accommodate for thousands of inbound and outbound links, it becomes a rich resource of information for search engines to find.

Gone are the days where keyword-friendly articles were the only way to climb up the search engine ladder; today's successful blogs are finding their way to the tops of the search engine rankings simply based on readership, quality information, and links.

As a result, more people are likely to find your business and stay connected with a subscription. The key benefits of turning to a blog for information include:

- ☐ Easy to read content
- ☐ Relevant industry information
- ☐ Connect with an expert on the subject

□ Simple and casual format to get news

Blogs on a specific topic or niche are also becoming a simple resource for daily reading; people are setting up RSS feeds and aggregators where they receive the web's most current information instantly.

Instead of having to visit each and every blog or website, these readers can stay in touch with your blog, company, and brand with inbox delivery that they themselves have initiated.

People are actively seeking information from blogs, and in many ways, direct marketing is no longer needed; people are choosing to subscribe to your content on their own.

Marketing Online: The Basics

Marketing online is a requirement for all types of businesses, giving you many benefits beyond the typical marketing programs that offline businesses use today. When you're considering what type of strategy will work best for your business, you'll need to start by thinking of ways you will reach your target market.

The internet has opened up multiple opportunities for businesses of all sizes to interact with customers, reach out to niche groups, and increase market share well beyond the competition.

Online promotions are much more than putting your website content up on the web and hoping people will read it; it goes a step beyond a basic brochure that describes your services, and this is why blogs in particular can help you launch your business to the next level.

Still, making sure people can actually find your blog or website is an important part of the puzzle. Marketing online requires a different approach than standard advertising strategies, and you'll need to start by doing some market research.

Making Your Business Succeed On the Web

Succeeding on the internet is much easier when you can create a step-by-step marketing plan and execute it effectively every step of the way.

Many internet marketers overlook the benefits of making an Internet business plan, a well-designed course of action that can help you determine and reach measurable goals. This can really help you refine and optimize your marketing strategy so you can make your business a success.

So, the first step is to develop an Internet business plan. You can integrate your current business strategy and marketing efforts with this, and really strengthen your brand in the process.

A part of your strategy may also include marketing your URL and e-mail address on non-Internet media. You might try an approach where you are including all the information on business cards, stationary or posters.

Internet advertising doesn't have to be limited to the computer, especially when there are so many ways to promote your brand in the offline setting as well.

Ultimately, your goal is to drive as many visitors as possible to your site. No matter what stage of development your blog or website may be in, it's important to create a unique and targeted marketing approach so you can create a steady stream of visitors. Just remember that every single visitor is a prospective customer.

A few methods you can use to start marketing online effectively include:

- Increasing search engine rankings
- Improving visibility by regular participation on discussion forums
- Finding relevant discussion forums and niche groups in your market
- Creating your own community, or becoming a regular contributor to existing and popular networks
- Designing your blog or website with search engine optimization in mind.

Simple Ways to Increase Visitors

Each visitor to your blog or website is a potential customer, and any changes you make to the overall site design, usability, or quality of content on your blog can create or damage the customer-client relationship. You want to avoid turning visitors away because of a poorly-constructed site or presentation, and set your sights on finding ways to boost traffic.

Making yourself more discoverable is one part of “**Search Engine Optimization**” (**SEO**) techniques, and can help you reach the top rankings of search engines so potential visitors can find you after a simple search.

Increasing visitors requires both a technical approach and some direct marketing. You’ll want to start by making sure you are **hosting the blog or website on your own domain**; this makes it much easier for search engines to find, and also makes your URL much more credible. You can then use the URL name itself to promote it, adding a ‘www’ tag to your postings, e-mail signatures, and other information that you share on the web.

The next step is to **write good titles**. Even people who are already subscribing to your blog may not actually click on the information you have written unless they are compelled to do so.

Make sure your titles are on topic and describe the content you are posting. Using keywords in your titles makes it much easier for search

engines to discover them as well, and you can use tools such as Overture and WordTracker to generate some keywords that work well with your site.

Another effective way to start generating visitors is to **participate in discussion groups**, forums, and even other blogs. Taking initiative with your own social networking can help you gain a steady audience very quickly; try participating in online communities related to your industry, or run some keyword searches yourself and find out what your prospects are talking about within your niche.

It's likely that you'll stumble across a few different discussion forums and groups, many of which that can get you instant traffic by clicking on your signature each time you participate.

You'll always want to **tag your content** as often as possible, since many people run searches based on tags and keywords, larger sites including Digg, Technorati, and StumbleUpon use tags to sort all content published on the web, and you can reach a larger audience simply by breaking apart your content and submitting it to the appropriate categories.

Another simple and effective way to increase traffic is to **simply write quality content**; the more quality you provide for your readers, the higher the chances that your audience will link to you and share the information you are presenting to others.

This is word-of-mouth marketing at its best, and you can create some very unique articles over time. Visitor traffic increases dramatically when your posts are submitted to larger directory sites and social bookmarking networks; think of ways that you can start developing some very unique articles, content, and posts. Remember that original and media-rich content is in high demand!

Improving Your Search Engine Rankings

As your website or blog URL starts to spread across the internet, you'll also need to focus on improving your search engine ranking placement. There are many ways to improve your search engine placement, and this is essentially what search engine optimization (SEO) specialists aim to do.

The first thing you need to remember with SEO is that major search engines crawl/spider the web automatically using a specific set of rules called **algorithms**; this means there are specific rules and guidelines to keep in mind when designing and posting to your site.

First, you'll need to focus on keywords. Keywords that match your titles and headings are one of the most effective ways to achieve a high search engine placement. Targeted keywords are essential for developing your ad campaign, and are more favorable to search engines than general terms.

Another way to improve search engine rankings is to regularly submit quality content; the web is becoming more competitive than ever, and

you will need to provide 100% unique content so that the algorithms can confirm that your site is legitimate.

Search engine optimization experts also focus on the overall design and descriptions of the body of your website. Each piece of content needs to have a strong title tag, along with META description tag.

The META tag helps to describe the article in a few keyword-rich sentences, and can help you boost your ranking immediately. (You do need to be aware however that meta-tag keywords and descriptions do not carry the weight with Search Engines they used to.)

The more often you provide complete content, the higher the chances of obtaining a higher rank. Publishing fresh content regularly will help you do this consistently, making it much easier to draw traffic from organic searches or the search results not shown as "Sponsored results".

If you are looking for a more structured program to increase visibility, paid inclusion sites are another option. You will need to work with your marketing budget on this, but once your site is fully optimized, you can start to submit to search engines and databases that can offer you placement across multiple networks.

Altavista, Ask Jeeves, and Submitaweb.com are all examples of paid inclusion sites that can boost your blog or website's visibility after a few simple steps.

Finding Your Target Market

After you've established your website and blog, submitted to search engines, and are starting to get favorable rankings, it's also helpful to start finding your target market directly. With millions of blogs and communities on the web today, it can be overwhelming to consider filtering out your target audience, but there are many ways to reach your audience, especially with today's social media tools.

Traditional ways of finding your target market include doing a market research study, or analyzing reports. However, social media makes it much easier to find out who and where your target market really is.

Social networking sites such as MySpace.com, Ryze.com, Friendster.com, and even LinkedIn.com can be a direct lead to your target market, and all of them are equipped with search engines where you can locate groups and communities based on keywords.

For example, if you are running a website or blog that specializes in delivering real estate news, you may start your target market research by simply typing in 'real estate group' or 'real estate community' into any of the search boxes on these sites.

Results will show you a list of blogs, communities, and discussion groups where people are already sharing information; this is your opportunity to join in and start promoting!

Many social media sites encourage setting up a profile and interacting on a daily basis; this is your opportunity to create an online presence and engage with potential visitors and customers directly. Your profile can be shared with thousands of people, and a simple link to your blog or website will help you boost traffic instantly.

Developing Brand Awareness and Why It's Important

Both websites and blogs can generate extra traffic when you start making use of online tools and resources on a regular basis.

Developing brand awareness involves sharing your blog and news to a variety of channels; with the growth in social media and niche communities, it is becoming even simpler to locate your potential target markets and present your site to thousands of people.

Brand awareness on the internet involves reaching a high search engine ranking, as well as developing an online community of interested readers. The first step in developing brand awareness is increasing your search visibility. A well-organized site or blog will be easily picked up by the search engines, and the more valuable your content is, the higher the chances that you will get search traffic.

Making the best of social media is another effect way to develop brand awareness. More people are becoming comfortable with networking online, and will often turn to social networking to discover new sites and share them with friends.

The more prominent your placement is on these sites, the easier it will be to become a well-recognized expert in the industry. Learning the basics about social networking, social bookmarking, and submitting your site to the right directories can help you increase your visibility considerably.

Making sure that the blog is regularly updated is another essential step. This is not only valuable to your readers, but you will be much more favorable to search engines as well. Search engines are always looking for the freshest and newest content on the web, and the more often your site or blog is updated, the higher the rankings will be at the end of the day.

The viral effects of developing your website or blog are another opportunity to develop brand awareness; your brand will quickly become recognized after people start linking to you, your content, and even providing feedback on your posts. The idea is to generate enough interest for your blog so that you are regularly staying in touch with potential customers and visitors.

Developing brand awareness also involves your credibility; the more that people find your site or blog to be valuable and turn to it as a resource, the higher the chances that you will build traffic fast and easily.

Building your brand will help you build a solid following of readers, subscribers, and eventually customers.

These people will be very comfortable associating with you and your company, and will be much more likely to turn to you for advice, recommendations, and products.

This is one of the most important parts of developing your online marketing strategy with success, and you can enjoy continual referrals and opportunities with a solid customer base.

Setting Up Your Blog

Blog Platforms: An Introduction

Setting up your blog will require a little research and review; you'll need to consider the factors of cost, the time and skills you currently have, and your readiness to learn some new software.

Almost all blog software is very easy to use and offers a variety of plug-ins and other resources to make yours unique. You don't necessarily need to hire a professional or specialist to start publishing; most blogs can be setup with a few hours, and you can learn how to use them as you go.

