

Blogging isn't Dead:

Discovering (or Rediscovering)
the Power of Blogging

Publish



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the Power of Blogging



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About iThemes

iThemes was founded in 2008 by Cory Miller, a former newspaper journalist and public relations/communication practitioner, turned freelance moonlighting web designer, turned full-time entrepreneur. Miller founded iThemes in his home, fulfilling a lifelong dream of running his own company. Since then, iThemes has grown into a full enterprise providing professional, premium themes, plugins and professional WordPress web design and developer training at WebDesign.com.

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Introduction

In 2006 I started my first professional blog. Like so many countless others before me, my story starts with a blog. The story's not over, so I can't tell you how it ends, but the ride up to this point has changed my life.

Back in 2006 I recognized a niche few were talking about. I saw an opportunity to "open source" my experience.

I felt I had a lot to share. I realized I wasn't the most experienced (or even best) person in my field. But I also knew I had enough to share that would be beneficial to many others.

I went through the same doubts you may go through—that you're not experienced enough, that you don't know enough, that you aren't the best.

I've said this many, many times to people because I firmly believe it: Success comes to those who take risks, to those who decided to take that scary, uncomfortable first step and actually do it.

So many awesome people have outstanding ideas, but they sit on the shelf and collect dust because they never take a chance on those dreams and make progress toward them.

I'm only talking to you today because I took that chance. I put myself out there to potentially be ridiculed, mocked and laughed at. I decided to go for it despite my fears and challenges about blogging. I took a first step, then another and another.

I used many of the same strategies and philosophies we'll talk about here. Blogging may be getting old and boring, but it still works.

That first year, I blogged like crazy.

And by the way, if anyone says blogging is easy, I beg to differ. Doing it well takes energy and time—and a lot of it.

There were many sleepless nights as I would invariably wake up with a post idea and rush to my laptop to blog about it.

I would wake up early and stay up late. I carried a notepad when I was away from my laptop so I wouldn't forget a post idea. I read hundreds of posts and blogs in my industry and about the topics I'll discuss in this course.

But most of all, I put in the time and effort necessary to achieve some of my lifelong dreams. All by blogging!

Through that first blog I...

- Received excellent career recognition in my field: When I started I was relatively unknown. Through blogging, I met some amazing and better-known people, some of whom have become great friends.
- Received media attention: I was featured and quoted in several stories in our state's largest daily newspaper.
- Was asked to present at conferences: Because I had consistently demonstrated my expertise, I was asked to speak at several conferences.
- Met most of the people involved in my current business: Many of the people who are a part of my business, including partners, team members and others, came to know me through my first blog. In fact, my first blog is a significant and vital part of my business success because I can trace so much of it back to that blog.
- Built my personal brand: I've leveraged so much of my business success from the personal brand I built through my blog and have used that momentum in so many areas of my life—even outside of my business endeavors.

Launching my first blog was one of the best things I've done. It took hard work, but I loved every minute of it.

Time and time again, as I've consulted with people about starting blogs, I've told them a blog is one of the best things you can do for your professional and career success.

In fact, if I were forced to start a brand new career in a totally unrelated and unfamiliar career field, the first thing I would do is start a blog. You can learn so much blogging and you'll be miles ahead of others in your field as you learn, grow and get connected to other bloggers and people in your field who find you. All because you took a chance, a calculated risk.

That's advice I gave in 2006 and it's advice I still recommend today. Blogging has grown up a bit since then and doesn't command the headlines and attention it once did. But that's OK. It's still powerful and effective in a way that may not garner headlines, but is quietly reliable. Blogging works.

I hope you'll use this resource to discover—or rediscover—the power of blogging. I hope you can blog your way to professional and career stardom, that you achieve your dreams as a result and have a blast doing it!

Why Blogging?

Why should you start blogging? Good question. Let's talk five simple reasons why you should be blogging:

1. Search

Search engine traffic is huge. You want people to find your organization. There are a couple ways to boost your search rank. You could hire a search engine optimization (SEO) expert and pay lots of money to make questionable tweaks that will likely need to be upgraded from time to time as search engines change their formulas.

Or you could blog.

Blogging creates lots of content filled with relevant keywords and generates incoming links. Those are the two keys of SEO that rarely change. They happen automatically with blogging. It's a better use of your money to boost your search engine rank with stellar content.

2. Social Media

Everybody knows social media is big. Lots of people are tweeting, liking and pinning. But what are they tweeting, liking and pinning? Content. People aren't just going to talk about you.

You need to give them a reason to talk about you. You want to get noticed? Create something worth talking about.

A blog can be a petri dish for growing content. Not every experiment will work, but some will take off. They'll get noticed. They'll get shared. But you have to consistently be creating content and sharing it. You can't just write a single article and hope it will take off.

3. You Own It

While it's worth exploring new social media sites, it's important to remember they come and go. Every giant we think will be here forever can come crumbling down. Remember MySpace? While having a presence is good, you should still have a spot that's yours. Something no one else can control—a place where no one can shut you down, no one can change the terms of service, no one can change how it all works. Facebook is fun, but how often do they change the rules? With blogging, you're in charge. You own the content. You can do whatever you want.

In an age when tech companies come and go and nothing is promised, that's important. Google promised not to be evil, but they also killed Google Reader. Instagram tried to own your photos. Yahoo bought Tumblr and said they wouldn't change anything, but who knows?

The only truly safe answer to all these concerns is to own your own space. That's what you can get with blogging: ownership.

4. Personality

People want to connect with people. They won't connect with a nameless, faceless organization. Blogging is a way to have a voice. It can give an organization personality. It's a way to be transparent and build community.

Bloggging allows you to build a personality and have a voice that no one else controls. When public opinion turns against you, you have a ready-made platform to speak out. When everyone sounds the same, you can stand out and be remembered. When customers have to choose, they remember personality.

5. Trust & Authority

One of the downsides of the Internet is that anyone can claim to be anybody. You don't know who's who. There's a lack of trust. Blogging can develop trust. By consistently sharing with people and proving who you say you are (for example, a car blogger will prove knowledge of cars by writing about them), you'll build trust.

That trust becomes authority as you generate a wealth of content. You've not only proven you know what you're talking about, but you become the go-to source for that content. You make yourself an authority.

When customers are looking to buy, they go to the authority and they go with who they trust. If you're good at what you do, you just need people to know. Blogging can get you there.

Bonus: Get Smarter

Hey there Mr. Smartypants—guess what happens when you spend every day writing and reading? You get smarter. How cool is that? Blogging requires critical thinking, summarizing and extrapolating information. You're exercising your brain.

Bloggging makes you smarter. It's probably not something you can easily measure, but smarter employees mean a smarter organization, and that's good for everybody.

Isn't Blogging Dead?

With the advent of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and Vine, surely blogging is dead, right?

Wrong.

The rumors of blogging's demise have been greatly exaggerated.

