

Learn how to write your blog

So many people don't ever get their blogs off the ground because of various fears: fear of not knowing what to write, fear of not having enough content, fear of writing itself. Well, you can conquer those fears by attending my **"How to write your blog"** workshop. I cover what you should write about, how to come up with ideas and inspiration and getting the blog post written.

The next **blogging workshop will take place on Friday, May 17 starting at 9:30 a.m.** This time, I am traveling across state lines to Virginia to hold the workshop at Link Locale, a co-working space in Clarendon. Also new this time is that I am offering an discounted price for early registration of \$70 if you register by May 1. After that, the price goes up to \$79.

More details and registration are available at the [Eventbrite page](#).

Hope to see you there!

Social media intelligence is an essential skill

You have probably heard of Emotional Intelligence (EI), which is defined as the ability to perceive, evaluate and control emotions. EI is the ability to figure out how to respond appropriately to a situation. There are people that rank low on the EI scale—they lack empathy or social skills. They may

laugh inappropriately or not seem saddened by a tragic moment. And there are those who have high EI and are very adept at navigating human interactions.

Yesterday's attack on the Boston Marathon got me thinking about a variation of EI—what I am terming **social media intelligence**. The news was just awful, and coming out in dribs and drabs. On Twitter, there was a ton of (mis)information. There was one bomb, then there were three. Was it domestic terrorism or did this have the hallmarks of Al Qaeda? Wild speculation abounded.

The people who have social media intelligence were the ones had reasonable responses and tweets. Some asked people to check their sources before tweeting and some asked others to refrain from posting exceedingly graphic images.

Those with **low social media intelligence are the people that appear unaware how their communications affect their followers** and who were busy re-tweeting thoughtlessly, spreading rumors and even engaging in fear-mongering.

Another variation of low social media intelligence was being unaware that a big news event was happening and tweeting/posting about mundane, unrelated stuff. Unfortunately some of these are communications folks who have automated posts to send out press releases and other announcements. There is little that is as jarring as reading about an upcoming event (join us for a spectacular fun-filled evening!) when simultaneously finding out that the nation's oldest marathon has been targeted by terror. Some people (those with higher social media intelligence) called out this behavior.

Whether EI is learned or you are born with it is an open question. Social media intelligence on the other hand, can most certainly be learned. In fact, in today's social media fueled information age, having this type of intelligence is an

essential skill. Here are a few guidelines:

- Be aware of what is going on and act accordingly. Don't post without checking your feeds.
- Don't assume that everything you see on social media is true and deserving of re-posting. Double-check facts and sources.
- Every social media network is different—post accordingly. Perhaps your personal trials and tribulations are best left to Facebook and taken off LinkedIn.
- Remember that people can see your posts both in real-time and in the future.
- Discussions on social media are not all about you. Remember the social in social media.

What would you add? What makes someone have social media intelligence? What are examples of lacking or having social media intelligence?

Blogging: when is it too personal?

Note: The following applies to business or organizational blogs not personal blogs.

What makes so many blogs fun to read is that they are more personal than other forms of communication. Since there are few (or no) editorial layers, most blogs are more frank and more conversational than other types of writing.

But there is a difference between showing your personality and

being personal. I am certainly in favor of showing personality. If you like to compare everything to sports or music or movies, then do it. If you talk about your passions for cooking or travel, it makes you look like a well-rounded person.

There is also room for personal stories, as long as you are using them to illustrate a point or explain a position. What there is no room for, in my opinion, is really personal stuff that you would share with family and friends, but not with business acquaintances, such as a discussion of your latest mammogram or romantic break-up or philosophical musing.

Yes, I know you have a right to blog about whatever you like. This is especially true if you, like me, are a solopreneur or head of a very small company. Your business is personal...but your blog can't be. Remember why you are blogging—perhaps it is to help with thought leadership, lead generation and/or SEO. Ask yourself if the very personal post you are writing will advance or detract from that.

What do you think? Is there a line? And if someone crosses that line on his/her blog, are there consequences? I would appreciate if you shared your thoughts in the comments.

Is your message reaching the right person?

This past week, I got four or five calls/messages from a guy at a car dealership saying he had the information I requested. Trouble is, I didn't request the information. The guy most likely had the wrong phone number. His message was not reaching the right person.

If you want to communicate a message, you have to make sure that you are reaching your target audience, whether it is a one-to-one interaction or a specific demographic group.

What can we learn from the dealership guy?

First, get the details and information that you need. In this case, the dealership guy had the wrong phone number. If you want to communicate with any audience, it is important that you know where they are and how to reach them.