We'll discuss how to make use of today's leading blog platforms. The three most widely used platforms include:

☐ WordPress

☐ Blogger

☐ TypePad

Choosing the Right Blog Platform for Your Business

You'll find a number of free and low-cost fee-based blog platforms available, and most of them use a simple text editor box for publishing. The cost differences vary depending on the type of blog

you are running; if you are going to host the blog on your own domain, you will need to manage hosting fees. Blogs run within the blog's domain are usually free, but you will not have a simple address to work with. If you want a unique URL, it's better to consider the different packages, even if you're starting out with the very basic.

Most basic packages allow you to add your own design elements and start making money with advertisements immediately. Most free hosts will not allow advertising, which limits your ability to start generating a separate stream of income from ad-clicks and sales.

If you're just starting out, it's best to pick the basic version so you can at least start driving traffic to advertisements.

Next, you'll need to consider how much you know about blog design. If you're already proficient with web design and templates, this will be fairly easy, but if you do not know where to start there are plenty of blog templates available.

Blog templates can help you construct your basic site, and then change it later when you need to. These can be easily replaced with a more comprehensive design, but most blog platforms provide a variety of options, colors, and basic attributes to make your blog stand out.

Blog platforms such as WordPress can be very helpful in getting you setup with a professional look, especially if you have limited design skills and are not working with a web or graphic designer immediately. Blogger also offers customizable options, and you'll find a range of

colors and styles to choose from. Moveable type is somewhat limited, but you can still find a basic, well-organized template.

Basics of Blog Setup

Even though each blog platform has different elements and plug-ins available, you'll need to come up with some ideas of your basic blog setup and structure. This is comprised of the types and categories of information you intend to share with the audience. For example, you will need to create content for your:

- Profile page/About Us section
- A contact page
- Resources
- Blog categories for each type of news
- Deciding whether to accept comments
- Basic marketing elements such as a blogroll or link exchange
- Space for advertising
- Feeds
- Ad Sense sections
- Logos
- Blog archives
- Page headers

After identifying the basic elements of your blog, it's time to choose the actual platform you will be using. It's not a good idea to switch platforms at a later date, since you'll probably end up reformatting and

editing every piece of content. Choosing the right fit from the start is the best way to keep things moving along smooth and simply.

Using Blogger

Blogger is a widely-used blogging platform because of its ease of use and simple templates. You'll find a number of startup blogs that use blogger to publish online, and anything with a '.blogspot.com' extension indicates that it is a Blogger blog. Blogger is free to use, and only requires a username and password for setup and access.

You won't need to install any special software to get started, this blog platform uses a simple WYSIWIG editor. Once you've registered for your free account, you can choose a template and just start copying and pasting content into the publishing toolbar.

If you need to add images, just use the upload image tool and paste it right in. Blogger is one of the most user-friendly blogging platforms available and very useful for beginners. You'll find enough fonts and color options to make your blog stand out from other sites, and can upgrade to your own domain very easily.

Steps to Create Your First Blog Post with Blogger

You can start blogging with a Blogger blog in just a few minutes; after registration and choosing a template, you can start posting immediately.

□ Step 1: Registration

The first step is to register with your name and e-mail address; using your Gmail account will help make this step much easier.

□ Step 2: Enter your basic information

This is where you will enter your e-mail address, a nickname, and set your password. You will also be asked to agree to the terms of service.

□ Step 3: Naming the blog

This is where you will enter the blog's title, and you can see how it appears as an extension of the .blogspot.com URL. If your first choice is taken, Blogger will make some recommendations or ask you to try something else.

□ Step 4: Choosing a template

This is where you'll choose from the gallery of templates; look for something that complements your brand, or start with a basic black and white design. Remember that you can always change this later.

□Step 5: Start publishing

You can start posting right away, and a good place to start is your contact information. Make sure to include all relevant contact information, website URL's, and other information that you think your readers will find valuable.

□Step 6: Publish with one click!

After entering your title, you will be all set to publish and can see the results immediately.

Using WordPress

WordPress is quickly becoming a leader of blog platforms, and offers a more professional look and easier navigation than blogger. WordPress is also compatible with a variety of content management systems, so if you are looking for something that may integrate with your commercial website at a later date, WordPress will be your best choice out of the three.

WordPress makes it easy to upload images, create categories, and works well in different browsers. It may also have some SEO benefits since each posting can be easily tagged and therefore searched by the search engines.

From a blog setup point of view, WordPress also takes just minutes to set up. You'll want to start at the WordPress homepage and can

download and install the WordPress software for free. WordPress makes it very easy to add text, images, and even movie files so if you're looking for something that can offers media-rich content, this will be your best choice.

You can choose a free blog on the WordPress domain at wordpress.com, or set up a blog on your own web host.

WordPress offers a variety of quality hosting programs and services right on the site; take some time to review costs and benefits of DreamHost, HostICan, Laughing Squid, and BlueHost to find out what works best for you. Most of them offer a high amount of disk storage space, competitive monthly transfer rates, and unlimited domains under one account.

Steps to Create Your First Blog Post with WordPress

You'll need to start by downloading and installing the WordPress software program, and then get started with the signup process.

a) Step 1: Registration

You'll start by entering a username, password, and an e-mail address. After accepting the terms of service, you'll be asked to name and describe your blog.

b) Step 2: Choosing a blog name

This is where you can choose the title and header of your blog, along with a brief 2-3 line description. Keep in mind that this

will be added to the WordPress database immediately, and will be viewable to the audience whether or not you publish content right away.

c) **Step 3: Verify your authentication code**

WordPress will send you an e-mail to verify your identity and introduce you to your new blog.

d) **Step 4: Choose a template**

You can choose from over ten attractive WordPress themes and templates, and can switch these out whenever you choose. WordPress also allows you to upload logos or your own design if you choose.

e) **Step 5: Navigating the dashboard**

After confirming your site, you will have a chance to enter through the dashboard. Just login with your username and password.

f) **Step 6: Review the Manage, Posts, and Categories links**

The 'Write' tab is located in the top-left hand corner. This is where you'll be able to post content directly into the editor, and the easiest way to do this is to copy and paste directly from your favorite word processing program, or enter the information as you go along.

g) **Step 7: Adding images**

WordPress allows you upload image files by clicking on the

'upload' button at the bottom of the page, and attaching the image. After you have uploaded it, you will need to select it for appropriate placement.

h) **Step 8: Save and Publish**

It's important to always save your work as WordPress does not do this automatically. When you save a draft it will be available for viewing in the 'Manage' tab and you can go in and edit for publishing later. Pushing 'Publish' will send the information immediately to your blog.

WordPress offers a variety of plug-ins and other tools as you get more comfortable with the overall format and design. It's a good idea to spend a few hours navigating through your options for setup and design, and there are also many WordPress forums and resource sites available when you're ready to upgrade. WordPress offers great value for businesses of all sizes, and can be customized very easily.

Using TypePad

Many business professionals choose TypePad for a simple yet sophisticated blogging platform. This is not a free service, but does offer you a free 14-day trial to test it out. It's easy to use, and you can use simple drag-and-drop tools for organizing your content, images, and other site elements.

If you want to build your own template, TypePad also lets you create a customized template with colors, fonts, borders and your header

image. This blog platform also uses a basic WYSIWYG editor so you don't need to worry about HTML and coding.

It's a great choice if you're looking to include a videoblog, upload podcasts, or publish other media files easily. You can also tag all content, and publish with an RSS feed. A basic level package starts at just \$4.95 per month, while the Premium level with maximum storage costs \$29.95 per month.

Setting up your TypePad blog is simple; you'll need to register with a member name, password, and set up your blog address. The .typepad.com extension will be added if you are not hosting the blog on your own domain, and after agreeing to the Terms of Service, you will be all set up.

TypePad offers a clean and smooth layout, and definitely makes your business site look professional. It's a great choice if you have a budget to work with as you set up your blogs, and offers plenty of features for upgrading and customizing as your site grows.

Other Considerations

Another important consideration after setting up your blog is the amount and frequency of your postings. It may be helpful to create a schedule for posting, and almost all blog platforms allow you set a time and date stamp so you can control when things appear on your

blog. This can be helpful when you want to pull together a batch of posts and release them one by one.

Doing this will make sure that your blog is continuously updated, and you can choose to do this once per week, once per day, or even every hour if you want to!

This strategy will help you to plan ahead and provide quality content on a regular basis. Remember that many readers simply subscribe to your blog through the RSS reader, and having something fresh and new available on a regular basis will help them stay 'in touch.'

You'll also be able to earn recognition from search engines, since the crawlers are constantly looking for websites that are constantly updated.

The Basic Blog Structure

Understanding how each element of your blog comes together is essential for the long-term success for your business blog.

After you've gained some experience with using the platform you've chosen, it's a good idea to take a close look at each area and learn what can, and perhaps cannot be, optimized to suit you best. Besides the visitor traffic counts, the overall structure and pieces of your blog can help to increase exposure.

Do keep in mind that every area of the blog can help your site become more search engine-friendly. Not only does this reduce overall marketing costs when you are trying to obtain search engine rankings, but you'll also start to see more 'organic' traffic simply by tweaking a few areas.

Everything from the blog layout, the template you choose, and the fonts and colors you use will have an impact on your final blog.

You'll want to choose wisely when it comes to each area, especially paying attention to color schemes and other themes that may help with branding purposes.

Layout and Basic Composition

The layout is a part of your blog design, and your goal is to create something that will leave a lasting impression. More and more blog networks are creating 'generic' blogs that have very little creativity and are focused more on the new content instead.

Even though the content of your blog is the critical element, what the visitor sees and feels as they explore your blog is just as important.

If you choose a simple layout and design, just makes sure to navigate it yourself and see what your focal point is.

Are you focusing too much on the sidebars? Is the header distracting?