This is partly because the numbers, headlines and money are all moving to social media stars like Instagram, Pinterest and Vine. Blogs aren't the emerging trend they once were. But there are two things at work here:

1. Blogging is Free

Not in the sense of a price tag, though that's true, but in the sense of limits. Blogging is free to do as it pleases, for good or for bad. Social media doesn't have the same luxury.

Twitter can shut you down. If you violate their terms of service or do something to make them angry, they can delete your content, deactivate your account and you're done. Can't do that with blogging. There are no terms of service. You own the account—you are the account.

Instagram can be bought. In fact, Facebook bought them. These social media services are run by companies and companies can be bought and sold, go out of business or shut their doors. Blogging is not for sale. Bloggers maybe, and blog posts sure, but blogging itself can't be bought and sold like a commodity.

Freedom also comes with a price. Facebook can run their numbers any time they want and give you an instant snapshot of how many people are using Facebook. It's quantifiable and that can mean dollars. It doesn't work that way for blogging as a whole. There's no tech team to drum up the numbers, no database that tracks those overall stats. You'd need a research team to track a million sites, and even then there's no guarantee of accuracy.

What all of this means is that most of social media is companies. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Vine, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and all the rest are run by companies that can be sold, can shut you down and can easily score headlines and hype.

Blogs, on the other hand, are not a singular entity. There's no single company, organization or software that encompasses blogging. You can't buy stock in blogging. There are countless blogging services—think WordPress, Blogger, TypePad. But there's no single site. Which means it's difficult to come up with numbers about bloggers.

It's hard to make headlines because there's no PR department. Facebook has Mark Zuckerberg to serve as spokesperson, but who does blogging have? Nobody official. Blogs don't get as much attention because it's harder to get a handle on them.

But that also means you can't control blogging. You can't pull the plug on it. You can't sell the company and shut it down. You can't change the terms of service—there are no terms of service.

WordPress is the software that powers 17% of the Internet. If any one company is the face of blogging, it's WordPress. But if they closed their doors tomorrow, blogging would still continue. Every WordPress site would still exist because WordPress doesn't own every site. They gave their software away for free and encouraged a world of limitless blogging.

Blogging is unhindered, uncontainable and uncontrollable. It's a decentralized movement, not a planned business. Blogging is free. It doesn't depend on stock prices, doesn't answer to shareholders, doesn't care about stats and doesn't depend on Google. Blogging is a growing, morphing, stretching movement. You can't kill it.

And that means incredible freedom.

2. Blogging is Boring

Let's be honest, blogging isn't as sexy as it was back in 2005. It opened the door to all kinds of content creation and sharing. Blogging is the gateway drug that enabled social media to explode. As such, blogging is kind of passé now. It's boring.

But that's not a bad thing. In fact, when a technology becomes boring that's a very good thing. That means it's no longer new, flashy and untested. It's no longer the shiny new toy that captivates everyone's attention simply for what it is. It no longer rockets to new heights only to burn out and flame away. Instead it has to earn attention on its own merits, not the novelty of the medium. It's become accepted, tested and expected. It's tried and true. It's a reliable platform you can build on.

The meteoric, headline-grabbing rise of blogging may be dead. But that's OK. Blogging isn't dead and that means we can forget about the hype and get on with business.

Blogging isn't gracing the covers of magazines anymore because magazines don't exist anymore. Most of them have been replaced by blogs. Just ask Newsweek.

Blogging isn't for early adapter hipsters anymore. Blogging is for everybody.

A History Lesson

There's often an impression of bloggers as unemployed slubs sitting around in their pajamas writing about what they had for breakfast. It's a great little joke to make—and it's true that many folks can write in their pajamas thanks to the rise of telecommuting—but it's far from the full picture of bloggers.

The reality is that blogging effectively came to be thanks to two innovations. One is content based and the other is technology based.

Content

Blogging started as a new form of online content. Most web pages used to be static information. A web site would consist of several pages of unchanging copy and you clicked around a menu to read stuff. But blogging started a trend of journal-type writing with the newest updates at the top. It was the reverse-chronological structure that allowed people to visit a site and instantly see what was new. They could keep reading until they got to something they'd already read.

It took advantage of some of the core features of the web and made content more digestible, more findable, more linkable and more enjoyable.

Blogging really started to gain traction as we saw moments when it worked better than other formats. During the Sept. 11 attacks many news sites were shut down as they were flooded with traffic. Their graphic-heavy format couldn't handle the traffic and many news home pages were replaced with basic sites—minimal graphics and text updates, latest news at the top. It's a strategy the news media continues today—the bigger the breaking news the more basic news home pages become.

Some bloggers especially shined after Sept. 11, using their sites to post links and news as soon as they could find it, creating a reverse-chronological list of updates as they happened. Instead of waiting for full details or posting a recap at the end of the day, these updates went up as soon as they came in. For people starved for information, these aggregators and clearinghouse sites became invaluable, offering a glimpse of what was new at a glance.

A new way of creating—and curating—content was born.

Technology

But it wasn't simply the format that changed everything. Creating websites was still tedious. Running a blog required technical knowledge.

You either needed the basic know-how—writing straight up HTML in a text editor and uploading it with FTP software—or a web management tool like Dreamweaver, that still required uploading files via FTP.

It was not for the faint of heart.

Then the tools were developed that changed all that. Open Diary in 1998, Blogger and Live Journal in 1999, Movable Type in 2001 and WordPress in 2003. These tools used a database approach to store content and serve it up using template designs, effectively automating much of the technical side of blogging.

In a nutshell, blogging got easy.

Blogging Impact

With a new, more engaging approach to content and tools to make it easy, blogging took off. Anyone could do it. Which is why we get jokes about blogging what you had for breakfast (which is pretty much the joke about any new social technology). But blogging started to make significant cultural impacts.

Some of the most visible and well-documented examples come from the world of politics.

Bloggers covered the 2002 story of then Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott praising Strom Thurmond, setting off a political crisis over Thurmond's support of segregation that ended in Lott's stepping down. In 2004 Dan Rather and CBS ran an investigative report questioning President George W. Bush's National Guard service, citing documents they'd uncovered. But bloggers quickly declared the documents forgeries and CBS later issued an apology.

Blogging gave a voice to those outside the mainstream media and also allowed niche topics to take off. Mainstream media has to be supported by a mainstream audience, but bloggers could focus on narrow topics and make it work.

In 2004 Webster declared "blog" the word of the year.

This was the start of the long tail, the weakening of the mainstream and the emergence of the niche success. It's no coincidence that at the same time Napster was taking off, the iPod debuted and the music industry was in a free fall. The Internet was changing everything.

Blogging has had a profound impact, giving companies a voice when the mainstream won't listen, allowing organizations to reach their audience on their own terms, giving people a way to talk back.

Blogging Today

Blogging has an impressive history, but with the rise of social media blogging has taken a backseat. But there's still plenty of room for blogging.