Second, if you aren't getting a response, check why. This guy left me four messages. The fact that I wasn't getting back to him did not seem to trigger the realization that he was calling the wrong person. For marketing communications, you may want to check the reach of the channel you are using, or whether the message is appropriate to your target audience.

Third, pay attention! If the dealership guy had bothered to pay attention to my voice mail message he might have realized he was calling the wrong person. Many marketers are, like him, going through the motions. If the playbook says, contact someone three times or run an ad for a month, that is what these inattentive marketers are doing, regardless of effectiveness.

Are you sure your message is getting through to your intended target audience?

What does April 1 mean to you?

For many, April 1 is April Fools Day, and they act accordingly foolish. For others, it is Opening Day for Major League Baseball, and they make plans to attend a game. For some, April 1 may simply be the start to a new month or the second quarter of the year.

My point is that just because for you April 1 means pulling stupid pranks on people or going to the ballpark it does not mean other people share your views. As a communicator or marketer, you have to be sure that your target audience will get or share the prism with which you see the world.

Corporations use holidays/special days in their advertising all the time. Maybe it's Easter or Christmas, or Valentine's Day or MLK Day. Those days may or may not resonate with your target audience. It is your job as a communicator to make sure that you are not losing your audience by focusing on the wrong thing.

Last week, a local DC organization (which I will not name because it certainly does not deserve publicity) thought it would get a jump on April Fools, so it pranked its membership. In my mind, it made the organization look juvenile. I am sure to the organization's leadership it was a harmless joke—just having a bit of fun.

However you choose to celebrate April 1, take a moment to check whether your audience understands and embraces that. The Onion is expected to make an April Fools joke, but is CNN?

Know your strengths and weaknesses

I know a scholar who is very smart and informed and yet, this scholar doesn't ever ask for or listen to marketing advice. A few years ago, this person, who had written a couple books, decided to launch a website. I met with her after she had already done it. She wanted some feedback. I thought she should have a blog. But, she couldn't add one since her site had been built in Dreamweaver. I wished she had asked my opinion before she created her site.

This scholar sends out weekly email blasts. She does not have sharing capabilities on her emails. I have advised her time and again that she could get the word out even farther if she would add the ability to share on Facebook (where she has a presence). But she either doesn't care or doesn't think my advice is worthwhile.

I have stopped giving her any advice. It is clear that she thinks she knows enough about marketing herself to ask me (or anyone) for help.

In any aspect of life it is helpful to know (and acknowledge) your strengths and weaknesses. You play to your strengths and get help in the areas you are weak. For example, say you have great ideas but can't spell for your life. If you are

blogging, you know you need to get an editor to read over your stuff.

In the scholar's case, her weakness is marketing (and social media). She should acknowledge that and get help (or at least listen to advice).

We may not know our strengths and weaknesses, but we should work to find out what they are and act appropriately. Get feedback (listen to feedback!).

Thoughts?

Are you providing enough information?

You must provide enough information whenever you expect an answer from someone. It seems fairly simple doesn't it? And yet, look at this email I received a couple of days ago:

Deborah,

Hope you're well. We're looking for some freelance technical/medical writers and I thought you might be interested or might know some people. We have some general needs and a very specific need for someone in Boston.

[name]

No email signature with contact information or point of reference here. I do not know the sender—have never met him or even heard of him. Did he find me on LinkedIn, doing a web search or what? No clue.

I looked up the sender based on his email address, and found out he is the president (!!!!) of what looks to be an advertising agency (very confusing website...that is another blog post) with presence in multiple states, not around where I am located.

Would you respond to this person? After looking up, I did. I sent back an email asking for more details. Guess what? He never responded.

If you are prospecting for clients or consultants or anything else, you need to provide information, like:

- Complete contact information
- How you found or know of the prospect
- What you are looking for specifically
- How to respond

Do you have an email template that you use when prospecting? What information do you provide?

Should you solicit online reviews?

There's no doubt that online reviews are influential. There are specialized review sites like Trip Advisor and then there's the seemingly all-purpose Yelp. I admit I read reviews and have been swayed about staying at a hotel or eating a restaurant because of what other people say, and that is the point.

As a business, should part of your marketing efforts be to

solicit reviews?

Let's start with the fact that reviews will happen whether you solicit them or not. Sadly, because of our passive-aggressive culture, it's become more likely that an unsatisfied customer will take to social media to complain about your service. Which is to say, that if you give bad service, you will most likely get negative reviews.

