

# Stop surprising me with your “tips”

In the last few weeks, I have been noticing an inordinate amount of posts with this type of formulaic headline:

[Insert number, generally 5 or 7] [insert hyperbolic adjective such as surprising or best-ever] **Tips to** [insert desired action, generally improving or achieving] **Your** [Insert success-oriented result such as expert knowledge or success]

Example:

## **5 Tips to Exponentially Improve Your Business Success**

This is a headline formula sure to get attention. It is well-known that people love lists, tips and any headline with a number in it. Combine them all, and well, you have guaranteed clicks (also known as click-bait). And click-bait is exactly what these are. Very few, if any, of the articles attached to these headlines provide anything substantial. Certainly, not anything surprising. And many seem to forget what a tip is.

Although the word tip has many meanings (including the point of a pencil, to topple something) the definition most of these posts refer to is this, from Merriam-Webster:

*a piece of advice or expert or authoritative information*

*or*

*a piece of advance or confidential information given by one thought to have access to special or inside sources*

But here's the thing. A lot of what I am reading barely seems like advice and most of it is certainly not authoritative. For example, I read one of these articles entitled something like

5 Tips to Improve Your Writing, and one of the “tips” was “don’t lie.” Seriously. Don’t lie is not a tip, it’s a given (and some of the religious persuasion would say it is a commandment).

And then, there’s an article I read last week about “surprising” ways to land a job. Here’s one of the surprising ways: network. They may have well put in “fill an application” or “send a resume.”

I understand why people are writing these headlines and constructing their posts like this. After all, following a formula is easy, and it usually gets attention. The problem is that when you don’t deliver on the promise of the headline, people won’t read anything you write anymore or at least won’t look at it seriously.

Here’s my non-surprising tip: avoid click-bait posts.

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## **One big marketing lesson from the MLK Day of Service**

For several years now, there have been organized Days of Service on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day across the United States.

I love Days of Service. In 2013, I went to the big one organized around President Obama’s second inauguration, where I joined thousands in putting together care packages for US troops. Yesterday, I went to the Montgomery County (where I live) Day of Service and learned to crochet squares, which

will be joined together by other volunteers into blankets for needy people.



Crochet squares at  
Montgomery County  
MLK Day of Service

Yesterday, at the Montgomery County Conference Center, where the MLK Day of Service event was held, I saw hundreds of folks, representing various ethnicities and races, many of them children, all crammed together in a ballroom. All of them converging to volunteer in memory of Dr. King, to participate in a small project (crochet for one hour, like me) but selfless.

How do you get thousands of folks to volunteer? Generally, there's not enough budget for physical incentives (t-shirts, food, etc.) for everyone. People will need to transport themselves to the location and give up a chunk of their time. So why do people do it, year after year?

All sorts of people will take the time and devote energy to volunteering because there is payoff. The payoff is a feeling of accomplishment. They feel like they are helping out and perhaps, even making a difference.

The one big marketing lesson here is simple. **People want do**

**things that make them feel good about themselves.**

A powerful motivation to get people to do what you want (buy a product, sign up for healthcare, etc.) is to focus on making people feel good about themselves.

Have you seen the TV commercials for Chantix (a medication to help people quit smoking)? The commercials tell the stories of individuals who decided to quit, generally because they want to live long lives for their families. They focus on how good people feel once they have stopped smoking, and what a great accomplishment it is.

We know good marketing understands and focuses on the intended target audience. Part of understanding a target audience is to know what will motivate action. Some marketers feel scare tactics work better (if you don't buy life insurance, you will be hit by catastrophic funeral costs you won't be able to afford). In my opinion, people prefer to feel good about their choices (if you buy life insurance, you will have peace of mind).

What are your thoughts? Do you respond better to positive or negative marketing?

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## **Before you write your next blog post, ask yourself this**

You want to grow your blog. You want to write consistently. You want to be shared widely.

All bloggers do. But not all bloggers succeed.