"Certain ideas need to be expressed and a man needs more than 140 characters," says WordPress founder [Matt Mullenwag](#). He goes on to point out that social media is a primary referrer to blogs. In short, social media needs something to talk about and that's often blog posts.

[Andy Baio](#) of [Waxy.org](#), and a blogger since 2002, shares some major reasons why blogging still matters:

Most of the interest in writing online's shifted to microblogging, but not everything belongs in 140 characters and it's all so impermanent. Twitter's great, but it's not a replacement for a permanent home that belongs to you.

And since there are fewer and fewer individuals doing long-form writing these days, relative to the growing potential audience, it's getting easier to get attention than ever if you actually have something original to say.

Carving out a space for yourself online, somewhere where you can express yourself and share your work, is still one of the best possible investments you can make with your time. It's why, after ten years, my first response to anyone just getting started online is to start, and maintain, a blog.

Blogging is far from dead. It may not grab headlines, but that's OK. You weren't starting a blog to grab headlines anyway. The power of blogging that generated headlines in 2004 still exists today. You can still tap into it to reach an audience and share your story.

Blogging Strategies

The beautiful thing about blogging is there's no single right way to do it. There are a thousand different ways you can approach blogging and they can all work.

Blogging is what you make it.

It's all about how you want to harness the power of easy updates and building an audience. For some folks it's nothing without an audience, the bigger the better. For other people an audience doesn't matter. They'd still be blogging even if no one was reading. Figure out the approach that works for you, determine your own goals, define your own success—and go for it.

Here are some different approaches and strategies to blogging. Look here for inspiration, but don't feel limited. Your approach could combine several of these options together or explore something new.

Communication Channel - Your blog is just one channel in your communication strategy. Maybe it's more personal posts in contrast to your more corporate news articles, but it's primarily a different way to hear the same message.

Communication Hub - Your blog is the center of your communication strategy. If anyone wants to know what's going on, they check your blog. It's the home base of your online operations and every update gets posted there, whether it's personal or corporate, a lengthy whitepaper for download or a candid shot from the company picnic. You embed social media items here to make sure the widest possible audience sees everything you do.

Content Repository - Your blog is a place to collect and share knowledge, creating a destination and SEO goldmine. It will draw people to your site, build your reputation and be a marketing strategy in and of itself. Knowledge is your marketing strategy. Content will bring you eyeballs and business. No fluff here, you want solid, useful content.

Alternate Channel - You already have other outlets sharing content, but your blog takes a different track. Maybe it offers an inside perspective or takes a different view. It's in some ways counter to the standard narrative, and that's precisely the appeal.

Think Tank - Your blog is a place to think out loud. It's where you share rough draft ideas, figure things out, toss out ideas and see if they stick. Seth Godin is the master of this blog, throwing out loads of ideas in rough form. Many of them eventually become books.

This approach often works better for an individual, unless an organization is willing to be wrong once in a while.

Build a Brand - Your blog is all about building your brand. It can give personality to organizations and make faceless corporate giants seem more human. It's a way to show who you are and showcase your expertise. Every post establishes in the readers' minds who you are as a company. It's an ideal approach for being real and transparent with your customers.

Build a Resume - For individuals your blog is about building your career. It's a chance to flesh out your resume, prove your knowledge and expertise, and showcase your personality. It's a way to bring your resume to life and make you hard to ignore.

Historical Library - Your blog is a library of everything you've done. This approach is similar to a content repository, but your motivation is internal instead of external. This is your personal or corporate library. You're collecting and saving knowledge for the betterment of your company, saving ideas and inspiration for the future and for posterity. You're not doing it to provide content or create good SEO. This is your story and you want to save it for the sake of you. This kind of blog can be an especially good way to preserve insights, ideas and history as people come and go in your organization.

Revenue Generator - Some people hear about bloggers making six figures and think of blogging strictly as a moneymaking venture. It's true some folks make money at blogging, but if this is your motivation you're in for a ton of work and very little reward. Blogging works best as part of your broader marketing channel, helping a business indirectly make money. It's certainly possible to make good money directly through a blog, but it's not easy.

Home for Your Project - Another type of blog that's really fun is when your blog simply gives a home for your project. It's where your project takes shape, whether it's a comic book, art installation or cause. You share the process and even the creation itself on the blog and it all starts to come together, building an audience as you go. If you're writing a book, these are the folks who post it online and allow it to get better as more and more people read it and respond, as opposed to closely guarding it on their laptops and not letting anyone read it until it's published.

Examples

We hesitate to pair each strategy with an example because there are so many different types of blogs and rarely do they fit so nicely into categories. But it's still helpful to see examples. So here you go:

[37signals](#) - Look at 37signals—their brand is personified in their blog. They talk about what works and what doesn't, how they focus on the bottom line, how they make minor tweaks to boost the customer experience. Their blog might work as a communication channel, content repository and think tank, but for them it's primarily a brand builder. Read their blog and you know who they are as a company and what they stand for.

[Seth Godin](#) - Seth Godin is the master of the think tank blog, throwing out idea after idea. Of course Seth Godin's rough ideas are probably fully formed masters theses for the rest of us. He's a good example of someone who shares ideas and thoughts, trying things out, refining and improving them. Many of his books originated as posts on his blog.

[GapingVoid.com](#) - Hugh MacLeod is a great example of someone who just started doing what they're doing and blogging gave them a platform to achieve success. Hugh turned his napkin drawings into a thriving business by doing what he loved. His blog was merely a platform that allowed him to reach an audience.

[Chris Brogan](#) - Try thinking of a better example of someone who has built a business around their blog. ChrisBrogan.com is Chris Brogan and it's his platform, business pitch and everything all in one.

[Shel Israel](#) - He's famous for using blogs to pull projects together, often sharing portions of what he's working on to generate interest, refine the ideas and collect more examples. He polishes his points and makes the ultimate project better.

Darren Rowse - The ultimate example of a blogger as moneymaker is Darren Rowse. He wrote the book (and blog) about it—[ProBlogger](#). He also runs another moneymaking blog about [digital photography](#). Read Darren's stuff and you'll quickly learn how difficult it is. Both of his sites are good examples of content repositories.

Google - [Google's Official blog](#) is a good example of a blog as a communication channel. It doesn't cover everything the company does, but it gives them a platform to share their perspective, and they often give an inside scoop or share interesting tidbits. It's also a solid way to build their brand (not that Google needs it).

[Newscut](#) - Minnesota Public Radio's Newscut blog is a good example of an alternative channel. MPR already creates plenty of content, both audio news stories and text articles online. But the Newscut blog takes a different approach, exploring current stories from a unique angle or covering stories that don't usually get any attention.

Blogging Goals

OK, so you've decided to blog. Great.

Now what are you trying to accomplish? What's your goal?

