

Some thoughts about comments

Right off the bat let me say I think having open but moderated comments on websites and blogs is the way to go. In the past year, several leading blogs have decided to go the no-comment route, arguing that discussions will occur on social media. That's fine, but part of having a blog is being social, and to me, social means allowing comments.

This morning I read this piece on consumer advocate Christopher Elliot's site, in which he describes how he will deal with comments (especially snarky or inappropriate ones). Basically, his team (don't we all wish we had a team, but I digress) will moderate all comments and flag inappropriate ones. If someone is flagged, he/she will be informed and eventually be disallowed from commenting on the site. Seems very fair to me.

Yesterday, Mark Schaefer on his {grow} blog wrote a post entitled "I don't know my online audience and neither do you." His point, with which I most definitely agree, is that you can't rely on social media actions and presence to really know who your audience is. There are many customers and potential customers who are just not active on social media, but may be actively doing business or thinking of doing business with you. They may be talking about you (gasp!) in person or emailing (gasp!) links but (the idea of it!) not sharing on social media. He says we can only identify about two percent of who it is that is sharing our content.

He writes:

Pick any blogger who has been around for awhile (SIC) and ask them what percent of their audience comments on the blog – they'll say it is about 2 percent.

Basically, the issue of commenting boils down to motivation.

Only very motivated people are going to comment on your blog. In Elliot's case, many of those are motivated by a desire to be unpleasant or controversial. In Schaefer's example, only a small percentage of a total audience takes the step of commenting.

It's important to recognize that all a comment indicates is that a motivated person has decided to interact with you on your blog (whether for good or for bad). By allowing it, you are encouraging interaction. By moderating comments, you are encouraging good behavior. By depending on getting comments, on the other hand, you are falling into a perceived popularity trap.

A blog won't rise or fall on the number of comments that are on it, but rather on the actions that you want readers to take. Perhaps you want your readers to think about doing business with you. Or perhaps you want readers to think of you as an authority in a subject area. Whatever your goal is, try to figure out how to measure it. Your comments alone won't do it.

You are, of course, welcome to comment on this subject.

UPDATE February 9, 2015:

Just came across this article, about Tablet Magazine, and a trial scheme to ask people to pay to comment. Should cut down on the crazy comments, but could also backfire by creating an obstacle to legitimate commenters.

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.

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.

Bloggging 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!

Adding insult

It seems that there is a new breed of call-to-action/pop-up ad that is seeking to shame you into an action and insult you if you choose not to take that action. I am not sure if it's a trend, or there's one provider that everyone is using for these, but lately I have seen them on several different organizational blogs.

What is happening is that you will attempt to go to a blog post and before you can read the post, a large pop-up appears. The pop-up will usually be asking you subscribe to a newsletter and will be forcing you to choose between two options (one to favor the action and the other to *oppose* it), since there is no way to close the pop-up otherwise.

The yes option will be intensely positive. It will say something like this: Yes, sign me up for your newsletter since I care about the Earth and will do my utmost to help keep it

clean. *

The no option will be oppositional. It will say something like this: No, I don't care about the Earth at all. I won't lift a finger to help keep it clean.*

**These are made-up examples but they mirror what I have been seeing on blogs and websites for various organizations.*

More traditional calls to action will provide two options that are more subdued and straightforward, something like "Yes, I'd like to (subscribe, vote, etc.)" and "No thanks."

Obviously, just because you don't want to sign-up for a newsletter does not mean you do not care about the subject. Perhaps you don't want another newsletter. Perhaps you want to read the blog post before you make a decision. But yet you are being asked, by clicking on that negative option, to affirm that you believe or support that very negative sentence.

This a trend that should disappear and quick. **Insulting and shaming people to support your cause, even if it is a great cause, is a form of bullying.** Bullying your readers is never a good idea.

Have you seen these? What are your thoughts?

Improve your blogging! Come to the How to Write Your Blog workshop next week, on September 18, in Washington, DC. More details and registration here: <https://howtowriteyourblog918.eventbrite.com>

It's back! How to write your blog workshop on September 18

It's back and entering its third year! The **How to Write Your Blog: A Hands-on Workshop** will take place in Washington, DC on September 18, 2014, from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm.

If you've been struggling to get your blog going or your current blog is gathering dust, this workshop is for you.

You will learn:

- Elements to include in every blog post
- How to find blog post ideas
- Types of blog posts you can write
- How to make your blog work for your organization
- What to include and what to avoid on your blog
- How to write attention-grabbing headlines

Through exercises and discussion, we will come up with a direction for your blog and help you to write great blog posts.

Register by September 11 to get the early bird price of \$85.

Get more details and register at:
<https://howtowriteyourblog918.eventbrite.com>

Make it a challenging summer!

In the marketing communications world, it seems like summer is a quiet time of the year. People are on vacation. Summer Fridays are in force. This makes it a great time of the year to take on a few challenges.

I think summer is a good time to shake things up. On a personal level, you may have certain goals for the next couple of months. Maybe, like me, you want to spend as much time outdoors as possible. Maybe you want to learn a new skill. Maybe you just want to have fun.

