

7 Solutions to Blogger's Block

It happens to all of us. Sometimes we just can't/won't blog. We are out of ideas. Or, if we do have ideas, they don't gel enough to form a good blog post. Perhaps we are being perfectionists. Or perhaps we are burned out.

Does having blogger's block mean you should give up your blog? I don't think so!

Here are seven solutions to deal with blogger's block:

If the problem is lack of ideas:

1. **Revisit and update an old post.** Check your archives. What post had good traction? Review it and re-use it. Update as necessary.
2. **Shake up your routine to inspire creativity.** Creativity experts suggest shaking up your normal way of doing things – such as taking a different route to work, brushing your teeth with the opposite hand—in order to help your brain form new ideas. Once you have, sit down and brainstorm ten different ideas for blog posts. Write them down. Revisit them as necessary.
3. **Create a “compilation” post.** Instead of writing a brand new post, compile or curate resources, articles or lists. You could do a “round-up” of blog posts or articles (e.g. 5 best articles on SEO) or research a list of resources (e.g. 15 upcoming tech conferences).
4. **Interview someone.** Come up with five questions and pose them to your company president, a colleague, an industry leader or to whomever it makes sense. Alternatively, try interviewing someone via Skype, and post the video of the

interview (and if possible, a written transcript).

If the problem is burnout:

5. **Solicit guest bloggers.** Reach out to people you know—other bloggers, professionals in your industry, friends—and ask them to write a post. Make sure to provide a topic and guidance (and a deadline).

6. **Try a different format.** If you always write your posts, what about doing a video blog or a podcast? Or how about having a graphic post (heavy on images, light on words).

7. **Take a break.** Sometimes you need time off to recharge. You should write a post explaining the blog is on a short hiatus or that you are on vacation. You should probably say when the blog will be back. If you are uncomfortable not having content during your break you may want to re-post popular older posts or seek evergreen content. If you have a white paper or book, you could run excerpts.

What do you do when you are struck with blogger's block? Please share your suggestions and solutions in the comments.

Check your calendar before you do anything else

This morning, I got an email from a networking group apologizing for scheduling a lunch during Passover (which starts tonight and runs for eight days). It offered free admission to those observing Passover since they would not be able to eat the lunch offering (people who observe Passover

refrain from eating bread and other grains, among other dietary restrictions).



“Fat-ass wall calendar II”
by Geir Arne Brevik on
Flickr

There are many religious observances from various religions throughout the year. Some are more observed than others. While organizers can't always avoid having a conflict, they should try. For observant Muslims, attending a lunch during Ramadan is impossible. For observant Jews, attending a networking event on Yom Kippur is unthinkable. Some Christians would not attend a BBQ on Friday during Lent.

Understanding the importance of holidays to their practitioners should be on communicators' and event planners' agendas. From a practical point of view, why would you schedule and promote an event that potential participants won't be able to attend? From an inclusive point of view, why would you not be sensitive to different religious beliefs?

But it is not only about religious observance. It's about understanding what is going on when you are planning your event. Will something else affect your turnout? A competing event? A conflict? A major city-wide happening? If there is going to be a race that shuts down various city streets, for example, that might make it difficult for your attendees to get to your event or find parking.

All it takes is to check the calendar *before* you plan your event. Of course, some things will pop up after you have settled on your dates and venues, which may force you to reschedule or adapt somehow.

If you are constantly planning events, then you may wish to invest in Chase's calendar, which lists just about everything, everywhere. Otherwise, if you use Google, you can subscribe to various calendars (religious holidays, US holidays, etc.). Or there is this Holidays Calendar, which lists all major religious and US holidays for the year. For those who prefer paper, most wall/desk calendars list major holidays. And don't forget to check your local resources such as newspapers, local websites, chambers of commerce and others to understand what is going on closer to home.

But having a calendar is useless unless you check it. Make it part of your event planning and promotion checklist.

Wishing a Happy Passover to those who celebrate. It's on my calendar!

How to choose the best social networks for marketing

Being effective in social media marketing requires choosing the right social networks on which to spend time and effort (and money). And you do have to choose because a) there are too many networks and b) some will work better than others.