It's vital to take some time to think through what you want to accomplish because it will keep you on track. You're going to hit some tough times. No endeavor is free of bumps and blogging will have plenty. You'll get discouraging feedback, hit writer's block or have to trudge through obscurity.

Having a goal will keep you on target and get you through the rough patch.

We've already talked about different strategies to take with blogging. Those are how you might approach blogging and some of them are more goal-focused than others. But your goals are what you want to accomplish with that approach. Goals are bigger picture and, arguably, should come first. But sometimes it's more fun to start with the different strategies.

Your blogging goals need to be personal and specifically tailored to your situation. You shouldn't get your blogging goals from an ebook about blogging.

But we have a few general goals that might help you think about it and figure out what your goal is.

Share Ideas, Experience & Expertise - Maybe your goal is to be an expert in your field. That position will bring you traffic, clients, income. A blog is a great way to showcase what you know and that can make you the go-to person.

Thought Leader - Maybe you want to be the thought leader in your field, blazing trails and thinking through tough new issues. This is similar to sharing ideas, but it's much less practical and much more theoretical. You certainly draw on practical experience, but it's about applying that thought and mixing in some forward thinking. Sharing ideas, experience and expertise is about today, thought leaders are about tomorrow.

Define, Clarify or Create a Niche - Maybe you have a topic that isn't well defined or clearly known. You can pave the way. Blogs are excellent ways to break new ground in a field, carve out a niche and make a topic known. How many blogs have sprung up around esoteric concepts that don't seem like they could support their own crowd? [Church marketing](#), the [Supreme Court of the United States](#), [election projections](#), etc.

Boost Your Career - A blog is a powerful way to showcase yourself. You can build your personal brand and platform, even

set yourself up to land a better job. That's an admirable and forward-thinking goal. Get on it!

Sell More Stuff - Maybe your goal is simpler: You just want to sell more goods.

Promote Your Company - Let's be honest: A lot of company blogs don't exist to become thought leaders or share ideas. They exist to beat the company's drum. That's OK. A blog can be a much more personal and engaging way to market your company. Of course as you get down to specific strategies to do this, you might discover that achieving your goal of straight up promotion requires doing something more, like sharing ideas or blazing new ground.

Whatever your goal is, figure it out and focus on it. You want your blogging to be focused and effective, not scattered and random. Being honest about your goal will help you get better results. You can be more realistic about what you're after and choose a better approach. Don't delude yourself about high and mighty motives if you don't really have them. But if that is what's driving your blog, cling to it. Your blog will be better for it.

Blogging Tips

Ready to blog? Let's talk tips.

We've got a lot of advice to share—this is the heart of our ebook. So we've broken our tips down by category.

General Blogging

Let's start with the big picture tips and tricks that can help you get your head around the very idea of blogging and blogging well.

Be Consistent

Blogging is built on consistency. Your audience needs to know when to expect content and you need to learn how to deliver it consistently. You'll need to train both readers and yourself. Set up a schedule, carve out the time and make it happen. Be sure to make your schedule realistic. Skipping posts, especially at the start, won't help anyone. You'll be better off posting less often but consistently than more often but inconsistently.

Be Gracious

Part of the downfall of mainstream media has been the ivory tower mentality—they're journalists. Of course they're right. Wrong.

They're just as human as the rest of us, just as prone to mistakes. Lose the pride and admit that you can learn from your readers. Be willing to admit your faults, be quick to say thank you, slow to be defensive. Practice humility.

Help People Out

Selfish bloggers don't get very far. You need to share the love. You need to give it away. You need to help one another out. While it's OK to talk about yourself and promote what you're doing, you should also help others and talk up what they're doing. Give a little. More often than not those small gestures of goodwill will come back in the form of links, support and promotion.

You Can't Take It Back

Remember the rule of the Internet: Once you post it, you can't take it back. Just because you delete a post doesn't mean it's been wiped clean from the Internet. There are so many archives and places where it could show up that you can't control. So be smart: Don't post something unless you're comfortable with everyone seeing it—your boss, your coworkers, your competition, your enemies, your IRS auditor, your mom.

Give Credit

One of the primary rules of blogging is to give credit where credit is due. If something inspired your blog post, give it a nod.

If you're pulling a quote from somewhere, link back to it. You don't have to show the entire chain of connection (I saw Bob's tweet about Ingrid's blog post which talked about a book by Deon), but giving credit is a helpful way to show people where your ideas come from. It helps them know where to look for more and it encourages back and forth conversation about that idea. You didn't have that idea in a vacuum, so be a part of the conversation.

Find Your Niche

Most blogging success is found by being successful in a narrow topic. You're not going to become well known as a generalist, covering everything under the sun with little connection. You need to have some focus. You need to find your niche. Narrow in on a topic (preferably the one you're passionate about) and focus on that and nothing else. You'll never find success if you're a mile wide and an inch deep. Find those few topics you can rule and cover them extensively.

Read Other Blogs

Don't be overly narcissistic. It's not all about you. Get out there and read other blogs in your category. You'll learn things, you'll get ideas, you'll find more things to talk about. You should also read other blogs about writing, blogging and other topics you enjoy, even if they're not directly related to your main topic.

You'll pick up some insights from that cross-genre reading and it will make your blog better.

Types of Posts

There are all kinds of blog posts you can write, but sometimes that wide-open sea of possibilities can be intimidating. Here are some options to narrow down the choices and help get you started.

Write a Series

Sometimes it helps to write a series of blog posts. Pick a topic and think of a dozen different things you can talk about. Start with something fairly specific and think through the details. Each of those details can grow to be their own post and pretty soon you have a series. For example, you might decide to write about a local zoo. You could give a review of the zoo, write a post about must-see things with kids at the zoo, list the top 5 animals at the zoo, explore the zoo's business operations and how they provide care for the animals, etc. A series can be a good way to generate interest among your readers and a good way to explore a topic thoroughly.

Write a List

Blogs have perfected the list—5 Ways to X, 21 Things You Need to X, etc. It's an approachable and sharable way to cover a topic. They're quick to read and can generate a lot of interest.

Some people over do it a bit and seem to come up with a list for everything. They can be overdone, but every now and then a good list is just what you need.

Do an Interview

Talking to someone else can be fascinating and relatively easy content. Let someone else do the talking for once! You get to tap into their expertise and share it with your readers. Score. You can record a video interview with Skype or other software or do a text interview by emailing the person questions and having them just write up their answers.

Share Articles & Resources

You're likely not the only blog on your topic, so point to what other people are writing that might be helpful to your readers. One good strategy is to summarize what an article or blog post is saying, pull out a quote or two of the especially good stuff and then add your own comment, either agreeing and adding an example or contradicting and drawing your own lesson. This works better than simply linking to an article because you've summarized it for your readers and it's now on your site. If the original post ever goes away, your post still works and can stand alone. Can't say the same for a simple link. (Just be sure not to repost someone else's entire blog post—that's stealing. Usually 200 words is a good maximum to quote or not more than 50% of the post for shorter pieces.)