Can you easily read the content, or do you have to squint to make sense of the font and style? All of these elements will be unique to your blog, and since it may be an extension of your company and brand, it's vital that you use something that will make a lasting impression.

The blog layout consists of:

- ☐ Fonts
- ☐ Color themes
- ☐ Line spacing

- ☐ Header styles
- ☐ Image boxes
- ☐ Advertising space
- ☐ Columns (one-, two-, or three-columns)

Picking Appropriate Color Themes and Palettes

The first step in constructing an appropriate layout involves the color theme. You want to use colors that either match or complement your main website, or even just go along with your printed materials. Remember the value in branding, especially if you have traditionally been an offline company and are now moving things ahead on the web.

Color psychology can have a positive or negative effect on every single visitor that reaches your site, and you can make the most of your branding strategy by using special colors that evoke specific feelings. The following colors are generally associated with different emotions, feelings, and reactions in both positive and negative ways:

☐ **Red:**

excitement, warmth, energy, and stimulating in the positive, but aggression and excessive visual impact in the negative. Red is a strong and powerful color, and can be used properly in subtle ways. It demands attraction and recognition, but can also be perceived as overly aggressive.

□ **Blue:**

intelligent, cool, efficient, and trustworthy in the positive, but unfriendly and aloof in the negative. Blue is essentially soothing, and the different hues can create a peaceful and serene feeling. However, it can also be perceived as cold and unemotional so you will need to pick the right tone to deliver the appropriate message.

□ **Yellow:**

confident, creative, strong, and friendly in the positive; depressing, irrational, and even fearful in the negative. Yellow is a very stimulating and energizing color, but overusing it or using the wrong tone can work against you.

□ **Green:**

balance, rest, peace, environmentally friendly in the positive, but bored, bland, and stagnant in the negative. Green can be used in very positive ways for a refreshing and energizing color palette, but too many dark tones can be perceived negatively.

□ **Orange:**

warmth, security, fun, and abundance in the positive, but frivolity and disorder in the negative. Orange is a very energizing color, and can also attract immediate attention; however, too much of it can indicate foolishness or not being taken seriously enough.

□ **Pink:**

femininity, love, tranquility in the positive, but weakness and inhibition in the negative. Pink can be soothing and attractive, but can be draining and overdone very easily. Avoid using it unless it clearly matches and represents your brand.

□ **Brown:**

seriousness and warmth in the positive, but lacking in 'flavor' or taste in the negative. Strong browns can be helpful as accents, but a site completely done in brown can indicate boredom or lack of creativity.

Using powerful color combinations is very helpful when choosing the layout of your blog, and most blog platforms offer 'color combos' so you make the right choice. If you are designing your palette from scratch, just remember the principles of each color's psychological impact and proceed accordingly.

Choosing the Number of Columns

The number of columns in a blog has been debated time and time again, and there are both advantages and disadvantages of each. All blogs are set up in as one-column, two-column, or three-column structures. The best way to pick one is to simply choose something that suites your blog's purpose. For example, if you plan on linking out to partner sites or other blogs, you'll need a three-column structure. This will give you enough space to create a blogroll and

relevant links on the right sidebar, include your blog commentary down the middle, and then put advertising and other links on the left side bar.

A two-column blog is most advantageous for a blog that has limited advertising. You will still have space for an extensive link roll and perhaps some contact information, but all reading will take place on the left side of the page.

A one-column blog is very basic, and is a good place to start if you want the blog to stand alone and *not* link out to different areas. This will help you create immediate interest to the content itself, and will definitely be less distracting for most web visitors and readers. Sometimes a minimal look works better, especially if you have a lot of content that requires attention.

Font Styles and Your Blog

Unless you are using a customized blog template, there are only a few standard font styles to choose from. This is not necessarily a bad thing, since most web users are becoming with the typical font styles such as Arial, Times New Roman, and Verdana. These are easy to read, and can help people 'scan' blogs much more easily. Choose a style that complements your website and company image, and you'll easily avoid using something that may not even download correctly on all web browsers. Just keep in mind the impact and readability of the text on screen, and you'll be making it much easier for all readers to continue reading.

Formatting Text

Blog posting works under a similar format as writing articles, and the more SEO-friendly you can make each entry, the higher the chances of reaching the top of the major search engines. When you are writing your headings and titles, be sure to include keywords as often as possible. Each title of your blog will become an extension of the URL, and this is what search engines can find and rank accordingly.

A well-formatted blog entry will also include bullet points and headings. Even though blog posts are generally much shorter than articles, developing a well-organized post will help increase readership and be more favorable to search engines. It's a simple step that many startup bloggers overlook, and can help significantly as you make your presence online.

Making sure that you tag and organize all blog entries is another important element of your blog site design and overall layout. Archives of each blog entry are automatically created for review, but you can organize each entry by adding 'Categories' and posting each item into the appropriate section. This makes it easy for people to find specific keyword-based posts, and will also help with search engine rankings.

Designing a Customized Blog Template

If you decide to do something a little more creative, you may want to pursue a customized blog template instead. Customized blog template services are offered by many web designers and companies, and give you the chance to pick exactly the colors you want from your own website's color palette. If you want to include a special font, logo, or other artwork of your own, this is your best choice.

If you have web design skills, try developing your own blog template with the basic layout elements in mind. A customized template can be made with the same elements of a typical blog, but you will have the freedom to place and organize it as you would like to. Alternatively, there are upgraded versions of blogger platforms available.

A Few Notes on Squarespace for a Customized Blog

Squarespace is another valuable blogging and content management system platform. Squarespace is very similar in setup to WordPress, but gives you more freedom to set up your basic blog layout, include specialty items such as catalogs, media galleries, and discussion forums, and works with a simple drag-and-drop format.

If you're new to web design, this is a great choice when you're looking for something professional but unique. Squarespace offers different packages depending on the bandwidth and customized options you need, but even the basic plan is comprehensive enough to develop something that will stand apart from your competitors. You don't need special software to use it, and everything is very clean and efficient.

Why a Free Template Might Be a Better Choice

Still, if you're new to blogging or simply can't decide how the color scheme and layout should come together, a free template will save you time and upfront investments. You can always change your color choices later, and can try different types as you go along.

WordPress, TypePad, and Blogger make it very easy to switch between themes as you start publishing, but you'll want to settle on something well before you start marketing and promoting your blog. Changing themes and colors too often may lead to confused visitors, so be sure to make some final decisions before you move ahead with promotions.

A free template will be your best choice when you want to:

- ☐ Save time
- ☐ Start publishing immediately
- ☐ Cut down on initial startup costs
- ☐ Create a simple accompaniment to your website

Blog Layout and Pageviews: understanding the Connection

The visible layout and overall look of your blog has a strong impact on steady web traffic, and there are many elements of basic web design to consider as you piece together the blog.

Making sure that all the graphics, logos, headers, and fonts of your blog are consistent with your message will help you deliver information

clearly. Avoid the temptation to fill your blog with random content and images; the quality of your postings is always important.

Making sure you are posting frequently is another easy way to increase page views. The more that people realize you are updating the blog regularly, the higher the chances of regular subscribers.

You want to make sure your layout is attractive and can transmit the right message on every visit. This will create a unique experience, and help you develop steady readership over a period of just a few months.

Introduction To Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing has become a valuable way for many websites to start selling and promoting products without the hassles of inventory and costs of traditional selling, and each affiliate makes a commission per sale.

Even if your business is selling its own products and already has inventory available, you may consider joining an affiliate program as a merchant to further your market reach.

Affiliate networks provide a cross-platform marketing opportunity, making it easier for more interested buyers to find you. However, there is a balance between affiliate links and selling products on your own; if a visitor does not find your site to be credible they may be turned away simply by the idea that you are trying to sell something.

What is An Affiliate Program?

Before jumping into major linking and applications, it's important to learn about what an affiliate program actually is. Affiliate programs are similar to MLM businesses in the offline world, except that they may have stricter requirements and do not require a lot of upfront time or monetary investment. Affiliate programs pay the blog or website owner a commission on every sale that is generated through a link on the owner's site; this means that any traffic generated from your blog can easily turn into a potential customer for another company.

It's important to keep this in mind when selecting the affiliate programs and networks that you work with. Even though you are not necessarily driving customers *away*, you are directing them to other resources. If these products are in any way competitive with your own, it may be necessary to reconsider your options.

Commission checks are only valuable if you are providing value to your visitors, and not turning down an opportunity for a complete sale of your own!

Selecting and Joining an Affiliate Program

Most affiliate programs designed for bloggers require a minimum amount of traffic and a reasonable amount of quality visitors each day.

Many companies and merchants do not want to work with blogs unless they've reached a specific page rank or search engine presence, so it's important to read the guidelines and learn what the requirements are for each. Knowing how you fare against similar blogs will help you learn about which affiliate networks to join, and there are many ways to get started. Today's leading affiliate programs include:

- Linkshare
- Amazon.com Associates
- Clickbank
- Commission Junction

linkshare

Linkshare offers a very comprehensive affiliate link network, and is made up of some of today's leading brands and e-tailers. The linkshare program is easy to setup, and costs nothing to join. Commissions on products sold are competitive and set at attractive percentages; you'll find brands including Chase, Avon, Macy's, Best Buy, Netflix, and others that can complement your blog and industry.

The list of Fortune 500 clients offers you an opportunity to create a strong lineup of new products, but balancing this out with **quality content** on your blog and a **diverse set of links** is a top priority.

The reporting system is smooth and easy to manage; you can simply log in and learn about traffic results and the analytics section helps you learn about how your customers are responding. Linkshare is one of the largest pay-per-performance affiliate programs available, and can turn out to be a very valuable opportunity for your business blog.

Amazon.com Associates

The **Amazon.com Associates Affiliate** program is another valuable way to help sell products through your blog. This program offers a competitive commission structure, and you can earn up to 10% in referral fees for revenue generated from specific links. The associates program offers you a chance to promote and sell different products,

but may not work for all businesses who are trying to generate product sales of their own.