With all things being equal, (posting well written, well research, thoughtful, grammatically-correct and spell-checked posts) what sets successful bloggers apart?

Successful bloggers know the answer to this question:

### **Who will read this blog post?**

In other words, they know and understand their **target audience**.

If you know your target audience, you will write the stuff that is relevant, useful and/or interesting to them.

Let's say you are a plumber who blogs about plumbing issues. Who is your target audience? Is it potential customers? Or is it young plumbers who want to learn the business? If it is the former, then your blog posts would perhaps be focused on what causes plumbing issues and do-it-yourself tips to keep plumbing working well. If your target audience is young plumbers interested in learning the tricks of the trade, you might write about how to get customers or how to find the best plumbing supply vendors.

If you don't define your target audience, and think about their needs, you will have an unfocused blog, and you will end up reaching no one.

So before you write your next blog post, ask yourself **who will want to read this?** If the answer is not a member of your defined target audience, think twice about posting.

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# **Blogging resolutions, goals and actions for 2015**

It's hard to believe that we are in January. Of 2015. After clearing the haze left from the year-end holidays, and eying the still empty 2015 calendar in front of us, what better time to consider what you want to do with your blog this year.

In order to do something (bigger, better, more, less)—anything—with your blog, you should consider creating your very own 2015 blogging plan, which should include setting blogging resolutions and goals, and then listing a series of actions to get you there.

To me, a resolution is the guiding principle (for example, I want to be a better writer) while goals are a measurable way of achieving results (following the example, publish five articles during the year). Actions are simply the steps you take in order to get there (again, per example, research publications).

So here's your bare-bones 2015 blogging plan:

1. Set a blogging resolution for the year (or as some people like to do, a focus word/phrase)
2. Set a series of goals (make sure they are specific and measurable) to help you achieve your resolution
3. List the actions you need to take to get there

## **Blogging resolutions (choose one or write your own)**

- Blog regularly and consistently
- Get better results/generate leads/improve thought leadership
- Increase blog readers
- Restart a blog
- Upgrade/change the focus/redesign the blog

- Be more focused on your area of expertise

### **Blogging goals (Pick and choose which would help you attain your blogging resolution and then add the specifics)**

- Create a blogging schedule/editorial calendar that includes topics, authors, target amount of posts, keywords, etc.
- Write a mission/vision statement for the blog
- Set aside brainstorming time each month to generate blog post ideas
- Spend more time on each blog post paying attention to grammar, spelling, fact-checking
- Create better headlines for each blog post that will result in (more attention, more readers, better sharing)
- Implement a blog promotion plan to reach target audience
- Include graphics, video and/or audio in most or all blog posts
- Write a target number of blog posts per week/month/year
- Experiment with a different format (podcast, vlog, live blog)
- Determine specific call-to-actions to include with every blog post

### **Blogging actions (everybody should do most of these)**

- Update your blogging software, themes and plugins regularly or as needed
- Review your current plugins and explore new or different versions (Do you still need all of them? What functionality is missing from your blog?)
- Review your sharing capabilities (Any new social networks you want to include? Noticed any good sharing plugins on other blogs?)
- Update your copyright line to reflect 2015 (do this now!)
- Research your “competition”
- Set your 2015 Google Analytics goals

- Study your Google Analytics ( if you don't know how—search for a tutorial or class)
- If you use IFTTT, review and update your settings
- Create graphics “warehouse” (whether server or cloud-based) where you can access and store your own pictures, images, infographics, video, etc.
- Research and select an image subscription service
- Determine your blog loading speed and if it is slow, find ways to improve it
- Make your blog responsive already! Do you see many people without smartphones around?
- Update biographies, about us pages, gravatar pictures

This is by no means a complete list. What would you add? What are your blogging resolutions and goals? What specific actions do you take to keep your blog running smoothly?

Happy New Year 2015! Here's a virtual toast to you achieving great things with your blog this year. If you've never had a plan for your blog, make 2015 the year to start!