Questions Are Blog Posts

Anytime someone asks you a question, that's a good blog post. More than likely other folks have the same question, so you're doing them a service by putting the answer out there. Don't let that insight and wisdom disappear in a phone conversation or an email, only to help the one person you're talking to. Write up that response and you've got a blog post.

Writing Advice

Just because you can write doesn't mean you can write. Here are some tips to help you improve your writing, which is the core of any good blogging.

Find the Edge

Blogging is widespread today. People are already talking about nearly everything. So you need to find that unique angle. Find the edge of a topic so you can bring something new. Find that bleeding edge that people aren't already talking about. You don't want to just add to the noise, so be sure you're finding that unique angle.

Margin to Edit

Just because you're a blogger in your pajamas doesn't mean typos and grammatical mistakes are OK. You still need to edit and proofread.

Readers don't want to read your rambling and they certainly don't want to trip over your typos. Take the time to edit and proofread your posts. Give yourself some space between writing and publishing. Having a schedule will help give you that margin to write, take a break, then edit, take a break and then proofread. That space before publishing will save you some embarrassing mistakes.

Write What You Know

The success of blogging is often about the unique perspective writers can bring to the table. You're an expert in something and that's why people come to your blog. It's not the detached journalistic voice, it's biased and personal and that's what works. Journalism strives to be unbiased. Blogging embraces bias. Let your experience shine.

Write Good Headlines

Your headline is often what determines whether or not people will read your post. You should spend some serious time working on that headline. Write it, rewrite it and edit it, just like you would for a blog post. You want to capture what your post is about, include some keywords for SEO, make it captivating and generate curiosity. That's a tall order. Headline writing isn't easy. But it has a big impact on your success. Give it the time and effort it deserves.

Write for the Web

Remember that you're writing online. It's a lot different than writing for a magazine or a book. Your copy should be shorter and easy to scan. Use subheads and bulleted lists to break things up. Use bold text to draw attention to main points or pull quotes to highlight a poignant statement. You want your post to be easy and quick to read. All of these things will help.

Write Conversationally

For some reason when people sit down to write they shift into high school essay mode. They start using big words and complex sentence structure. It gets confusing quick and nobody wants to read it. Don't write like a stuffy textbook that puts people to sleep. Write conversationally. Yes, you should still follow the rules of grammar, but you can relax a bit. Write shorter sentences. Don't use technical lingo or corporate speak. Company blogs have a special tendency to get dull, so fight for a strong, personal voice there of all places. Nobody wants to read a corporate blog full of corporate speak.

Write with Passion

Want to have a good blog? Write about what you're passionate about. Your enthusiasm will shine through and make for better reading.

Plus that passion will serve as a motivator when things get tough. If you love something, you'd probably be writing about it anyway. The topics you're passionate about make excellent blog fodder.

Write to Someone

Sometimes it can help to write a blog post as if you're writing to a specific person. It encourages an easy conversational style and can help you create a more accessible post that does a good job of addressing objections and concerns. Having a specific person in mind, especially if that person is in your target audience, helps ensure your post is hitting the topic the way you need it to.

It's OK to Experiment

Especially as you're getting started or when you get stuck in a rut, try something new. Experiment with a different writing style or a new topic. Try a different format or use another medium, such as video, photos or audio. Try writing something twice as long—or half as long—as you normally do. Try interviewing someone. Try telling a story. Try asking your readers for input. Experiment with something new and see what sticks.

Get Schooled

Writing is a skill like anything else. Just because you know how to write doesn't mean you're any good. You need to refine that skill. Simply writing helps. But you need to do more. School yourself on writing well.

Check out some books on the topic, stuff like *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser, *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott and *On Writing* by Stephen King. It also wouldn't hurt to brush up on the technical aspects. Check out *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White or something more modern like *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynn Truss. You should also invest in a style guide like the AP Stylebook, which will answer all your questions about when to capitalize titles, when to write out numbers or use figures and the proper usage of affect and effect.

Write When You Don't Want To

When you first start out it's probably going to be easy to write. You've got lots of ideas. The hard part is picking just one to focus on. But after you've been doing this for a while it's going to get harder. There will come a day when you don't want to write. On that day, you must write. The secret to becoming a successful writer is to write even when you don't want to write. If you wait for inspiration to strike, your blog is going to shrivel up and die.

Technical Know-How

Blogging requires some technical know-how. Tools have made it easy for even the tech newbie, but some basics will be a big boost.

Search Engine Friendly

By their very nature blogs are full of SEO awesomeness. Simply using WordPress gives you a leg up. But you can do even more by making sure you're using SEO keywords in your titles and throughout your posts. Figure out what people are searching for in your topic and use those words and phrases in your posts. Don't be obnoxious about it—work them in naturally and make sure they fit. But using those keywords will give you an extra SEO boost.

Back It Up

You need to make sure you're backing up your blog. There's nothing worse than pouring hundreds of hours worth of work into a blog just to see it disappear in some weird tech snafu you don't even understand. Get [BackupBuddy](#) for WordPress and get it going. If you're using another platform, find some way to back up your stuff, even if you have to do it manually every week. Better safe than so very, very sorry.

Stats

You'll want to set up some stats for your site so you can track things and see how it's going. If you set it up from the start, using Google Analytics or something similar, you can track it from day one. Of course once you set it up, ignore it. Nothing is going to crush your enthusiasm faster than checking your stats every day and seeing them go nowhere.

Trust us, that's how it'll be at the start. Set it up and ignore it, then check back in six months and hopefully you'll see a steady rise that's worth getting excited about.

Write First

Blogging is about writing. There are a thousand things you can get distracted by: social media, tweaking your design, researching SEO keywords, reading and commenting on other blogs, scouring your stats for trends, email newsletters and so much more. But none of those things are writing blog posts. They may be good things to do, but they're not what you're supposed to be doing. If you're not writing good blog posts, none of those things will matter. So write first. Explore your distractions after you're done writing.

Pictures, Video & More

Yes, blogging is all about writing. But people are also very visual. Images and video are more popular and easier than ever. You can make your blog posts more appealing and sharable by adding pictures and video. WordPress makes it pretty easy to upload images, automatically creating different sizes and allowing some image editing. You should try to add at least one image to every post. Look for Creative Commons-licensed images that have been licensed for free use, usually with attribution (pay attention to what's required).

To get pictures exactly the way you want them, you may want to invest in some image editing software like Photoshop or something else. To do videos right, you'll likely need to embed the HTML code. That's fairly easy to handle in WordPress, even if you don't know code. If you're not a techie, mastering these simple skills will be a big help.