Consider this a valuable supplement to your blog if you choose to use it; it can be a great resource for readers to learn about what your company *recommends*, and can open up another revenue income source.

If you choose to place a banner on the site, you can also earn a commission or bonus for any visitors that sign up for the Amazon.com associates program themselves.

Clickbank

Clickbank is another popular resource for bloggers interested in affiliate programs, and offers a range of e-books and software products instead of 'tangible' products. These are valuable for companies that may be looking for educational or resource material to add to their blog, and isn't necessarily a good fit for all e-tailers and ecommerce sites.

It's a good idea to take a look at the type of inventory available; Clickbank is broken down into different categories including entertainment, health, B2B, computing, and society/culture. You may find some e-books and other digital products that complement your website, or write a post about your own experience after downloading a specific piece of text or software.

As long as you keep in mind that you are simply recommending these products for your users, you can use Clickbank to your advantage. Commission rates are fairly high, simply because there is such a large assortment of 'niche' products available; some commissions offers as much as 70% per sale.

Commission junction

Commission Junction is a fast-growing affiliate network that has gained recognition by many professional bloggers. This affiliate network also offers digital products from a variety of industries, and works as an intermediary between your company and the affiliate programs themselves.

The company provides steady statistics of your performance with each company, and a multitude of products; you can choose different styles of your 'ad placement' as well, to include text links, buttons, or your choice of ad banners. Whatever the case may be, it's a good way to learn about the multitude of affiliate merchants available, and applicable to you.

The application process for all the major affiliate programs is relatively simple, and rarely requires an upfront investment. Clickbank is the only exception, and there are different programs available for businesses interested in participating in a network of 'premium' merchants. Premium level affiliate networks enable you to earn higher commission rates, and in some cases you'll have access to a wider range of products and merchants.

After reviewing your website, traffic counts, and approving your registration information, each site will offer a username and password for easy login. Once you login to your account, you can apply directly to each participating affiliate merchant and learn about the terms of service.

Make sure that you read the entire terms of service agreements for each program you intend to join; there may be conflicts of interest with your own business or advertising on the site, and you will want to review the requirements in detail as you get started.

After agreeing to the terms, you will have an opportunity to send in a request to join. All merchants that approve your site will then notify you about your status, and you can start building a roll of links to include on your posts.

Some merchants require a direct link with a picture accompaniment, while others are satisfied with an embedded URL only. Your goal is to make sure that the post itself is in line with your company goals, and can strategize and place each link accordingly.

Additional Items to Consider when Selecting an Affiliate Program

Using affiliate marketing on your blog requires some strategy, but the step can benefit both readers and blog owners simultaneously. The goal is establish credibility first and gain a good understanding of what

your readers may enjoy. Then your blog can serve as a product recommendation site, rather than a 'seller.'

It's important to think about the potential impact of **every post**, especially when you are providing links and directing visitors outside of your own site. Knowing what is acceptable – and what isn't – will be critical to the success of your business blog.

When making the selection of companies and programs you want to work with, you'll always want to consider your audience.

IF they are generally shopping for specific products, a little research on recommendations and similar products may be required before you start posting about them. Making a genuine recommendation is much better than having random posts just 'selling' all the products in your affiliate channel.

Remember the value of credibility as you proceed to populate your blog with affiliate links. This will help you filter out any potential damage to your readership.

Any time that you are promoting or talking about a product, you will want to include links embedded within your post. This is the best way to 'soft sell' and avoid being intrusive.

Instead of direct banner advertising, or even putting in a picture with a link attached, contextual advertising will help you promote the product with a 'helpful' link of the product for sale. This can help with

positioning and avoid turning off new visitors if they realize it is an affiliate link.

Even though many people are turned off by the idea of blogs as 'selling platforms,' you can be strategic about positioning and create advertorial-like placements as needed.

The Importance of Trust on Your Blog: Making Affiliate Links Work for You

Increasing readership of your blog will take time, marketing, and quality posting on a regular basis. As a result, you'll need to be very careful how you present affiliate links and related products. In many cases, people will simply be turned off by the idea that you are attempting to sell something, and careful positioning is a huge factor in how valuable your affiliate links will be.

Web readers are looking for fresh and new content, so there is no reason why your posts should fall short of quality, whether you are making a product recommendation or even attempting a direct sale.

A blog is a very powerful tool for your marketing and overall business presentation, so partnering up with affiliate merchants that are relevant to your industry is just as important as writing quality posts and presenting valuable information.

Building trust is an essential element for ongoing readership of your blog, and you can earn your reputation as an expert by being consistent.

If you choose to write about site and products, make sure that they offer a unique perspective and are not just a simple 'show-and-tell.' This can help with the integrity and credibility of your site tremendously, and will be likely to be shared with others more often than not.

Some bloggers use the tactic of 'cloaking' affiliate links by adding text links within simple text, and not mentioning the product at all. This can be helpful in some situations, since most web-savvy readers will catch the link code and affiliate ID, and may be turned off.

Others may choose to 'hijack' or bypass your affiliate link because they are uncomfortable with this unknown link. Others may simply be blocked by anti-adware programs so users may not see them. Another, perhaps more valuable strategy, is to mask your affiliate link by redirecting them to another page within the site or blog.

When the user hovers over the link itself, clicking on it will take the visitor to an internal redirect page that you need to create separately.

The redirect page is a simple page that lists all the products and affiliate links so anyone who clicks on the link will be taken to another page with just the product.

Another important factor to consider is the value of comments. You may decide to place affiliate links in comments that you post on other websites, or in response to reader comments on your own blog.

Again, keep in mind the credibility and value you are providing; if it seems like a 'direct sell', you will simply start turning off potential visitors. Answering comments appropriately and regularly will help you earn the respect of loyal readers.

Increasing traffic with credibility in mind is one of the most effective ways to market and promote your blog, and ultimately, your business.

Credibility And Your Blog

Establishing credibility is both a short-term and long-term goal for your business blog, and more valuable information that you provide for your audience, the higher the chances of success.

Toady's competitive blogosphere makes it challenging to meet the needs of your target market if you do not pay attention to quality and maintaining some consistent standards as you start posting.

People who are turned off by your blog are less likely to return; with thousands of blogs on similar subjects, it is easy to lose traffic because of a lack of experience, poor writing, or simply not updating your blog enough.

Valuable blogs receive ongoing traffic as they start showing up on directories and indexes across the web. These include sites such as:

- ☐ Technorati
- ☐ Daypop
- ☐ Blogdex
- ☐ Blogstreet
- ☐ Digg

All of these directories receive thousands, even millions, of visitors each day. Each item that is listed on the site receives ratings or reviews from other users, and you can start establishing credibility simply by joining. These sites also contain thousands of articles and topic matter related to your subject; they can serve as effective research tools when you are developing blog content, and can give you some valuable links to work with as you start developing fresh ideas.

When your overall site is indexed on these directories in the appropriate category, this also provides some credibility. People who are searching across these networks can see that your blog may be more worthy of attention, especially when you include a logo, title, or description for the catalog.

Elements for Credibility: What Your Blog MUST Have

There are some essential elements that your blog must have in order to be credible. These are a combination of the site structure and design, as well as the style and type of content you start posting. Each one is discussed in detail below, and the blog must include:

- Author name and company (if any)
- Contact information
- A brief Bio or About Us section
- Blogroll
- Links to resources
- Well-balanced visual elements
- A steady amount of ads

- No spam in comment boxes
- Compelling language and headlines
- Proper language, free from typos
- References to sources
- Carefully placed affiliate links (if any at all)
- Author responses on comments
- Appropriate language and conduct

You'll start with providing the author name and company; this is essential for helping your readers make a 'human' connection to your blog, and they should be able to contact you directly with any questions.

Blog readers are looking for an 'insider' perspective on most issues, and it is very helpful for them to be able to distinguish company marketing materials from an actual first-person perspective. Knowing who the author is will help to bring the message of the blog closer to home.

This goes hand-in-hand with the contact information. You can include your e-mail address or even a phone number if necessary.

The goal is to make sure users can trust that the information is coming from a real person, and they have the freedom to contact the author if necessary. This can help you create a connection with both customers and random visitors, providing credibility for your content.

Next it's a good idea to provide a brief bio. This can also take the form of an 'About Us' section that briefly summarizes who you are, why the blog exists, and what you plan to include.

This can be helpful for anyone who simply stumbles across the blog and needs a quick summary of what your blog is about. This information may also be included on the homepage, as it can help direct users to the appropriate resources—your main website, for example—instead.

The blogroll is a very effective marketing tool, as it helps readers see who else is linking to your blog, and where to find more information. The blogroll is your connection to other blogs in the blogosphere, and credible blogs listed here will in turn help you earn some credibility. A blogroll should be comprised of at least ten to fifteen different blogs or websites.

It's a good idea to send out e-mails to everyone on the blogroll notifying them of the inclusion, and hopefully listing you on their blogroll as well. This will help boost traffic from other resources, while helping you link up to some valuable blogs for referencing as well.

The Resource Links section is another area that will demonstrate credibility; a solid resource list will inform your readers that you are using various resources for research and keeping up to date with news in your industry, and also provide them with other navigation options as they browse your site.

The resources links section can also be followed up with an e-mail to each website notifying them of the inclusion. They may choose to participate in a link exchange program as a result, furthering your chances of increased traffic.

The importance of visual elements was discussed in Chapter 4, and it's important to remember that an attractive layout will help to boost your credibility naturally. The visual design and navigability of your site are important for your overall presentation, and making sure that there are no major errors in site design is an ongoing project.

The opportunity to include ads on your blog makes the site more valuable to advertisers, but it is important to remember balance during the selection and implementation of ads.

Overwhelming readers with ads, or simply bombarding random advertisements throughout your site can easily turn off a fair amount of first-time visitors.

Even when you start joining affiliate programs and other networks, maintain a steady amount of ads that complement your site instead of distracting your readers from the content.

Monitoring spam comments is essential to keeping your blog in good standing, and will have a higher chance of reaching the top rankings of search engines when it is free of clutter and spam-related materials.

