

Why your blog isn't being read and what to do about it

Unless you are publishing something like the Huffington Post, chances are that you have a small audience for your blog. You will publish lots of blog posts that do not get comments or are not shared on social media. This isn't because you are a bad writer or you don't have something valuable to say, it is, quite simply, because **people don't have time to read your blog.**

I have been blogging for years, and I have been following more than a hundred blogs for years too. In the past few weeks, I have been blogging less and reading less. Why? Because I am working on a project that has me working outside my home office for five days a week for about twelve to fifteen weeks, plus I am commuting more than two hours each day. I am no longer able to be on Twitter all day, nor can I read my Feedly very often. Even though this is novel for me, it is the reality for a great many people. There are only so many hours in a day, and something has got to give. For me, and I suspect for many people, it's keeping up with blogs.

As a blogger, what can you do about it? Here are six actions you can take to avoid being forgotten:

1. **Keep blogging.** An outdated blog is surely never going to be read, and it will not help your goals or your SEO.
2. **Remember your blog goals, stick to your topic and keep giving readers good stuff.** Too many blogs go off topic too often or don't share valuable information. That causes readers to lose interest and be less inclined to stick with it.
3. **Ensure your readers can subscribe to your blog in many ways.** It may be easier for people to read your blog if they can get an email when you publish a blog post. Some people

like RSS readers. In any case, you must give them options.

4. **Highlight your best posts in your newsletter** (you do have a newsletter?). Whether your newsletter is weekly, monthly or quarterly, you can use it to point people back to your blog by telling them about all the great content you have there. The idea is to get your audience to remember you have a blog, and to appreciate that you share relevant information there.

5. **Spend more time on your headlines.** A great headline almost guarantees people will read the post (or at least, scan it).

6. **Share, and share again.** (And encourage sharing by having sharing capabilities and acknowledging people who share stuff). Make sure that you share your blog post with all your networks. People are at different places at different times—make it easy for them to see your post.

What would you add to this list? What makes you read a blog post even if you don't have the time?

Get off your high horse (if you really want to communicate)

We've all met people who are desperately trying to make sure everybody knows how smart or how powerful or how well-connected they are. These people do things like sweep into a room and speak very loudly, making sure they become the center of attention. They may also love to name-drop. And sometimes they think that by using sentences packed with big words and

jargon, you will be mesmerized into thinking they really know what they are talking about.

But the opposite always happens. The harder people try to impress you, the more you tend to see through them. Same thing happens with your written communications—blogs, websites, letters, whatever. If you try to impress, especially by filling your writing with jargon and big words, the less you are communicating.



Merry Go Round by Mike Rawlins on Flickr.

As Mack Collier wrote in his blog post, “You Don’t Look Smarter by Making Others Feel Stupid.”:

Make your ideas more accessible and empower your audience to learn at a pace that’s comfortable to them. Remember that if your words make the reader feel dumb then the reader might decide that you’re not an ‘expert’ after all

So, if you think that throwing big words around will result in you looking smarter, you are dead wrong. (P.S.: I LOVE that quote from Albert Einstein: “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.”)

It reminds me of a time when I was visiting a friend in Florida. She had a little baby at the the time, and she had another friend visiting who also had a baby with her. Both women were in the pool and both babies were naked. They asked

if I wanted to get in. I said I really did not want to be swimming in baby pee. The friend looked at me and said that baby pee was sterile, and that I needn't be concerned. She added she knew this because she was a physician. Yes, she called herself a physician. To which I promptly replied: "Oh you're a doctor. What is your specialty?" (I think she was a dermatologist, but I don't remember.) I couldn't get over that she thought calling herself a physician somehow made her more authoritative.

In everyday conversation we visit our doctors and have our lawyers—not our attorneys—draw up contracts. When someone asks us where we live, we don't say we "reside" in a certain neighborhood. If someone asks why we are taking night classes, we usually say we are trying to learn more about the topic, not "augmenting our knowledge base." If we get a new gadget, we tell people how much it has changed our lives, not "it is a disruptive technology."

So, next time you want to appear like you know what you are talking about, get off your high horse and use the words most people would actually use in conversation.

What are the goals for your blog?

Whenever I have a workshop or a presentation on blogging, someone asks how you know if you have a "successful" blog. And my answer is always the same: **you define your success.** You

set the goals for your blog and if you reach those goals, then you have success.

Start with having SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) goals, **emphasis on measurable and specific**.