Here's some help to see how it's done:

- Tutorial video: [Adding Images](#)
- Tutorial video: [Using the Media Library](#)

It's OK to Link

Sometimes people get the idea that if they link to something else, their readers will click away and never come back. Not true. In fact, the opposite is true. If you provide helpful, useful links, your readers will appreciate it. Don't worry about losing readers when you're providing something helpful. They'll come back.

Don't Do It

While there's a lot you should do to be a good blogger, there's also a lot you shouldn't do. Here are a few things to avoid.

Don't Reveal Too Much Information

You need to set some personal boundaries as a blogger (and really as a person online). How much is too much to share with the world? You need to know how much you're going to talk about your personal life. Decide now what's off limits and what's acceptable. Much of what you're sharing about your life likely involves other people. Is it OK with them if you're sharing? You either need to make sure it's OK or assume it's not. If you have kids, how much are you comfortable sharing about them? This also applies to business information. People have been fired for sharing the wrong things or thinking they were anonymous when really they weren't. If your blog isn't part of your day job, make sure it's not going to be a problem with your day job. (Read more on page 70)

Don't Be Reactionary

Some blogs go for eyeballs with strong opinions and bold ideas. That's fine, but it can get old when you're constantly outraged at every new not-quite scandal. Nobody has that much energy to get worked up over every little thing.

After a while it starts to look fake. Plus, you end up needing to generate scandal so you have something to freak out about. You should be able to create good content on your own and not need to always respond to what other people are doing.

Don't Be Too Self Promotional

You need to walk a fine line with self-promotion. Most people have a problem with this one, but they usually go too far one way or the other. Either they're too self promotional and they talk about themselves so much everybody gets tired of it. Or they go the other way and are so afraid of offending people they never talk about themselves and their audience misses out. It's OK to promote yourself. Just don't go overboard. Company blogs are especially susceptible to over-promotion. Your blog is here to help your customers, and they care about more than just your products.

Don't Obsess Over Traffic

It takes time to build an audience. Obsessing over your stats won't help. Checking them on a daily basis is a good way to get distracted and frustrated. Focus on writing instead. Check your stats infrequently so you can still notice major trends or set up some alerts so you can be notified if last week's post is taking off. But logging in every day and worrying about 10 fewer visits isn't going to get you anywhere. Except maybe crazy.

Don't Get Even

Your blog is not an outlet for responding to every perceived slight. You don't need to get even with the crazy driver who cut you off or the rude salesperson at a store. Don't fill your blog with rants. You've got more productive things to do. Don't be that person.

Don't Fake It

Bloggers can't be fake. It doesn't work online and it definitely won't work on your blog. Your readers will quickly call B.S. and you'll be found out. Part of what works with blogs is transparency and truth. Readers trust you. So don't you dare step on that trust by presenting some false persona, lying or misrepresenting yourself. You may not be a journalist, professionally bound to standards of integrity, but in some ways you have a higher standard. Don't be afraid to be yourself. That's what people are drawn to.

You Can Do It

Need a shot in the arm? Yes, you can do it. If you're having some doubts, here's what you need to know.

You're an Expert

You may not think of yourself as a bona fide expert, the kind they put on TV to explain things in your field. But you are. You're an expert at whatever it is you do. Nobody does it like you. You know your field, your industry, your job, better than anyone else. If you're even reasonably good at what you do, then you have something valuable to share.

All Experience Counts

Skills are skills. Even if your expertise doesn't seem grand and impressive, it's still expertise. It's not just white-collar folks with fancy degrees who can blog and share something worthwhile. Even if you work with your hands for a living and rarely touch a computer, you've got skills, insights and experience that would command an audience. Even the "boring" jobs like bagging groceries, data entry or fast food fry cook require skills and expertise. At the very least that experience is something nobody else has. Don't look down on your experience, embrace it.

Don't Quit Now

What you're doing matters. Hang in there. It can be hard at the start when you're slaving away, writing tons of posts and getting no response and barely a squiggle of traffic. But it matters. You're building something for the long haul. You're creating search engine juice that will later pay off.

This is the test—do you have what it takes? This difficult stretch is where you have to prove it—you can either fade out and give up, proving you don't have it. Or you can power through and show what you're made of.

Ignore the Dissenters

If you start blogging you're going to make somebody mad. It will happen eventually if you're any good at all. Somebody will get angry and you'll hear about it. You'll get rant-filled comments or receive a nasty email. Be prepared. Don't be surprised when it happens, don't let it ruin your day and don't waste your time with it. It may be your fault, it may not be. It may require a response, it may not. Apologize if necessary and move on. Don't obsess and don't let it drag you down.

Some Day is Today

It's time to stop saying some day. Take the leap. No more excuses. Make today the day you put your fears aside and embrace the risk. Give it a hug and get moving. There are a thousand reasons to quit and none of them matter. Whatever encouraging mantra you need, tattoo it on your forehead and get to work.

8 Steps to Get Started

So you're ready to get started? Here's a quick primer to getting up and running.

1. Technical Setup

First and foremost, you need a place to blog. But don't worry, this doesn't have to be intimidating.

There are a lot of simple, out-of-the-box solutions that work well for this. You can go with Tumblr, Blogger or WordPress.com for a hosted blogging platform. You can be up and running in minutes and you don't have to do any of the technical work.

But be warned—one of the benefits of blogging is that you own it. But that's not quite true if you're using a hosted blogging platform. You may own the words you're writing, but Tumblr (now owned by Yahoo), Blogger (owned by Google) and WordPress.com (owned by Automattic) have control over your platform.

That's why we highly recommend going with a self-hosted WordPress setup (WordPress.org as opposed to the hosted WordPress.com). You should own your domain and have access to your servers.

There are lots of resources to walk you through it, including [video tutorials](#) and our [Getting Started With WordPress](#) ebook. If that sounds overwhelming, you can find hosts that will do all the setup for you while you still retain some control.

2. Start Writing

Once you get a platform set up you're ready to go. Start writing.

Yes, it's that simple. Certainly there are all kinds of other things you can set up. You probably want to pick a theme or add some custom design elements. Add your logo. Maybe set up your sidebar or write some About copy.

But all that junk is extra. What really matters is writing your blog posts. So forget that other junk for now and start writing.

3. Goals & Strategy

It might seem smarter to talk goals and strategy before you start writing. But that'd be wrong. There's an immediacy to blogging. You don't have to wait for the next issue to come out, you just hit publish and your thoughts are live for the world to read. That's cool.

Part of embracing that immediacy is just sitting down to write and seeing what comes out. So definitely write first.

But then you should come back and spend some serious time thinking about your goals and strategy. Hopefully you've already done some thinking on this, but now it's time to get serious. Have a goal in mind, with strategy that flows from there. Create some objectives you'd like to hit and some tactics that will get you there.

Hopefully you've already thought about what kind of blog you're going to have. You have a goal in mind, whether you're sharing ideas or building a brand. Your strategy and tactics should flow out of that.

4. Keep Writing

Get back to writing. Your blog is all about the content, so you need to create more.