Spam blockers are often a part of most blog platforms, but even the filters can overlook some types of comment spam on occasion. Monitoring your blog regularly will ensure that you are keeping track of visitor comments, and you can select an option to moderate all comments before they are published if necessary.

This prevents spam bloggers 'sploggers' from overloading your site with unnecessary material without authorization, and can help you post the appropriate comments and feedback to keep your blog as interactive as possible.

Ensuring that your headlines are compelling, original, and creative will also help to reach out to your readers. Credible blogs make an extra effort to provide unique and engaging content, and your efforts will pay off when you are posting relevant information on a consistent basis.

In addition to the headlines, watch the quality of the content you are posting; use strong and effective language to deliver your message, and provide links and references to material as necessary. Editing your blog regularly is just as important as writing it and it should always be free of typos and grammatical errors.

Blog entries are designed to be short, concise, and compelling; avoid turning the blog into an article repository, and write blog posts that are only 300-500 words in length at max.

If you do want readers to read an article, direct them to your company website where they can view it in a different format, or provide a link to its home on the web. It's best to maintain consistency throughout your blog so that readers can become accustomed to your voice, tone, and style.

As you develop each piece of content, make sure you are providing references to sources. Even if you are redirecting users away from your blog homepage, you can use settings where the link opens in a new window. This will help them stay on your blog page if they need to, and providing the right references will help you establish credibility and authority on the subject naturally.

Watching how and where you place affiliate link ads is another element of credibility for your blog. If readers feel that you are simply using the blog as a vehicle for affiliate links, they are much less likely to believe that your content is coming from experience and not just a marketing ploy instead.

We discussed the value of affiliate link programs in the previous chapter, and it is very important to keep this in mind as you start to introduce visitors to the blog. Affiliate links are only valuable to your readers if you have found the products valuable yourself; if readers detect that there are ulterior motives to the placement of these links, they may simply stop visiting.

Keeping up with your blog also involves responding to comments in a timely manner, and appropriately managing negativity.

Starting a 'flaming war' (Written online arguments with your contributors), will not help your reputation, and many startup bloggers make the mistake of losing focus when responding to comments on their blog. At best, it can be helpful to simply moderate comments before publishing so you can control the interactions on the site.

It is difficult to earn your reputation back after communicating publicly on sensitive issues, so be weary of this during your responses.

In addition to appropriate commenting, it's essential to use the right language and tone. Even though blogging is naturally conversational in style, it can be 'read' the wrong way without context.

Make sure you are using politically correct terms when necessary, and avoid writing posts that require reading between the lines.

Offending large groups of people after writing seemingly simple posts can take its toll on readership; make sure to review and edit content as needed.

Blog Credibility and SEO

Search engines today are becoming even more refined and smarter at finding relevant and informative sites and blogs to index, and your blog will receive a higher credibility status when it encompasses most of the important elements. Search engines and directories are looking for:

1. Relevant content
2. Appropriate formatting and titles
3. Steady visitor traffic
4. Linking in from other sites
5. Regular posting and updating
6. Consistency in blog content
7. Sites free of spam and excessive advertising
8. Effective use of Ad Sense

How Visitors Determine Credibility

Making yourself a trustworthy and credible resource on the web takes time, but becoming an expert in your niche industry is an essential step towards regular readership.

Even if your blog is an extension of your website, you can use it as a subsidiary resource platform that can help introduce readers to your company, and encourage them to continue reading. From the

customer or visitor's perspective, there are essential signs of credibility that help distinguish one source from another. This includes:

☐ **Longevity of the blog**

How long has it been active, how many posts are there?

☐ **Experience**

Does the author have other sites and experience published around the web? If so, what are they? Expertise – can the author verify their expertise?

☐ **Design**

Is the site well-constructed and updated according to industry standards?

☐ **Writing style**

Is the author a strong writer, or do they seem to post poorly written content on a regular basis?

☐ **Readership**

Has the blog or site reached a high amount of readers? Many people turn to ranking indexes such as Alexa to determine this.

☐ **Consistency**

Are the posts regular and arranged in the appropriate categories, or are they simply submitted to the blog randomly?

☐ Transparency

Is the voice natural and friendly, or does it sound like it is coming from the marketing/PR department of the company?

Gaining steady readership will take time, but establishing credibility is a long-term goal for any blogger regardless of experience.

Knowing how to convey a message that matches with your reader's interests is a necessary step; take the time to research, review, and edit your blog posts each time and make sure that the overall blog setup and design is in line with the competition.

Social Networking

Having a well-established blog will take time, but you can speed up the process of recognition and credibility by participating in social networking.

Social networking is no longer reserved for the casual web surfer looking to set up a profile; today, thousands of businesses and entities can develop a solid profile and introduction to their company by joining the right social networks, and this is a very effective way to position and promote your blog.

Building a steady set of readers for your blogs involves developing quality content, *and* building a strong relationship with each and every visitor. Even a casual reader can become a regular visitor to your blog when you start joining other communities that they are already participating in.

Social networking has taken off on the internet in recent years, especially with the growth of sites such as MySpace and Friendster.

You'll find many businesses even have profiles set up on these sites, but this may take away from a professional brand image that you are trying to promote. Today, there are many more credible sites that you can start participating in and networking on, and these can help you

increase page rank, attract new customers, and develop a steady relationship in a few short months.

Web 2.0 and Its Impact on Business Blogs

Community building is very important in today's competitive online marketplace, and the growth of Web 2.0-based sites is only making this even more important. Web 2.0 is the 'second' version of web applications and interactions, a level of internet usage and networking that makes use of keywords, search engine rankings, and user-generated content to spotlight particular sites and content.

But what does this mean for businesses online today?

By harnessing a variety of Web 2.0-based tools, it will become even more easy and efficient for you to start marketing to the right target market. Instead of simply joining directories and showing up on search engine rankings, readers will be able see you as an 'active' entity within their communities.

Part of brand management involves knowing how to engage and interact with your customers; a simple way to do this is by learning how and where your customers are interacting, what their preferences are, and what topics are of interest to them.

Not only is this an effective market research tool, but you'll also find many potential customers voicing their opinions about products – perhaps yours. Learning how to effectively search and find your

groups, communities, and other areas of interest within your industry is a skill that you can develop over time.

A great place to start is to simply create a profile for your company to represent your blog; after that you, can start interacting and communicating with other participants of each community.

Getting Started with Networking in Blogging Communities

First, it's important to understand that there are two main types of social media available at your disposal. The first includes the standard lineup of sites including:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- MySpace
- Social Shopping Communities
- Other niche-based communities

The second is the large segment of social bookmarking sites such as:

- ☐ Digg
- ☐ StumbleUpon
- ☐ Reddit
- ☐ Del.ici.ous
- ☐ Mag.nolia

The first set can help you build a profile, add pictures, maintain a smaller version of your blog, and interact with a large scope of customers regularly. This is most often used to network with friends, colleagues, and associates and making yourself visible on these community sites certainly has value.

However, you will not have a chance to share specific pieces of content on your blog (unless you use a plug-in or directly post information into various sections of the profile page), so these have a limited ability to be updated. You do, however, have a chance to interact directly with others; you can send messages, notes, or send out a notification to thousands of people on your network to simply visit your site.

The second side of blogging communities offers far more potential; this is the roundup of social bookmarking sites that can essentially help you boost readership for specific pieces of content and help you network with niche target groups in the process.

Bookmarking sites allow you to share content across multiple networks, and have other people created virtual 'bookmarks' of items they like and share them as well. After just a few months of submitting your content to these sites, people will readily start sharing the URLs of everything you post. It's essential that you include your website information and any other related information in your signature line so that every single reader learns where the content is coming from.

Other valuable blogging communities that use the same bookmarking concept include sites such as Technorati, Digg, and Reddit. These sites have millions of visitors each day, and articles and links posted to them are widely read.

However, these are communities where other users rate and review items that are posted; the more 'authority' you may have on these sites, the higher the chances of readership. Building authority can take time, but your chances are much greater when you provide something very unique and appropriate for a given category.

Overall, the more you participate in these social communities and various bookmarking outlets, the higher your level of visibility.

Many of these sites also have search engines that allow you to seek out specific groups on your own. One simple way to find these groups is to generate a list of keywords related to your subject; narrowing down a top ten list of keywords, and then running a search to find the groups can help you refine your interaction so you are posting to the most appropriate site or community on a regular basis.

Setting Up Your Profile: Key Things to Remember

As you begin setting up your profile on each of the community and blog network sites, it's essential that you provide a consistent profile, a thorough description, and include a picture or logo when possible. Most people will be more attracted to a profile that includes all contact information and details, and you will want to keep this in mind as you

set up your basic profile within each network. Profile pages will include:

- ☐ Name
- ☐ URL
- ☐ Other websites
- ☐ An image for a logo
- ☐ Brief description or intro

Always double check to make sure your URL is included on each and every page; it's the ONLY way a potential visitor can easily click and find you, and any misspellings or typos in this area can cost you thousands of pageviews.

If you want to share something else in your About section, this is a good place to do it; linking out to a formal About Me page or other similar content can give interested readers something further to review, and you can stand apart from other guests simply by including extra information.

The Value of Linkbacks on Your Blog

After steadily growing readership and interest through visibility on social bookmarking and networking sites, you'll start to see the value of having other people do a lot of the marketing and promotion *for* you.

Blogging is very unique in this way, and different from direct marketing of websites and other content-based internet platforms because it lets you put your marketing efforts on 'autopilot' in many ways.

As a blogger, you can focus on creating a valuable and consistently updated blog, and the more people that start paying attention to your daily postings, the higher the chances that they will post a linkback (Also know as a Back Link) to your blog from their web site.

Linkbacks are a very valuable tool for blogs, and can greatly increase both blog traffic and popularity in a few short weeks—even days if the content is deemed worthy enough of mass attention.