However, negative reviews are always balanced out by positive reviews. If, as a consumer, you are researching anything, you will read both the good and the bad reviews. Most people will be able to identify disgruntled employees or nit-picky reviewers. If most of the reviews are positive, you will discount the few reviews that are negative. Likewise, if most of the reviews are negative, you will discount the reviews that are positive. The lesson here is that genuine, positive reviews are important.

What generates positive reviews? Good service or product! As a business, you will need to focus most of your energy on providing positive experiences for your customers. If you don't, whether you solicit them or not, you will get negative reviews.

There is a difference between feedback and reviews

I recently had my hair cut at a salon I have gone to for a couple of years. The salon actively pursues online engagement. After my appointment, I got an email from the salon asking to provide feedback. The "feedback" was actually a link to give an online review. I was in a quandary. I had a bad experience this time: the receptionist was unhelpful and confused; I was made to wait 30 minutes; and the water was cool (on a very cold day) when they washed my hair. My stylist tried to make it better by giving me a discount and comping me a bottle of shampoo. But I thought management needed to know that things were not working well. Is the best way for me to give them a

one or two-star review? Is that going to communicate to the salon something is wrong?

Businesses should actively solicit feedback AND positive reviews. They are not the same. In the hair salon's case, they are confusing feedback and online reviews.

A better way to get BOTH is to say something like:

We are committed to providing the best possible service. If we did not meet your expectations, please contact (manager). We want to know how to improve our service!

If you enjoyed the service today, we'd love if you reviewed us here (link to the site).

Thanks for your patronage.

The answer then is yes, you should solicit positive reviews, but don't think of that as feedback. You need to be aware of what is wrong so that you can fix it.

What are your thoughts about online reviews? Is it part of your marketing to solicit them?

Getting "scroogled"

I am sure you have probably seen Microsoft's ad campaign against Google, where the company claims you are getting "scroogled" by Google. It is clever, and has some basis in reality. If you haven't, one of the ads is for Outlook.com, which is being presented as an alternative to Gmail. The ad implies that Google is reading your "private" email to be able to target advertising to you.

I am not sure Microsoft is the correct alternative to Google, but I think they are on to something with the term “scroogled.” Google, which is ubiquitous, is desperately trying to get more people on its (useless in my opinion) Google Plus platform. To force you to join, they are now killing the extremely useful Google Reader.

I have been using Google Reader for years, and often advise attendees to my blogging workshops that they should set up a reader. I also think readers are the only way to keep up with blogs, since you may follow dozens (if not hundreds). Readers give you one place to see what is new. If you only follow one or two blogs, then getting email updates works.

Alternatives to Google Reader: Get one ASAP!

In any case, Google Reader will be gone as of July 1. Luckily, there are some alternatives out there. Here are some reviews and compilations for you to check out:

CNET: 5 Worthy Alternatives

Silicon Angle: 6 Alternatives to the Dying Google Reader

Lifehacker: Google Reader is Shutting Down; Here Are the Best Alternatives

Don't get “scroogled!”

The lesson I draw from this is that any free service is free to let you down in the end. Many individuals and organizations put all their eggs in the proverbial free basket, and will suffer the consequences when organizations like Google and Facebook change the rules of the road whenever they like. My advice is to make sure you own your own website or blog (don't depend on Blogger or WordPress.com), have your own email (which you can usually get when you have your own domain and web hosting) and have alternatives to the free behemoths, which after all have their own agenda to push and

ultimately, don't care about your needs and wants.

What are your thoughts? Do you feel that Google is treating you fairly?

Blogs can help change the world

It is not an exaggeration to say that blogs can help change the world. Take, for example blogger (and dissident) Yoani Sanchez. Since 2007, Yoani has been an outspoken critic of the situation in Cuba on her blog Generacion Y. She has attracted worldwide attention and is currently on tour, as reported in the Washington Post today.

And then there is Ai Weiwei, the Chinese artist who has been using his blog (and Twitter) to document the China's governmental cover up of shoddy building codes that led to the the death of more than 5,000 schoolchildren in the aftermath of the devastating 2008 earthquake.

Both Sanchez and Ai Weiwei live in repressive societies where the government controls mass media. Both were able to use blogs, because they are self-published mass media outlets, to get their message and thoughts out to the world. By providing an alternative news/opinion source, not only to their fellow citizens, but to the world, they are shining a bright spotlight that would otherwise not exist.

Blogs are powerful. They allow you to communicate your

thoughts to people everywhere around the world. You can use words, photos, video or even music with few barriers, at a low monetary cost (and sometimes, even free).

If you really want to make an impact, there is no better nor a more direct way than on your own blog.