5. Other Junk

Now would be a good time to come back to all that other junk we said to skip so you could start writing.

We're lumping this together as "junk," but it's important stuff:

- Design - Spend some time on your site's look. You don't want to get lost in the weeds here, but do make sure you have a professional look.

- About - Make sure you add some basic about information to answer standard questions. Explain who you are and why you're qualified to blog. Give people a personality to connect to. You don't have to share all your secrets, but don't hide behind anonymity.
- Subscriptions - Set up all your subscription options, whether it's email, RSS or social media. Give people a way to stay connected once they find your blog.
- Extras - Add those extra elements, whether it's a plug for your book in your sidebar, a link to Amazon for a little referral income, a page detailing your services or whatever it is you need. While some of this might be secondary to your blog, it might be pretty crucial to reaching your goals.
- Prepare - Spend some time setting things up behind the scenes to pave the way for success. Come up with a schedule and plan to post consistently. Brainstorm a list of topics. Start drafting policies for comments, guest posts and more.

6. More Writing

Time to do some more writing.

7. Promotion

It's time to tell the world. Unless you're planning a private library or insider-only history, you probably want lots and lots of people to read your blog. So it's time to spread the word. You'll need to make an effort to get the word out and then let your words speak for themselves. Write good content consistently and people will come.

You'll want to use whatever other channels you have to spread the word. Send emails, post to Facebook, send a carrier pigeon, whatever works. Tell the world.

As you spread the word about your blog posts, remember to share something of value. Don't just beg people to come read your latest post. Share insights, ask questions, invite people to a conversation.

8. Even More Writing

You guessed it: back to writing. Sensing a theme here? Getting started with a blog is really about sitting down to write. Not just once in a while or whenever the inspiration strikes. But all the time. You should now have a posting schedule to follow and that should mean some scheduled writing time as well.

If your blog is going to succeed you'll need to be cranking out the quality content. So write, write and write some more.

Build Readership

Now that you've got your blog going, you probably want people to read it. Here are a few ways to build your readership.

SEO

One of the easier ways to build traffic is to make sure people can find you. You want your blog listed prominently on the search engines so you'll want to pay attention to SEO.

We've talked about this before, but it's worth mentioning how SEO can help you build traffic. People are always searching and that first page of search engine results is usually what gets the clicks. You want to be on that first page so you have more people finding your site, which is more people who might subscribe, more people who might come back.

Search engines can be a steady source of new readers, but you need to make sure your site is set up properly.

1. Simply blogging is a big first step. You're already creating quality content. That gives search engines the opportunity to link to you.

2. Using WordPress is another good step. Out of the box it offers good SEO.
3. Next you want to pack that content with keywords. Know what the relevant keywords are and use them in your blog posts and titles. You want people finding your site because of the core of what you talk about, not a few random posts.
4. Plugins: [Google Sitemap Generator](#) and [All-in-One SEO](#) are plugins that can help improve your SEO.
5. Themes: Your theme can be a powerful SEO tool. Two things to look: 1) Make sure the full title of your blog post is showing up in the title tags, and 2) Headlines are wrapped in H1 code. This gets a little technical and any solid theme should be doing this already, but it's worth checking.

Email Newsletter

An email newsletter can be a powerful way to build readership for your blog and also build your community.

Let's face it: Your audience won't read every single post you write. They've got other things going on and you're probably not the center of their universe. So anything you can do to remind people to check out your blog and point to your best content is going to be a big plus.

An email newsletter is an ideal way to cultivate that audience. Your email newsletter subscribers can be shaped into a core of solid, dependable fans who are eager to check out your stuff.

Here's how to do it:

1. Set up an account with a professional email newsletter solution. This is something you don't want to do yourself. There are several great providers out there, including Aweber and MailChimp. Sometimes the service is even free when your list is under a certain size.
2. Make it easy for your blog readers to subscribe to your email newsletter. Put a simple sign up box in your sidebar or under your blog posts. You might even want to offer an incentive to sign up, like a free ebook.
3. Send your email newsletter! Too often people set up an email newsletter system and then aren't consistently sending emails. That's a good way to undermine your efforts. You need to send consistent emails so your audience knows what to expect. Make sure your emails are short and helpful, highlighting some of your best stuff.

Subscriptions

You should also offer the option to subscribe to your blog. This way fans can be notified of each and every post to your blog.

This is accomplished through RSS, a syndication tool that allows readers to get your content. They subscribe to your RSS feed and can use various tools to see those updates.

Some folks think RSS is going out of style. That's why Google killed their RSS-service, Google Reader. But the backlash and sudden growth of Feedly are good indicators that people still like to subscribe to blogs.

You can also create an email subscription to an RSS feed, which will email a list every time you update your blog. Unlike an email newsletter it's automated and much more frequent, but it can be another solid option to offer.

Be sure to make your RSS feed visible, adding the orange RSS icon to your site. Usually listing it with your other social media icons is a good choice.

Social Media

You'd be crazy not to build your blog traffic with social media. It's getting all the headlines these days and is definitely delivering solid traffic.

It's another case where users aren't necessarily visiting your blog on a regular basis so you need to remind them and bring them back. Social media is a good way to broadcast some of your best posts and bring in new readers.

Go Deeper

You should try to take social media a step further. Don't use it simply as another broadcast tool. That's missing the point. Social media is built on conversation, so be sure you're allowing for that two-way communication. Ask questions. Encourage discussion. Let your blog post be the start of the conversation, but use social media to go deeper.

Go All In or Go Home

Social media isn't something you can do halfway. If you set up an account and post once a week you're not going to get anything out of it. You need to give it a serious effort, put some real resources into it and actually take part in the conversation. If you're not really going to be present, don't bother.

An inactive account says volumes about your consistency and your follow through (the lack thereof). You're better off staying out of it entirely.

Time Suck

Social media is a notorious time suck. It's easy to lose hours checking in on your feed and deluding yourself that you're a part of the conversation so it's time well spent. You need to carefully guard how much time you spend on social media. You need to give it a serious effort, but it's also easy to go overboard and start wasting time. Set a daily time limit and don't go over it. Make sure you're notified about replies so you can respond as necessary, without checking in and getting distracted.

Repeats Are OK

Unlike blogs, social media is often a live conversation and if people aren't there for the discussion, they'll miss it and won't go back for more. Social media is like a river of content that's always flowing. People dip their toe in from time to time, but they're rarely immersed in the flow. It's not only easy, but it's common for people to miss a single update in the stream of the conversation.

If you post something once, it goes into the stream of the conversation and is very quickly pushed aside by even more recent updates. A few hours later and your post isn't the latest. The next day it's old news. A few days later and it's completely forgotten.

So it's OK to repost an update. You might not want to have the exact same conversation word for word, but you can share the same link to your blog post several different times. Maybe rephrase it and post it at different times of the day, but repeats are acceptable. You'll be hitting people who didn't see it earlier and they'll appreciate it.