Linkbacks are simply links that *other* bloggers post about your content. Anyone reading another person's blog on a similar subject will have an easy 'path' to yours when the blogger has referenced your material. This can help you when you considerably, regardless of whether you are promoting individual links and content yourself.

Posting Non-Spam Comments

Commenting on other people's blogs will help you gain exposure with a simple link back to your own site or profile, and can be a very effective strategy in gaining visibility. Making sure that your comments are appropriate to the topic, and relevant to the post and readers is essential.

You can turn off many loyal fans by posting something inappropriate or unsatisfactory to the discussion, and it's imperative that your interactions remain consistent and professional.

Always remember that any information you provide that is linked to your blog can have an impact on your credibility. Take the time to participate in the right discussions, develop comments that are appropriate to the topic, and remain neutral on subjects that could start a fiery discussion or debate that you may not be able to control.

Guest Blogging

Guest blogging is becoming a valuable strategy for many professional bloggers, and can be used as leverage in the form of a testimonial if you are promoting a particular product. When you are looking for new content or featured pieces to gain readership, opening up your blog to guest bloggers can be a strategic decision with powerful results.

The concept of guest blogging is relatively simple; you can start by posting a series of questions or topics to all of your readers, and ask for volunteers to provide feedback or information via e-mail. Then you can review the responses and feature a special piece of content. This is both a promotional strategy, and an effective way to develop fresh content.

An alternative strategy to encourage readers to participate involves a more direct approach. Here you would create a schedule and time where the blog is 'open' for bog entries. It may help to create a strategy and establish some ground rules before beginning. You will need to:

- 1) Set up the invitation post
- 2) Create a user profile for guest bloggers to access your service
- 3) Establish dates and times for the post
- 4) Set blog restrictions such as length, topics, etc.
- 5) Provide posting instructions
- 6) Create permissions and any terms of agreement clauses
- 7) Confirm blogger identities (to avoid spam)

Instead of opening up the opportunity to all the blog readers, you may also choose to request information from a particular blog or group of bloggers instead. 'Cold calling' bloggers in your industry can help increase public relations in new networking circles, and you will be much more likely to establish rapport with a large group of readers.

Still, contacting bloggers, especially the most popular ones, can be difficult; you may need to establish a relationship before getting an acceptance, but the publicity and recognition can prove to be worthwhile.

Summary of Community Building Marketing

To recap the main points of this chapter, we can break down the basic marketing techniques to help with your community building strategy.

- ☐ Provide valuable and quality content. Make sure that every item posted on the blog has relevance, is search-engine optimized when possible, and offers some extra value to your readers. Unique and quality content is critical to making your blog a success in the long-term, and you will help you build credibility for both the business and your website as a result.
- ☐ Build steady readership on social community networking sties. Use both bookmarking and social networking sites to your advantage, and make it easy for visitors to share your information.
- ☐ Make use of content aggregator sites. Larger blog community sites and networks such as Digg, Technorati, and StumbleUpon are great ways to increase readership overnight. Make regular submissions to these sites, or encourage visitors to do it for your and you can start reaching out to niche markets you never knew existed.

- ❑ Join full-scale blog portals and encourage guest bloggers on your site. Sites such as MyBlogLog are great ways to find other professional bloggers within your industry. Inviting them to put a guest posting on your site will not only help you build credibility, but can help you develop some unique content for your readers on various occasions throughout the year.

Branding And Marketing

Earning blog credibility, increasing traffic, and promoting your blog in the process are all part of your marketing strategy. The only way you can build your brand is by becoming highly visible across a variety of domains; this includes blogging communities, social networking groups, and even discussion forums where your target market can be found on a regular basis.

Marketing and branding go hand in hand with your company website, and even more so if your blog is the only online entity of your business. There are a number of ways to develop a cohesive marketing strategy as you shift into the online world; this involves:

- ❑ Developing Relationships with other bloggers
- ❑ Identifying top blogging communities
- ❑ Determining a brand identity, and tracking its impact on your business

Developing Relationships with Other Bloggers

No matter what type of visitor reaches your site—from the average guest to another blogger in your industry—there are many ways you can develop an ongoing relationship.

Relationships are important in both the online and offline world, and a successful blog is often based on the first impression. Making sure you've taken the time to invest in site design and layout can help considerably with attracting a large audience. A blog can make a good first impression when it is:

- ☐ Easy to read
- ☐ Easy to navigate
- ☐ Provides useful and timely content
- ☐ Is built with categories and organized appropriately
- ☐ Offers archives filled with keyword content (easily indexed by search engines)
- ☐ Offers related posts
- ☐ Is consistent

Always remember that the blog represents your brand and is a virtual representation of your company. Communicating with your visitors and readers regularly involves your content, and understanding what they may be interested in reading will help you develop quality

postings. When you are looking for fresh content to share, working with other bloggers will give you a chance to reach out beyond your scope of knowledge and make use of all of your resources.

Top Blogging Communities

Participating in blogging communities will ensure that you are deeply networked with other bloggers, and will help you increase your visibility as well. Blogging communities are rapidly growing across the web, but knowing which ones to join can be a challenge.

Some communities are simply not a valuable use of your time, and you can spend hours participating in discussions and comments with little or no traffic increases. A few blogging communities that can help you grow your business, however, do exist. You may try setting up profiles on:

- ☐ MyBlogLog
- ☐ Blogger
- ☐ WordPress Groups
- ☐ Google Groups

MyBlogLog is one of the web's largest communities for blogs, and can help you track down a variety of related blogs in your industry, as well as setting up a profile for other users to visit review regularly.

The biggest value of MyBlogLog is its ability to tag and identify relevant industries based on keywords; the front page will list the most popular blogs at any given time, and simply reaching the front page can offer a significant traffic increase—completely automatically. Building a community on this site largely depends on your level of interaction.

Since MyBlogLog requires users to 'invite' others to each community, it can be especially helpful in reaching out to a specific audience. You can search and refine the entire group of readers on the site by keyword; once your URL and description is uploaded to the site, it's possible to use this as your profile and network with others.

MyBlogLog offers several advantages for any startup blog, and even though it is free when you register, there are also paid services and programs available. A premium service will allow you to create a more comprehensive profile, and include images and photos as you grow. Even though this is not necessary as you begin, it can be a valuable community-building tool in the future.

MyBlogLog also makes it easy to track down individual authors behind a blog; instead of having to do an organic search using the major search engines, MyBlogLog authors are listed right within the site, along with author names and profiles. Simply joining another author's fan club can give you a chance to browse and explore related content and material easily.

Blogger and WordPress both offer unique blog communities that you are automatically registered in once the blog is published. Since the social networks on these sites are so large, it can be difficult to make an impact immediately. The best strategy here is to use them as a resource for related blog content and identifying other niche subjects. Both of them are easily searchable and indexed and tagged by keyword categories.

Google Groups offers you an opportunity to create your own set of community users and 'fans.' Although this is generally casual in nature, you may find some value for your business based on a significant subject or topic.

Identifying a theme for your group is the first step; after registering, you will be able to recruit group members and can easily start promoting your blog and website links in an unobtrusive way.

Brand Identity and its Value for Business

Your blog serves as your virtual 'branding stamp' and can help your business or company gain visibility far more easily than even direct marketing. The more involved and well-linked you are within your industry, the higher the chances of you gaining visibility, traffic, and ongoing readers. Developing readership and subscribers is a valuable goal for any blog, especially when you are building one as an extension of an already-established website.

Blogs are becoming more and more interactive and acceptable to visitors; instead of shying away from websites that are full of advertising, more people are showing interested in specialized niches presented on a blog. Using this to your advantage is vital for enhancing your brand, and the more credibility you have, the higher your rate of success.

Customers and consumers that identify with your brand will have a unique set of expectations for items that you develop and promote. Making sure that your blog is aligned with your company's values, mission statement, and overall design will be in your best interest for building an audience.

Marketing and promoting your blog with this in mind can be the key to a successful marketing strategy, and one that simply gets lost in the growing blogosphere.

Summary of Marketing Essentials for Promoting Your Blog

Now that you've covered the key elements of promoting, social networking, and joining blog communities, it may be helpful to reduce the concepts down for a summary. Here are the marketing essentials for promoting your blog; combining at least eight to nine of these as a basis for your first marketing effort will help you get ahead and start promoting your blog with much higher chances of success:

☐ Post high quality content on a regular basis

If you are providing news on your site, average post amounts range

from 3-5 posts *per day*. Make the most of your postings by only posting unique and high quality content. If you are looking to entertain or engage readers, aim for at least one posting per day.

☐ **Enable automatic trackbacks and pinging**

Pings are a valuable way to notify search engines that your blog has been updated. Increase the chances of sharing blog content by enabling trackbacks on your blog.

☐ **Make sure all posts are formatted and archived correctly**

When you first start out, it can be helpful to leave this as a future project until you have developed some solid content. After that, take the time to sort through your content and make sure it is placed in the appropriate category. Also keep in mind that categories need to be based on keywords; you can gain a significant advantage with the search engines when you include high-ranking keywords on your category section.

☐ **Develop your own link building campaign**

Whether this involves contacting other bloggers, responding to comments and providing linkbacks, or simply making a 'call out' for links as you post, make sure you are keeping track of results and try a variety of strategies.

☐ **Make sure your blog is optimized**

Template optimization involves the URLs, RSS subscription buttons, and title tags are embedded appropriately. While most blogging

platforms can help you do this automatically, you will need to pay attention to these areas on an ongoing basis.

❑ Submit any podcasts and media files to the appropriate directories

If you do start developing podcasts for your blog, make sure you are submitting them to the appropriate directories. Most are free, and can help you gain even higher rankings on the search engines.

❑ Comment on other blogs to develop expertise

Researching is just as important as writing for your blog, and you can search other blogs relevant to your industry and start commenting appropriately. Keep in mind the rules of the forum or group, and make sure your posts are relevant to the discussion. Always remember that your credibility is an important part of this, so be resourceful and post accordingly.