Goals could be:

- Get a certain number of readers each day
- Get readers to click on links or go to a certain page on your website
- Get readers to subscribe to your newsletter or to your RSS feed
- Stimulate discussion or get comments
- Get shares on social networks

Once you have goals, you will track these using an analytics program such as Google Analytics. There are many resources out there, but I found this post by Jeff Sauer very helpful: [Google Analytics 101 for Bloggers](#). Although I use Google Analytics, there are other programs out there (some free, some not). There may be a better choice for you, as Tom Ewer writes: [Why I Use Clicky Analytics](#).

What are the goals for your blog? Are you actively tracking them?

*Do you want to improve your blogging? Attend my **How to Write Your Blog** workshop next week on November 12 in Washington, DC. Learn more and register today!*

What makes for a great blog?

How many blogs do you read or follow? I have about 100 on my blog reader, and I read dozens more (OK, it is an occupational hazard). Now think about the blogs you read regularly, what do you like about them? If I were to hazard a guess, the number one thing that makes that blog great (for you) is

Relevant and/or interesting content

You would not read it if it did not offer you the information you like to read about, whether your thing is food, politics, journalism, PR, beer or any number of other subjects. But there are other reasons blogs are great.

Great blogs are:

- **Shareable** (no sharing buttons, no new readers)
- **Interactive** (allow for discussion in the comments)
- **Findable** (not only on by search but also on your main website)
- **Pleasing to the eye** (design does matter)
- **Scannable** (headings, bullet points, lists all help)
- **Well written** (or well spoken if a video or audio blog)

What would you add? Please tell me what makes you read a blog regularly.

I will be introducing a new feature where I rate blogs based on these attributes. Watch for it soon!

*Want to have a great blog? Sign up for the next **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on 11/12/13 in Washington, DC. Get all the details and register today (early registration prices available until Friday, November 1 at midnight).*

What not to do on your blog

If you ever watched the TLC show What Not to Wear, you know some people choose to wear cringe-inducing outfits when left to their own devices. It generally takes an ambush by the show's hosts, disapproval of the person's loved ones, and a look in the three-way mirror for the fashion-challenged individual to consider changing his/her look. In other words, sometimes you need an outside perspective.



What? by Judith (judepics) on Flickr

Here's my outside perspective on what you should not be doing on your blog:

Pulling a bait and switch. You tell readers you have five tips for doing something but in reality you want them to buy your e-book or webinar. Not cool.

Selling. You can funnel your readers to something you are selling, *after* you have given them value. In other words, your blog post is not advertising copy.

Letting down your readers. If your headline promises the ten best ways to do something, then you should deliver those ten tips.

Making readers cringe at your inability to use spell-check (or understand grammar). We all make mistakes, and we all forgive one or two typos and grammatical slip-ups, but there's a limit.

Not understanding how people read on the web (or on mobile). Your post consists of a single paragraph, no breaks, no bolding, no graphics, no bullet points, nothing. And it is really long. The web makes people *scan* content (so make your content scannable!).

Closing off comments. Why be social if you don't want people to interact with you? You can and should have a comment policy, and you don't have to approve every comment, but do have a way for people to interact with your blog post.

Being jargon and buzzword crazy. Few things make me want to scream as much as a blog post filled to the brim with buzzy phrases and cliched jargon ("try to find your sweet spot by selling the c-suite on the low hanging fruit...").

What would you add? Tell me in the comments, which I moderate but always check and respond to!

*Want to have an effective blog? Attend the next **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on November 12 in Washington, DC. Get more details and register today! Early registration prices*

available until Friday.

Is your blog hiding?

If you are putting in the effort toward having a blog, shouldn't visitors to your website be able to find it easily? For some organizations, the answer seems to be no. Some blogs are hiding and that is not a good place for them to be.

Why are these blogs hiding? Here are several "reasons:"

- The blog is "housed" separately than the website on free blog hosting such as Blogger or WordPress.com.
- Different departments handle the website and the blog and there is territoriality.
- Organizations believe they must have a blog but don't want anybody to actually read it.
- The blog is an afterthought and there is no room on the home page to include it.
- Some organizations think it is obvious that blogs belong in the "newsroom" section or the "publications" section (AKA not understanding the user experience).

Successful blogs are:

- Findable/accessible
- Relevant
- Shareable

A blog that is hiding is not easy to find, and therefore, not accessible (and certainly not shared or subscribed to). It won't matter how relevant or great the blog's content is if the average visitor to your website has no idea it is there.