How about making it a challenging summer?



Obstacle 14 from the West Point, The US Military Academy Flickr stream Photo by Tommy Gilligan

For the next **eight weeks**, I'll be issuing a weekly challenge to do with your writing, social media and blogging. Although there will be no scoring and no prizes (sorry), it's a way to shake things up and to make things better while you watch the thermometer hit 90 degrees and higher.

The first challenge will be posted tomorrow. To participate, simply read the post. Your comments are welcome here on the blog or you can post on Twitter using the hashtag

#summerchallenge.

Where were you when Feedly went down?

Last week, for three days in a row, Feedly was targeted by hackers looking for ransom in a huge DDoS (distributed denial of service) attack. It meant that nobody was able to access Feedly.

If you use Feedly as your RSS reader, it meant that there was no way of accessing all your feeds short of going to each source. We set up RSS readers precisely to avoid having to visit dozens of separate websites and blogs. Feedly being down was definitely an inconvenience (not on the magnitude of Twitter being down, but still).

If you are a blog publisher, and you use RSS as your primary distribution channel, you were really screwed last week. Nobody saw your feed. Few people if any took the time to visit your site to read your latest posts. If they did, it's too bad you can't identify them, because they are your most loyal supporters.

There's a big lesson here for bloggers: you must use various different channels to push out your content.

On social: You have to share on all of your social networks. If you don't regularly post your latest stuff to LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, etc., you must start.

On email: Perhaps this is a good time to check out newsletter providers that have the RSS-to-email feature. This feature

takes your latest posts and sends them out as a newsletter to your contacts on whatever schedule you choose. You definitely want to make sure people can subscribe to your feed directly too.

In person: Do your friends and colleagues know about your blog? Let them know and encourage them to visit. If you give out business cards, is your blog listed?

I can almost promise you that this won't be the last time Feedly will be down. Chances are also good that one of the social networks will be attacked too. There's little you can do to avoid internet failures, but there's a lot you can do to avoid depending on just one channel of communication.

Where were you (and what did you do) when Feedly went down last week?

Yes, blogging helps you get found

A couple of days ago I wrote a post called Is Blogging Dead? My answer is no, emphatically, blogging is not dead. My chief reason for believing this is that blogging helps you get found.

However, sometimes you get found for the wrong reason.

In the past week alone, two women have contacted me looking for help locating discontinued Clinique eye shadows. Why? Because three (!) years ago I wrote a post about my poor experience with Clinique's Gone but Not Forgotten program. If you read the post, you may be able to tell it is a critique.

If you read my About page or any other part of this website, I think it is fairly obvious that I am not associated with Clinique in any way. Yet these women somehow think I can help them, not just to find information about Clinique's program, but to actually find the eye shadows for them.

That post is one of the most visited on this blog and it has nothing to do with what I do. Perhaps I should delete it because it is clearly bringing the wrong kind of people to this blog. At the same time it illustrates the power of blogging and specifically, of tagging and keywords. I know people find the post by keying in "gone but not forgotten."

The main lessons here are two:

1. Blogging, and using descriptive keywords and tags, will certainly help you get found.

2. What you blog about (and the keywords, tags, etc. you use) should help you be found for what you want to be found.

Sadly, a third lesson is that many people out there do not bother to read things closely or have poor reading comprehension.

Have you had a similar experience? And, should I take that post down?

Is blogging dead?

This past Saturday, I attended WordCamp Philly. There were four tracks: User, Power User, Designer and Developer. With sessions in the User/Power User tracks such as "BuddyPress: An Enterprise Solution" and "How I Spent the Last 5 years playing with WordPress and building PewResearch.org" you can tell

something is up. It's not really new, but more and more organizations, from nonprofits to multinationals like Coca-Cola, are using WordPress not as a blogging platform, but as a Content Management System (CMS).



W for WordPress Philly
Pretzels

A few weeks ago, a well known social media marketing guy posted on Twitter that the effort involved in blogging was too large in relation to the return on investment (ROI).

Many organizations have BINOs: blogs in name only. They don't update them frequently or haven't even posted in the last couple of years.

So is blogging dead? Should you give up your blog and just use WordPress to be your website platform?

No!!!!

Blogging is not dead. Blogging still provides many many benefits, not the least of which is making it easier for people to find your organization when they don't even know it exists.

How many people don't know Coca-Cola? Coke doesn't have to do much to be known. But a small organization that works on historical restoration or a business that helps people in a specific area get organized has to work a lot harder. Small

businesses or nonprofits have to provide information that their potential customers or supporters need and want. One of the best ways to provide a constant stream of information is blogging.

Call it content marketing if you must, but blogs are an easy and flexible way to provide opinions, analysis, information, graphics or even podcasts to your audience.

Blogs are social. Blogs let your audience share content easily. And blogs are a way to interact with your audience through the comments. And you can extend your blog's reach by enlisting guest bloggers.

Even though WordPress is a powerful CMS and even though **consistent, quality** blogging does take a lot of effort, blogging is still worthwhile.

Are you still blogging? If you have given up, please tell me why in the comments. If you have seen value, give me an example.