You don't want to overdo any reposting, but it's all right to share it more than once.

Free Resources

Another way to build readership is bribery.

Give people something. Offer up a free resource. Give away something of value as an incentive to check you out.

Maybe you require an email address for the free goods or some other hoop, but you give something valuable in return for people's attention.

Technically it is bribery. But more realistically you're giving people something they want and value. In return you're asking for their attention, but since you're giving them what they want, they're already more than willing to give you their attention in return.

You're the nice guy handing out good stuff. Of course they're going to pay attention.

Call it bribery, call it genius. It works.

Promote Your Blog Offline

Online isn't the only place to build your audience. You can do it in the real world. Find ways to promote your blog offline.

- Make sure your blog is on your business card so every time you hand one out you're spreading the word. Mention it as you're meeting people at trade shows or conferences and give them a reason to visit your blog.
- All your communication materials should include your blog URL. Print advertisements, invoices, letterhead, brochures, etc. Anyone who comes in contact with your company should know you have a blog.

- If you have a store or physical location where you interact with customers, make sure your blog is advertised. Restaurants should have the blog listed on the menu and even consider tabletop advertising that features your blog. A sign at the cash register is another great place.

Just remember to always give people a reason to check out your blog. Simply having a blog isn't incentive enough. Talk about the content, the free resources, the inside scoop or the deals you're offering.

Ask for Links

It's OK to ask for help. Ask other blogs in your field to check out your stuff and link to it.

You don't want to do this with every post, but when you have really good content don't be afraid to ask other blogs to link to it. Just like you, other bloggers are looking for good content to talk about. By sharing your stuff you're giving them blog fodder. Even if you're in the same field they likely have a different audience and are reaching different people. They win because they're sharing good content with their audience and you win because more people come to your site.

- Make sure you're asking folks to check out the best of the best. There's no sense sharing second-rate content.
- Don't do it too often. You're calling in favors and you've got a limited supply. Space them out.
- Make sure you're reciprocating. Don't ask a site to link to you if you've never linked to them.
- Make it easy. Give people some lingo to use and the link. They may or may not use it, but making it easier increases the chances they will.

Write Good Stuff

Oh, and write good stuff.

If you want to build readership the single greatest thing you can do is write amazing content. That alone will grow your audience and make everything else you do that much more effective.

Comments: Yay or Nay?

One of the features that initially distinguished blogs was the ability to post comments. The web became interactive and users could respond to these thoughts you were throwing out to the world.

Today, commenting is standard procedure. Every bit of social media and every article has a comment section. People are liking, tweeting, pinning and occasionally even adding their own thoughts to your rant.

Comments are a way you can engage your readers, give them a voice and allow your blog to become more of a conversation. It gives your readers a chance to challenge you or agree with you. They might back up what you're saying and they might call you out on it.

The biggest question you need to answer is if you're going to allow commenting or not. Since commenting is so ubiquitous these days and there are other avenues for feedback (especially with social media), it's OK to ditch comments on your blog. And if you do allow comments, you'll need to decide how you're going to approach them.

Here are some commenting pros and cons:

Pros:

- Gives your readers a voice. Creates a conversation and a community.
- Reader input can make your stuff better, sharing examples and resources you didn't know about.
- Comments can become a destination. Some people might want to check out what you have to say, but others might come to see the conversation. Comments themselves can draw more people to your blog.
- Being open to conversation means potential negativity and conflict (we'll cover that in the cons), and simply being willing to allow that says something about who you are. You're open, you're honest and you're brave. You respect others. Allowing comments on your site might simply be a facet of your brand and company philosophy.

Cons:

- Giving people an outlet to disagree with you means they eventually will. That can get uncomfortable if you don't handle conflict well. For a company it can be especially awkward. You might not want to give voice to your critics and competition.

- Moderating comments takes time and energy. There's spam comments to delete, fights to referee and even nice comments or questions to respond to.
- Comment threads can get off track and out of control. You can be faced with difficult decisions about how to moderate that thread, when to shut it down and how much time you're going to invest in it.
- Blog comments can be a reflection of you or your company, even if you don't agree with them or endorse them. It's your blog and you're responsible for the conversation.

Tips for Allowing Comments

If you are going to allow comments, here are some tips to help you make the most of it:

- Response Policy - Figure out how you're going to respond to comments. Some people are an active presence in their own comments, responding to every single post, whether it requires a response or not. That can take a lot of time. Other people completely ignore their comments, which isn't a great way to go either—why give people a voice if you're not going to listen? You'll need to find the balance between moderating a conversation and protecting your own time.

- Moderation Policy - You'll also need to come up with a policy for how to police your comments. Spam comments can be deleted without question, but you'll need to figure out what to do with people who are rude, using profanity or off topic. Maybe you don't care or maybe you'll want to delete or edit those comments. But keep in mind that editing or deleting comments is a pretty bold move—be sure to make it clear what you're editing or deleting and why.
- Comment Policy - Once you figure out how you're going to handle comments, you should make that known. Share your expectations with your readers. You should post a message above your comments that explains your policies.
- There are a lot of technical solutions that can make comments easier to manage. WordPress will notify you of comments, you can automatically moderate comments or even shut off comments on old posts. There are tools like Disqus that make nested comments easier and can even pull in social media conversations.

Don't Get Fired

It should go without saying that you need to be smart and safe when you use the Internet. It should go without saying, but we're going to say it anyway. Be smart and safe online.

Too many people make poor decisions, share too much info or offer up something they shouldn't have and they always end up regretting it.

Be smart and safe:

- Offer the necessary disclaimers. Note that you're sharing your own opinion and not those of your company. People have a hard time making that separation, but you might need to underline it. It can protect you and it can protect your company.
- Only talk about what you're allowed to talk about. A company blog is no place for company secrets. Make sure you have permission to talk about what you're talking about. Secrets are amazing content if you're ready to share them, but it's an amazing way to get fired if your company wasn't ready to share.

- You can never take it back. Remember that online content is forever. Even if you delete something it doesn't necessarily go away. That rant you made in the heat of the moment will be there forever, it will come up when a potential employer Googles you, so make sure you really want to say it.
- Be careful about personal information. There are certain identifying personal details that you probably don't need the entire world to know. Things like your birthday and your mother's maiden name, info that hackers would use to start building a profile and crack your accounts. Also be careful with details like where you live, your phone number, etc. Talking about the school across the street from your house might sound harmless, but you've just told every whack-job exactly where you live. Remember that you need to watch those kinds of details not just for yourself, but everybody.

In general, be nice. Too often the Internet gets ugly simply because people are mean. Take a step back. Think twice. Get someone else's input. If all else fails, be nice.

In Closing

There's your primer on blogging. You could do a lot more reading on the subject. There are plenty of books on the topic and blogs about blogging, but there's really only one thing you need to do...

Start writing.