Want to learn how to have a more effective blog? Attend my next How to Write Your Blog workshop on November 12, 2013 in Washington, DC. Get the details and register today!

How to read analytics for your blog and other great articles

In my blogging workshop, I tell participants that if they are not feeling up to blogging they can do what I call a “round-up” post. In it, you round up the best/most interesting/relevant articles or blog posts that you have come across from around the web. In this way, you provide value to your readers, without actually having to write much.

This week, I have seen lots of good stuff, but here are four very useful articles for all you bloggers out there.

(As a side note, I am still having difficulty with Feedly and my posts are not showing up, so this is a test in a way.)

All about Google Analytics

Have you wondered how to use Google Analytics? Google Analytics 101 for Bloggers may give you some actionable information.

Do you have content mission?

Joe Pulizzi argues, quite rightly, that you should have a content marketing mission statement for your small business. Do you have one?

What are the best practices for business bloggers?

Hubspot shared “What the Best Business Bloggers Do (And You Should Too).” Do you already practice this?

Using “science” to increase your social media impact

If you think there may be a better time to post to reach a certain audience, Fast Company has some proof in “A Scientific Guide to Maximizing Your Impact on Twitter, Facebook and Other Digital Media.” Read away and see if you can use these findings to help you.

Do you like round-ups? I may start running them more often because there are so many great and useful articles out there.

Have a great weekend, and I hope your blog reader shows this!

Why SEO and content marketing are not enough

The really bad news today is that the US government is shut down (let’s hope temporarily). Another piece of bad news (for content marketers) is what I learned last night at the Web Content Mavens Meet Up about findability and search, and how search engine personalization is playing into it.

Findability is key

The first speaker last night was Jill MacNeice, who is an information architect for the Library of Congress (LOC). She explained how the LOC is working to make their millions of

documents and images findable by using a “findability framework” that is built around the idea that people should be able to find what they are looking for both inside the site, and from external search engines. It makes search visible and easy to find. It depends on metadata, good descriptions and URL design that makes it human readable, shorter and more shareable.

The LOC is an example of why SEO and search in general is important. After all, if people can't find you, then why are you on the web?

Personalization throws a wrench in search

But then Katherine Watier Ong, Ketchum's VP of Online Strategy and Market Insights, got up to speak about personalization and the semantic web. And if I were to boil down what she said to one phrase it is that personalization is making search engine optimization more challenging. It is no longer enough to have the right keywords, tags and content because Google and Bing and all your social media sites are personalizing the content they show you based on your profile and previous activity.

If you want to see how much information Google has about you, just check your Google Dashboard (search Google to find it). Bing uses your Facebook data to suggest things your friends like.

Did you know that you don't see every tweet in your Twitter stream? Twitter shows you what it “thinks” is most relevant to you, even from people you follow, based on your previous interactions and interests. Isn't that a tad scary? You sign up to follow someone and you may not see his/her tweets.

Katherine says the really creepy personalization is visible on LinkedIn. I have noticed that too recently. Since I liked a couple people's new photos, LinkedIn always shows me new photos and for several days. And how does it know which people I may know?

Search engines and social networks like Twitter and LinkedIn are moving toward developing a sort of artificial intelligence that tries to figure out what you are looking for and then practically jump ahead of your request, which is why you are seeing all these suggestions (you may want to follow so-and-so, you may want to check these items for sale, etc.)

All this personalization is useful for you because if not you would be drowning in extraneous information but it is really bad news for small businesses/websites. For example, search for your name on Google. For you, your name will appear at the top of your results. Now have John Doe do the same search on his computer wherever he may be living. Guess what, you will not appear near the top (unless you have a very unusual name or are someone like President Obama).

How do marketers deal with personalized results?

How do we work to cut through the personalization? Katherine suggested several actions:

- Create personas for your target audience so you can market appropriately
- Personalize your website (just like when you go to Amazon and it recognizes you) using tools like Marketo.
- Build social relationships.
- Stay on top of changes in search
- Use a content management system (CMS) that uses schema

In short, **personalization is a big challenge for search marketers**. Now, you don't only need to cut through the clutter of millions of websites, you have to cut through results that are personalized for each searcher.

If you work in marketing or communications, you need to be aware of how people find you. It is not enough to have a website and a blog. You have to understand SEO and the latest changes to search. You have to see the relationships between social media and search engines.