To choose the "right" social networks you should consider:

Your offering. Are you a retailer or a service provider? How much explanation does your offering require?

Your target audience. Who is buying your product or service? Where does the target prefer to receive information? Where is the target likely to make a decision?

Your strengths. Are you visual or do you like words? Are you more likely to take and post pictures or write a 1000-word blog post?

Where have you had the most traction? If you haven't yet been measuring response, then start right away. Google Analytics will tell you where people are coming from, and this is very valuable information. If most of your customers are coming from a particular social network, it makes sense to focus your energy and effort there.

I met a blogger who writes about event planning, and she gets the most visits to her blog from Pinterest. So she focuses exclusively on building her Pinterest presence. Then there's the women's clothing and accessories retailer who gets most of her online orders through Facebook. She has decided to budget for Facebook ads and sponsored posts and it is really paying off.

In both cases, these people understand their product/service and where to best market it. And they have decided to really focus on the social network that provides the most bang for the buck.

How many social networks do you focus on? Are you finding some work better than others?

You aren't on social media???

Those of use who work in a communications-related field have been quick to embrace and promote social media. We use social networks actively, we counsel clients to get on social media, and here's the kicker, some of us frown on those who don't do social media.

But how important is it to business to be on social media?

Just this morning, I read how Gini Dietrich of Spin Sucks is now a Hertz customer because her former favorite car rental company, Avis, failed her on social media. It would seem that businesses are at peril if they ignore customer complaints expressed on social media.

The book Groundswell by Charlene Li also counsels that businesses must adapt to the reality that customers are on social media, and will talk about you whether you participate or not in the conversation.

And yet, there are many many successful businesses that don't have a Facebook page, that are not on Twitter, have never heard of Pinterest—and **don't care**. For example, there's an accounting firm in McLean, VA that created a website seven years ago and has barely updated it since and that has absolutely no social media presence. Or the marketing firm that has a blog last updated more than a year ago. Or the many solo practitioners I have met that don't even have a website.

The truth is you can be in business, and even be successful, without doing social media. Social media is just a platform, like television or radio. If you don't use it, you may not reach a certain segment of the population, but that does not mean that you aren't reaching your target audience.

The big issue is that consumers take to social media to voice their complaints (not so much their compliments) about

businesses. Those consumers figure that the amplification power of social media will shame businesses into fixing their problem. And in many cases, this is exactly what happens. Unlike the mass media of yore, social media allows for far more connection and interaction between businesses and consumers.

But what if your business is not a huge national brand? Does it matter? I don't think it does.

That said, I believe that being on social media is an asset to any business. Social media networks can help grow connections and create new relationships. Social media helps to market and grow a business, and expose it to new audiences.

Businesses do not need social media to thrive, but they should consider using social media to grow.

What do you think? Do you judge businesses if they aren't on social media?

It's so basic, it makes sense!

Have you ever been to a networking event where you meet people, ask what they do and they give you a long rambling explanation or a very obscure description. You are then confused and ask them to clarify, and then they say this: Basically, I do [something you can understand].



Aha by Himmelskratzer on Flickr

Some people can just give you their job's title, such as chief counsel at xyz industries, and you can understand what they do. And some people have easy to understand professions such as doctor, accountant, insurance sales or real estate development.

Also, describing yourself as the "senior" manager or vice president does not help explain what you do.

But take for instance someone I met recently. He started off by telling me where he works (a company with advocacy in the name, but that doesn't actually advocate). Then, he told me they work with individuals who are looking to ensure their access to financing (or something like that). Then he said: "Basically, I sell insurance."

Generally, when you start a sentence with basically, you are about **distill the essence of something to its most UNDERSTANDABLE part**. Like a structural engineer who tells you that basically, she works to make bridges safer. Or the content strategist who tells you that, basically, he works with companies to find the most relevant information for their customers.

So before you go to your next networking event, or write your about page on your website, ask yourself: what is it that you do (or your company does), basically?

If it's basic, it generally makes sense!