❑ Develop a glossary section

This is an often-overlooked opportunity for increasing search engine rankings, and can be a valuable resource section for your readers as well. A glossary can be as simple as keywords with definitions, and you can also start inter-linking the definitions to actual posts within your blog.

❑ Customize your blog and design it with your logo in mind

Even if you aren't launching with an exact replica of your website colors, choose something similar that will be attractive to your readers. Customized designs and templates are the best way to

make a valuable first impression, but you may choose to wait until a later date.

☐ **Setup a Google sitemap**

Google sitemaps are designed to capture the key elements of your blog and validate them for search engines. This is one valuable step toward web optimization, and can significantly impact search engine rankings.

☐ **Identify a list of authoritative blogs and other web sites**

Even if you are not using these on your blogroll or link exchange program, knowing where to consult information can help you develop content on a regular basis. Create a comprehensive list of at least 15-20 sites that can help you post unique and relevant content.

☐ **Make use of statistics**

Statistics will help you track results and easily see fluctuations in visitor traffic. Most blog platforms are equipped with statistical analysis programs, and you can watch trends and patterns daily.

☐ **Promote yourself on social networking platforms**

These are essential for gaining exposure and a strong presence alongside your target market, and you can join different groups and communities very easily. Setting up the right profile will take some strategy (see Chapter 7), but is an important element of building your social community presence.

☐ **Submit links to social bookmarking sites**

This is a very effective way to promote individual pieces of content. As soon as you have created a URL of your submission, that link can be promoted across multiple channels and networks in just a few steps. Try submitting to the major social bookmarking sites such as Technorati, Digg, and StumbleUpon for increased exposure on highly valuable topics and content. Even interacting on these networks can help you learn what types of content and topics your audience may be looking for.

☐ **Position yourself as an authority**

Consult valuable resources and give appropriate credit on your blog. This is not only helpful for your readers, but can help you establish yourself as an expert within your field.

☐ **Focus on building credibility**

You can build credibility by communicating directly with other bloggers in the industry; establish a guest blogging opportunity for other bloggers to participate, and encourage them to market their contributions in the process.

☐ **Make contact with bloggers offline as well**

You can still build credibility and enjoy networking in the offline world, and attract some new visitors the 'traditional' way.

Promoting Your Blog

As you establish yourself across a variety of viewing channels and networks of blogs, it's still important to optimize your blog and ensure that all of your posts can be found easily. Submitting to sites such as Technorati, Digg, and StumbleUpon can help you earn respect from new readers, especially if you are providing quality information on a regular basis.

Increasing credibility takes time, but also requires developing a cohesive strategy across multiple online platforms and avenues. Some of the best ways to get found on the internet are simply to join multiple networks, social networking communities, and publishing platforms. You can start by:

Developing blog content that works

Launching a Squidoo lens

Promoting fresh content through article databases

Increasing social networking presence, such as through Yahoo!

Answers

Link baiting on discussion forums and other blogs

Introducing other authors on your blog or website, and coordinating a variety of PR tactics

Developing Blog Content That Works

Making changes on the type and style of posts that you submit can also be helpful; take a look at sites such as Lifehacker and even the Digg blog itself for some ideas on how to present a variety of posts and styles. Images are important, and linking out to videos or other examples across the web can also improve the quality of your submission.

Working with different writing styles and presenting information in a new way are just as valuable to readers as a simple article, and can increase readership easily over time.

Writing content for your blog is similar as developing articles for a website, but still requires a few other steps. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you start to generate quality blog posts:

☐ **Research first-hand information to reference**

Nothing can help you create a unique post better than first-hand information, whether it is an interview, a local publication, or other information that is hard to find. Avoid simply copying themes and ideas from other blogs, as you will simply be a 'follower' and not a resource for your industry. Remember that the goal is to become an expert in your field, and people need to feel that you are a resource, not simply an 'echo' on the web.

☐ **Break your own news story**

Start adapting a press-release type of tone for fresh news and

insights about your company. These can then be later adapted to full-fledged press releases and posted elsewhere on your website—with links—later on.

□ Write short, clear, and concise posts

This makes it very easy for readers to follow your topic, and gives you a chance to present information in a conversational style.

Avoid making posts *too* casual, however; the readers do not necessarily want to learn all about you, but are looking for a fresh voice from the company instead. You should be able to make room for a profile page and perhaps a picture of the author, but keeping it simple and professional will help you make a better impact.

□ Make sure you tag all your posts

The next chapter goes into detail on what this means for your blog, but even at a very basic level, it is very important that all your posts are tagged appropriately.

□ Develop your own ‘coined words’

This may be a part of your business culture, your office ‘inside jokes,’ or anything else that adds some uniqueness and humor to your site. Coining words will also help you become recognized throughout your blogging communities; this can be a highly effective viral marketing tool, and you’ll start gaining recognition in a variety of circles.

□ Encourage readers to Digg

If you can implement a Digg button right next to every post, even

better. Otherwise, simply encourage readers to Digg you by making a small request at the bottom of the page.

☐ **Start implementing relevant ads if you want to work with advertising networks**

This can help you boost search engine rankings easily, and will also help your readers find relevant information on your topic.

☐ **Create a new topic for each day of the week**

Themed posts can be changed out per season and you'll have many opportunities to share something new by incorporating a recent news subject or topic.

☐ **Reach out to Technorati**

Technorati is one of the best places to gain instant exposure for your blog, and the more submissions that you post to the site, the stronger your blog can be. If your blog gains a significant presence on Technorati on its own, you'll quickly see a jump in traffic because it will be spotlighted as a resource.

☐ **Develop a top ten list**

This can be a top ten list of blogs, a top ten list of interesting news at your company, or even top ten insights about a particular topic. Blog readers love lists, and you'll find it much easier to write these types of posts when you are running out of content ideas. Top ten lists are also easy to share; you'll find many visitors are eager to 'pass around' a top ten list far more readily than a full-fledged article or detailed blog post.

Making the Best of Squidoo

Branching out to other publishing platforms simultaneously is another simple way to attract readers. Sites such as Squidoo can help you build a custom 'lens' that spotlights your content, and can serve as yet another extension of your website, brand, and blog.

Squidoo can help you build a miniature blog or site where you can fill it with some of your best content. Squidoo lets you build another platform for your site, your business, or your brand by simply creating another URL link to relevant information. Here you might include items such as:

- ☐ Direct blog content
- ☐ Articles
- ☐ Pictures
- ☐ Video clips
- ☐ A small store of products

Squidoo gives you the benefit of reaching your readers in a new way; the communities on this site are also categorized by keywords and tags, so you can gain a significant advantage by developing a big lens and helping others find you by keywords alone.

Once they come across your lens, they will easily be able to link out to your blog or website; it works well as another opportunity to explore new channels, and become a valuable supplement to your online activities.

Promoting Content Through Articles

Article directory sites such as EzineArticles.com and Articles Databases are giant article resource sites with one common goal; letting others link out to a website or blog. If you have the time and resources to develop short 350-400 word articles to submit to these directories, you can start increasing traffic to the blog or website as well.

Article websites such as EzineArticles can be used as an effective press release or marketing tool; thousands of people search these sites looking for basic information, advice, or other resources.

Simply having a list of 50-60 quality articles with your link attached can be enough to generate some traffic in a new way.

The article topics can even be complements to your blog posts; the idea is to create enough visibility within your subject and let readers naturally think of your name/brand (top-of-mind-awareness) as they read and browse. You will be able to continue positioning yourself as an expert in the process, and gain higher recognition from search engines with all those embedded links located throughout the directory itself.

Social Networking With Yahoo! Answers

Yahoo! Answers is another resourceful site for web readers, and offers questions and answers on thousands of topics. Questions and answers are sorted by topic and category, and responses are published in a discussion forum format.

The key benefit of participating in Yahoo! Answers, however, lies in your opportunity to gain visibility through your profile; regular users of Yahoo! Answers are awarded 'points' and can reach the leader board after continued success.

Simply climbing to the top ranks of this site can help position you as a leader or expert in the field once again, and you can start finding relevant articles to post as an actual answer.

Yahoo! Answers is a dynamic and fast-growing web portal for users of all ages. You can even narrow down your search to answer specific questions using the internal search engine. This may help you locate questions on topics that are highly relevant to your industry, and you will receive a rating from other users.

Questions are usually considered 'closed' after the person asking it feels they have found what they need; however, this information is locked into the site for anyone to browse and review, even if they cannot post or comment on it directly.

As a result, you'll find it easy to start submitting links to your blog posts that stay listed on the site for months at a time. It's a simple way to gain a web presence with very little effort.

All of these links will also have a chance to gain recognition on the search engines, giving you an added boost to search engine rankings and any related search results.

Link Baiting on Forums and Discussion Groups

This is a commonly used tactic for websites, and is quickly gaining prominence in blog marketing and promotions as well. Link baiting involves participating in discussion forums and commenting on other blogs, then simply inserting your link within the text (if it is permitted), or connecting your link to your username.

Making sure that you adhere to all community guidelines is critical to your success with this method; it is very easy to simply be kicked off a discussion group or removed from a forum if you are not obeying community guidelines. Link baiting is only effective when you are using it to learn more about your readers, establishing relationships, and building recognition appropriately; make sure you are providing quality posts and discussions on these platforms as well.

Introducing Other Authors

We discussed guest blogging in the previous chapter, but it can also be helpful to consider introducing other authors or experts in the field as

part of your posting strategy. By introducing other people within your post, you can request a direct link on *their* blogs or websites.

Since you are spotlighting them as a featured author, they are much more likely to simply link to you; as a result, you will be reaching out to far more readers in your specialized niche and can start earning a reputation with prospective customers in the process.

Introducing other blogs and authors is a very effective PR tool, both online and offline. People are interested in learning about other experts and resources within an industry more often than not, and at the very least, it can be very helpful to grow your blogroll.

After launching a valuable blog and increasing visitor traffic through search results, you still have dozens of opportunities to reach out to your target market.