7 actions to keep your blog running smoothly

We spend lots of time thinking about what to include on our blog: what articles to write, what images to use, where to share our stuff. That's all important, but just as important is making sure our blogs are running well. Here are seven actions you can take to keep your blog running smoothly:

1. Install a spam detector and empty spam comments frequently:

I use Akismet, and it stops 99% of all spam. Spam is placed in a spam comments folder that should be emptied regularly, preferably daily (depending on how much spam is there). The more spam you have in that folder, the slower your site will load.

2. Update your themes and plugins: WordPress does a good job of telling that which plugins and themes need to be updated but it is up to you (or your site administrator) to do the actual updating. It only takes a few moments. But before you do anything, make sure you have a backup of your site (which leads to my third suggestion below).

3. Backup your site by installing an automatic backup plugin:

There are several out there. I have heard good reviews of Backup Buddy (not free) and I am using BackUp WordPress on here.



Mechanics working on race car at La Carrera Panamericana, Mexico, May 1954 for The Henry Ford on Flickr

4. Check your Google Analytics frequently (and if you don't have Analytics, install right away!): By checking your Analytics, you can learn a lot about what is working and what is not working on your blog. You should check the following:

- Bounce rate (are people staying on the blog or leaving immediately?)
- Page load speed (if it is taking too long for your pages to load, you are going to lose readers)
- Landing pages (where are readers going?)
- Keywords (useful to know how people are finding your blog)

5. Deal with comments: If a comment is legitimate and you use moderation (which I believe you should), approve it ASAP and respond if appropriate. People who comment on your blog are looking to engage with you. Don't leave them hanging!

6. Review your plugins, widgets and settings: Too many plugins

make your site slower. Are you using them all? Do you need them? Are your widgets still relevant? Are you using them? Do you need to add anything? And finally, check your settings. Is everything up to date and still relevant?

7. Optimize your SEO: There are several SEO plugins and they will help make your site more easily findable. I am not an expert, but making sure to include keywords and descriptions and filling out the fields will help make your site more visible.

What actions do you take regularly on your blog's back end? Please add to this list!

Top blogging lessons from WordPress Camp Baltimore 2013

What did I do this past Saturday? I attended WordPress Camp Baltimore for the second time. I think that if you blog regularly and/or help people set up blogs, you should most definitely attend this volunteer-run event, available worldwide probably at a city near you. It is well worth the low cost of admission. If you want to find one near you, check out the WordPress camp site.



WordPress Camp
Baltimore 2013

I attended five sessions out of the total of 15. There were two tracks: one directed to the developers and one to users. Obviously, what I learned would be more useful to a user than a developer.

Social media must be integrated into both your actual blog and your blog's strategy

- Google + indexes faster, so consider setting up your Google + authorship description
- You need both inbound and outbound social media plugins
- Check out the Tweet Old Post plugin to be able to use your older blog posts
- Be careful with sending people to social networks—the last thing you want to do is lead someone away from your site.

SEO keeps changing but there are several things you can do to keep your site visible

- Use the WordPress SEO by Yoast plugin—highly recommended by tons of people
- Name all your images
- Do not ever write “click here.” Write a description.

- Organize your content well—Google likes organized websites—using headings, etc.
- Optimize your site so users like it
- Include rich content—pics, graphs, videos
- Watch your page speed (you may need to cache you website using plugins like WP Super Cache)
- Install and submit a site map using the Google XML Sitemap plugin

Producing your own podcast is not that hard

- What you need to produce a podcast is: a blog, hosting that provides enough bandwidth, artwork/branding materials and a podcast feed. You will also need a microphone and a way to edit your audio.
- Use editors like Audacity.
- Look into podcasting plugins like PodPress and PowerPress

Blogs and WordPress sites make content marketing easier

- Content marketing's purpose is to drive profitable (however you define it) customer action.
- Content marketing is about providing relevant, valuable (educational) and enjoyable material for your audience/user
- Remember that customers care about themselves not you
- Keyword research is key (you must know what keywords your customers would use to find your service/product)
- When you provide valuable content, the reader/user is bound by the need to reciprocate since humans have a deep seated need to return favors.
- Remember that information that is exclusive is more persuasive (this is only available for a limited time)
- Humans are more receptive to requests from people who appear to be authorities or experts.
- Read Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion by Robert

Cialdini

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