UPDATE

Media trainer Brad Phillips has a great suggestion for improving your elevator pitch: start with the why. Here's a link to the post on the Mr. Media Training blog.

How to get more blog readers (and customers) fast

If there is one “secret” to get more blog readers (other than having a relevant, interesting, well written blog), it is this: be likeable. That's it.



Heart doodle by findingthenow on Flickr

People tend to do business with companies they like. People hire people they like. And people read blogs they like.

If you've ever read Dale Carnegie, you know that one of the main tenets in his teachings is to be likeable. For example, Carnegie says it is better to not to try to win an argument—let the other person be right. He also suggests disarming critics by being nice to them.

Social network behemoth Facebook knows likeability is key. After all, you are asked to “like” pages and status updates.

How can your blog be more likeable? Here are a few suggestions:

Be easy to understand—Instead of throwing around fancy words and jargon, make sure people know what you are saying.

Show your expertise without showing off—If you have to tell people you are superman, then your super powers are failing you (and perhaps you left your superhero costume at the dry cleaners).

Have an approachable tone— People respond positively to cheerful, casual and caring tones, among others, while sarcastic, acid and pedantic tones generally turn people off.

Leave combativeness to soldiers at war—You can disagree with something without attacking it wholesale.

What makes you like reading a blog? What makes you never come back? Let me know in the comments.

*Become a better blogger! Join me for the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1 (one week from today!) in Washington, D.C. Details and registration [here](#).*

Is Feedly picking up the feed? Test post.

As has happened multiple times already, Feedly has stopped picking up the feed to this blog. My last post, which I wrote on Thursday, March 20, has yet to appear. I am testing to see if this post will be picked up. It is a disaster when you depend on the RSS to work for your readers to be able to see your stuff. Feedly is failing me.

I apologize for any inconvenience if you are getting this through email.

How to lose blog readers fast

Have you ever seen a blog headline that says something like this:

How to lose 10 lbs. fast!

You quickly go check it out to find that the blog post doesn't really exist. You will not be losing 10 pounds fast, but you may be asked to pay ten pounds (if you were in England, perhaps 10 dollars here in the U.S.). In some cases, the blog post will consist of one line providing a bit of the

information you are looking for, and then you will be hit with this: *click here for more*. The “more” is that you are likely being asked to buy a book, seminar, program, etc. to learn the many secrets of fast weight loss (or increasing sales, or whatever).

A variation on this is the pop-up that appears before you can even read the blog post asking you to sign up for a “free” newsletter or sign in as a “member” to read more. In this case, the blog owner wants your information to add to a database as an exchange for providing information.

I may not know how to lose weight fast, but I do know what makes blogs lose readers in a second:

Tease them or try to sell them.

Readers come to your blog to pick up some knowledge, insight, advice, tips or motivation. They do not come to your blog solely to buy something. They do not want to give you their name and email and credit card information. They don't want to be added to your email list. They simply want to learn.

If you aren't willing to give information to your blog readers for free, with no strings attached, I suggest you forget blogging and look to other methods of content delivery.

Am I suggesting you have to give away all your secrets for free in your blog? Of course not! But you must think of your blog as a way to help your readers learn something while showing them that you know your stuff.

You *can* promote your events and e-books and seminars, but not by teasing your audience or bullying them into giving you money now. Do it like I will below, and your readers won't be turned off.

*Avoid blog errors like this one. Attend my **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1 in Washington, D.C. Early*

registration discount ends tomorrow at midnight, so register today to save \$10. More information and registration on the Eventbrite page.

Did Mad Men write this commercial?

Now, I should say upfront that I do NOT watch Mad Men, the AMC series about the advertising business in New York City in the 1960s. However, I do know that it shows the very real sexism of the time that ran rampant in advertising agencies. Women were generally in support staff positions rather than as creatives or agency principals (come to think of it, even in the 1990s, when I worked in advertising, the agency principals were all men...).

On the radio a couple of days ago, I heard a commercial for a home security company. In the spot, a woman is narrating and telling the audience that since her husband started traveling a lot for business, she is afraid to be alone in her house. And because she wishes to retaliate against her husband for taking the job that makes him go out on the road so much, and leaving her all alone, she has decided to get a home security system so that she can feel safe. Now, if she hears a noise, she doesn't need to reach for the Xanax, but rather look at her computer screen and monitor all the rooms in the house. (I am not making this up, except for the Xanax part.)