Marketing with today's top tools and communities is a great way to increase exposure with little or no cost. The work involved will require some strategy, and maintaining a professional tone and 'voice' is essential throughout.

Reading community guidelines, as well as the terms and conditions of each site, is necessary before participating (even more so if you are outsourcing your marketing/admin work) and will help you maintain credibility and respect as you venture forth into different social networking outlets.

Blog Tagging

As discussed in previous chapters, learning how to optimize each of your entries is essential for search engine rankings and gaining visibility. In order to make sure your blog posts are finding their way to the right communities and categories, it's a good idea to take the time to learn how to tag each post appropriately.

Tagging is relatively new to the internet, and has gained more prominence with the onset of Web 2.0 applications.

More and more websites are using tagging as a way to sort and aggregate data found across the web; not only is it visually appealing when it appears on larger aggregator and search engine sites, but it gives people easy access to find relevant information much faster and in a more practical way.

Learning how to use tagging to your advantage can help you develop quality blog posts and a share-able set of content.

Tagging systems are also known as 'folksonomies' as they are created by people all over the web; although you will be creating the first set of tags on your own to categorize your data, don't be surprised to come across your post elsewhere on the web that has been tagged with even more keywords. These are simply ways for people to find

and search different portals more easily. You can stay one step ahead by using resourceful and easily identifiable keywords.

Categories vs. Tags: Knowing the Difference

Both categories and tags are ways for you to organize your blog entries, but there is a noticeable difference between the two. Categories make use of a 'tree' to organize data, blocking off particular categories into subcategories and identifying content accordingly. They are highly structured, similar to indexing books on a bookshelf.

Tagging offers a different opportunity; instead of organizing content in a linear manner, everything is organized by association with a brainstorm-like effect. It is a very non-linear way of organizing information, but strings together keywords so you are in essence, 'breaking apart' each submission and identifying it with a simple word.

Many bloggers forego tagging because they think readers can simply search and find the information using the search box. This is true in some cases, but some posts may not be so easily accessible.

Tagging helps both the readers *and* the search engines. SEO-friendly blog posts and articles can gain easier recognition when you tag entries appropriately, and also provide users with a simple way to track down information in a few clicks.

Types of Tagging

There are two main types of tagging for blogs: internal and external.

Internal tags are those that are used exclusively within a site. In these cases, you may have set up your own tag cloud, or are creating a database of highly-searched tags for easy reference.

An external tagging system makes use of social bookmarking sites such as Technorati, or del.ici.ous where each submission is picked up by these larger aggregator sites. This helps with dispersing your content much more easily, and you can broaden the reach for a particular piece of content by participating in these external sites as well.

Learning From Tag Clouds

A good place to start when developing tags is to look at tag clouds on your favorite community portals and search engines. High-traffic websites use these clouds as ways to interlink information found throughout the website; this generates an assortment of keywords that are similar or relevant to your topic matter, and can help you gain an understanding of what is popular (or not) at any given time.

The Built-In Search Box

If your website has a built-in search box, tagging will also help users retrieve relevant articles and posts immediately.

Using tags with search functions is a great way to provide visitors to your site with easy access to all your articles, posts, and related materials. Not only that, these same tags are posted to larger sites such as Technorati and Digg automatically.

How Do I Implement Tagging In My Blog?

There are various ways to implement a tagging system on your blog, and most blog platforms support the standard tag plug-ins to get started. A few leading plug-ins and options include:

- 1) Ultimate Tag Warrior
- 2) Jerome's Keywords
- 3) TechnoratiTags
- 4) SimpleTags
- 5) Yahoo! Keyword Tags

6) **Ultimate Tag Warrior** helps to provide both internal and external tags, especially those that fit right into Technorati, Wikipedia, and social bookmarking sites such as del.ici.ous. The tags are displayed after just a few clicks and can make the tagging process much easier.

□ **Jerome's Keywords** is another tool that displays a list of tags and then makes it easy to simply implement your selection. This tool is

ideal for WordPress blogs, and can easily help you find the right topics and keywords with a few tweaks.

❑ **TechnoartiTags** are ideal for Moveable Type platforms, and use a similar feed as Ultimate Tag Warrior to send to larger aggregators such as Technorati.

❑ **SimpleTags** is a very basic plug-in for WordPress that also offers options to post to Technorati as well.

❑ **Yahoo! Keyword Tags** is actually a generator that you can place right into a WordPress blog as a plug-in. This will list a set of suggested tags and keywords, making it much easier to simply copy and paste, or type the list of tags directly into your tag box. This works hand-in-hand with Technorati and will help you avoid the need to go in and brainstorm tags for each post or subject.

❑

Tagging and Marketing: Effective Market Research

When you are browsing and exploring other blogs and sites of interest, reviewing tag clouds for keywords is a great place to start. Tag clouds give you the benefit of literally 'seeing' which keywords are of prominence; this means that more people are reading and writing about that specific item, and you can develop your content and blog posts accordingly.

Regular market or industry research is essential to developing quality content for your blog. Not only will you be able to create content that is highly-readable, but you'll also have a chance to appear next to other relevant, and often leading blogs, in the industry.

No matter what type of business blog you are developing, you'll have a chance to reach out to your target market in a more effective and approachable way when they can track down your information after just a few clicks.

Conclusion: Final Words

Creating a valuable marketing strategy takes time, but leveraging a variety of online tools can help you build your business faster than many traditional mediums. Reaching out to your target market has become easier than ever with websites and blogging tools, but knowing how to implement them effectively is part of the challenge.

Focusing on a complete interactive experience for potential customers is an important aspect of your online activities, and blogging can help catapult your business forward into the competitive marketplace.

This eBook shed light on a variety of issues for today's business blogger, providing you with valuable tools and information on developing a successful and widely read blog; all at very little, or no cost.

Identifying the goal of your blog is the first step to designing your publishing platform, and you will have a higher chance of success when you create a seamless transition between your company website, the business mission, and overall goals.

In Chapter 1 you learned about the basic blog structure and what each element of a blog means to the visitor. You also learned how and why more businesses are turning to blogging as a medium for

marketing and promotions, and this included identifying the target market, launching contests, and sharing newsworthy information.

You also learned why people are turning to blogs as a resource, instead of traditional methods of consulting a website or publication for references. Today, blogging is quickly becoming an attractive extension of many company websites and portals, providing customers with a less-structured and in-depth point of view on a variety of topics within the industry.

In Chapter 2, you learned the basics about marketing online, and how a business blog can fit into your overall marketing strategy. You learned some very simple ways to increase visitors to your blog or website, including how to write SEO-friendly articles and content, and making use of keyword tracking tools to do this effectively.

Improving your search engine rankings is a vital part of online marketing success, and we discussed the value of META tags, descriptions, and how these affect search engines accordingly. This chapter also shed some light on increasing brand awareness, and how to identify your target market.

In Chapter 3, you learned how to set up your blog successfully. First, we discussed the different blog platforms available, and reviewed each one for its advantages and disadvantages.

You also learned what is involved with each blog setup; items such as the blogroll, including space for advertising and using RSS feeds

appropriately were all identified as the pieces of your business blog. Blogger, WordPress, and TypePad were identified as the leading platforms in today's leading blog circles.

Chapter 4 discussed the basic blog structure in more detail, identifying key elements that can make your blog stand apart from the competition, and learning how color, layout, themes, and patterns can affect the user experience. You learned the importance of different column layouts, formatting text appropriately, and designing a customized blog template.

Chapter 5 was your introduction to affiliate marketing. Affiliate marketing is no longer reserved for websites and startup businesses, and more bloggers are making use of affiliate networks to generate additional income.

You learned about the most common affiliate programs available on the web today, and reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of each. This chapter also discussed key tactics in making affiliate links work for your individual business, and how to maintain credibility while implementing your system.

Credibility and your blog were discussed in **Chapter 6**. Here you learned the value of credibility in both the short- and long-term, and how to increase traffic based on credibility alone.

You learned about the key elements of successful blogs, and how they gain prominence on sites such as Technorati, Blogstreet, and DayPop.

You also learned a complete list of elements that help improve credibility instantly; items such as references to sources, proper language and grammar, and carefully placed ads were recognized as part of this process.

Chapter 7 provided information on your blog and the importance of social networking. Here you learned the impact of Web 2.0 on business blogs, and how to make the most of technological developments across the web today. You learned how to get started with networking in blogging communities, and the key things to remember when setting up your profile on each site.

We also discussed the value of link backs for your blog, and the importance of posting non-spam comments. You were introduced to guest blogging as well, another opportunity to provide valuable content on your blog and keep readers interested. This chapter focused heavily on community building and how to make it work for you.

Chapter 8 discussed the importance of marketing, branding, and your blog. Here you learned how to develop relationships with other bloggers and gain recognition in the top blogging communities on the web today.

Blogging communities are easy ways to increase exposure with people who are already interested in your niche topic; participating in blogging communities can help deepen online relationships and encourage users to subscribe or sign up for an RSS feed. We

discussed brand identity and your blog, along with some marketing essentials for promoting your site.

Chapter 9 took marketing one step further and discussed ways on getting found on the web. Instead of actively pursuing marketing with social networking and communities, you learned how to develop blog content that actually works in the long-term, and how to diversify your online presence. Here you learned how to setup your Squidoo lens, and developing fresh content through article databases.

We also discussed link baiting and discussion forums, and how to introduce other authors to your blog or website.

Finally, **Chapter 10** took you through the process of tagging, and how to gain recognition on the major aggregator sites through effective keyword tagging and building. You learned the difference between categories and tags, and how to make the best of tag clouds. You also learned which plug-ins to implement on your chosen blog platform, and how to use tagging for market research purposes.

Developing a business blog to complement your company or business endeavor offers multiple opportunities for growth, both online and offline.

Blogging is quickly becoming an effective marketing tool and medium for a variety of industries; when a blog complements a website, it has a stronger chance of establishing a quality brand.

A business blog has the power to help you drive traffic, gain exposure in your niche community, and increase customers year after year.

To Your Success