The commercial makes several assumptions:

- 1.) Women are afraid to be alone (being the weaker sex and all).

2.) Only men have (big, important) jobs that require travel.

3.) Women can make the decision to buy something, but the husband (who is the breadwinner after all) is the one controlling the household finances.

4.) Only married people own homes that would require home security (single people always live in apartments apparently).

(I could add 5.) Marriage is only between a man and a woman , but this is so ubiquitous in advertising that it's a topic for another day).

When I heard it on the radio, I couldn't believe that a company wanted to advertise its services in this way in 2014. Women have been in the workforce for a long time and they travel for business. In fact, I found the commercial to be quite offensive. But clearly, in the mind of this sexist home security company, as a single woman who is not afraid of being in my own home by myself, I am not the target market.

What is particularly a bad marketing decision is to be so narrowly focused when home security is something that could be sold to every home owner. This commercial not only is **too narrowly targeted but it could serve to turn off potential customers** due to the various outdated assumptions it makes.

Other companies are being more reflective of the reality of gender roles. For example, a national detergent brand has a TV commercial where the dad is doing the laundry of his very rambunctious (and dirty) little girls. Or the insurance company that shows a single mother shopping for life insurance.

We are not living in the 1960s. Companies that use dated (and sexist) notions are alienating potential customers...and that is not good for the bottom line.

In the Washington area and looking to jump start your blog?

*Attend the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1. Sign up before March 21 to get early registration pricing. Registration [here](#).*

Is robotic social media worth it?

On Wednesday, I wrote about how some Twitter accounts seem to be run by Rosie, the robot maid on *The Jetsons*. But robotic social media happens on other social networks and even on blogs. Since so many people seem to be doing it, what is the value of robotic social media?

Robotic social media? That's a thing?

First, what do I mean by robotic social media? I mean social media that is cursory, unengaged, formulaic, uninspired, and there because someone thought it was a good idea to be present (but not active) on social networks. It's the one tweet a day that announces a new blog post. Or the automated "thank you for following me" tweet. It's the blog post that has no salient point and seems written just to have some new content on your site. It's the LinkedIn profile that has not seen an update in three years, since it was set up.

Robotic social media nearly always depends on some sort of "social media management tool" that usually cross posts for you, and basically handles social media by algorithm.

Why would you do that?

I have been thinking about why people would use social media in such a non-social way. There are probably several reasons, for example:

- For SEO purposes
- Too busy to manage social media on your own
- To check off social media on the communications plan tactics

Only one of these could have some sort of value: SEO. Certainly, due to changes in search engine algorithms, social media has impact on search results. The theory is that being present on social media *helps* your search results. However, I believe that search engines reward influence, and being robotic (unengaged) does not lead to influence.

Perhaps, it is even counteractive

I wrote about the woman who admitted she uses a Twitter management tool and that she really hadn't known she "knew" me from Twitter. Now, I know that there's no there there. So no more interaction. Davina Brewer in the comments on that post mentions something that happens every day, with big brands and regular people: no response to direct tweets/messages. In fact, just this morning, I tweeted LinkedIn to ask a question, and still no response.

When I don't get a response, I assume that person/brand/organization doesn't care or doesn't even monitor their messages. I then stop interacting. I bet many people stop interacting or even following brands/organizations when their comments are not even acknowledged.

In my opinion, robotic social media is not worth it. To do something just because you think you have to, and then do it by proxy, is not going to accomplish any goals other than checking something off your to-do list.

As many have said before, social media is a platform not a

strategy. If you don't use the platform, it doesn't mean you don't have a communications strategy. Use the platform well, on the other hand, and you will further your communications strategy rather than stymie it.

*Don't be robotic! Come learn how to blog with me in the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1 in Washington, D.C. You will learn what makes for an effective blog, how to come up with blog post ideas and how to connect with your audience. Details and registration [here](#).*