

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.

Why you should blog even if you don't have the time

I was reading a transcript of an online discussion regarding the benefits of blogging for business. One of the people in the discussion declared that she did not have time to blog since she was way too busy doing client work. Her blog was basically abandoned, and she was OK with that. I wasn't in on the conversation, but if I had been, I would have told her she is making a big mistake.

It's very simple. If you don't do any marketing because you are busy, you will inevitably have to work twice as hard to

market yourself when you aren't busy. And yes, blogging is a marketing effort: It boosts your visibility. It keeps your website current. It helps with SEO.

Not blogging because you are too busy is like not networking because you already have a job. If you lose your job (which unfortunately can happen from one day to the next) you will soon realize you don't have relationships in place to help you in a job search. You must keep networking and building relationships, whether you "need" them now or not, because you never know what will happen in the future.

Whether you are busy or not, blogging should be a part of your business marketing routine. To neglect your blog now because you are busy working on your client's behalf is a rookie mistake. Those of us who have been in the business world for a while know that clients come and go. Clients can face budget shortfalls and cut you from one day to the next.

Put energy into your own business, not just your client's business. This applies to you whether you have your own business, or you work for someone else, and even if you are concerned with developing your career. If you are a worker bee, why not have a personal blog? If you work for an organization, you should insist that the organizational should be kept up to date. And it goes without saying that if you own your own business, you are solely responsible for keeping you presence out there.

Don't wait! Write a blog post today!

Invigorate your organization's blog

Is your organization's blog feeling tired? Perhaps it's time to try a few new things like soliciting guest blog posts, or live blogging a conference. Read the five tips to re-invigorate your blog that I share as a guest blogger at Bates Creative Group's *Align* blog.

My thanks to Director of Business Development Heather Shelton and Marketing Specialist Amanda Jennison of Bates Creative Group for including me in their blog!

5 items that your blog must absolutely, positively have

There are blogs with lots of good, well written and interesting information that are not succeeding. They almost always lack an element or two. Like when I find a great blog post that I want to share, and I can't because there are no sharing buttons. That frustrates me because I now have to add a step or two to share the post on social media, but it also shows me that the blog post author is not looking to increase his/her audience.



Photo by kokogiak on Flickr.

Here are the five items your blog must absolutely, positively have:

- 1. Sharing buttons.** There are so many services and plug-ins—find one you like and that shares your post to the main social networks.
- 2. Robust about page.** People want to know who is writing the content. A shady or incomplete author profile does not create confidence that your content is valid.
- 3. Subscription capabilities.** Give people the option to subscribe to your blog, either by email or by RSS feed.
- 4. Contact information.** Give your readers the ability to contact you beyond your comments.
- 5. Print (or PDF) button.** Some readers need to read things on paper, or want to print to save for posterity that amazing insight you wrote.

Does your blog have these? Why or why not? Anything you would add? Let me know! (Oh, another thing your blog should have is

a way to comment!!!!)

How to start (or restart) blogging

Having an organizational blog has loads of benefits, not the least which is it helps with SEO and it establishes expertise. And yet, many organizations have put off adding a blog, or have abandoned the blog they started. In my experience, there are many reasons for this, among them:

- Not enough personnel or hours in the day
- Not knowing what to write
- Feeling overwhelmed by having to produce something consistently

Blogging doesn't have to be overwhelming or extremely time-consuming. If you don't have someone else to handle the blog, it is possible for you to do it. You just need to learn how to do it (and why you should).

Having worked with dozens of people who have a desire to blog but don't know how to start or what to say, I have developed a way to teach how to do it and it's my **How to write your blog workshop**. I am offering the next one on Thursday, February 28, at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The workshop is limited to 10 participants, and will be intensive and participatory. We'll discuss why you aren't blogging and why you should, and we'll get you writing. The cost is \$75, and includes materials and refreshments.

To register, visit the Eventbrite page at

howtowriteyourblog3.eventbrite.com .

Start or restart your blog in 2013!

Where do all the RSS feeds go

I have more than 100 subscriptions on my Google Reader. I love having the convenience of all those blogs in one place. Yesterday, I led my “How to write your blog” workshop, and the participants told me they don’t use readers and doubt they have much traction. So, I thought I would survey to see if people use readers.

Please answer my poll. I will share the information with you in a blog post.

[poll daddy poll="6678494"]

Should you blog more often?

There’s lots of advice floating around there about how often you should blog. Some say blog every day, some say twice a week. Does frequency matter? Should you blog more often or less often?

I advocate for blogging consistently rather than frequently. For some bloggers it may be too much pressure to blog every day or even once a week. What can you accomplish consistently? Can you do once a month? In that case, that should be your blogging frequency.

A few weeks ago, I ran a poll via LinkedIn, asking the following question:

Do you judge a blog/blogger by the frequency of posting.

The answer options were:

- Yes
- No
- Depends on blog type
- I judge based on content rather than frequency.

Overwhelmingly, people said they judged based on content. Frequency may not matter that much.

The answer to should you blog more often is, quite simply, it depends.

In the end, you have to decide what is best for your target audience, and for your ability to blog. Does your target need frequent updates? Are you able to deliver the frequency? If so, then blog more often. Are you using your blog to provide relevant information, that does not have to be updated so often? Then blog less often.

What do you think? What have you found works best for you, and why?

All I learned about WordPress

I learned at camp

This blog is hosted on a website built on WordPress. Lots of blogs, and many websites, are built using WordPress because it is easy to use and easy to customize. Because WordPress makes it so easy to update your content, there are more organizations using WordPress as a content management system (CMS). If you use software such as Dreamweaver to build a website, you probably have to call your “web person” to ask him/her to make updates.

WordPress has built quite a large community of users and developers, many of whom have regular meet ups and discussion groups. A very popular (and fun) way to get a large group of WordPress enthusiasts together is WordPress “camp.” These camps happen year round in cities worldwide. All are volunteer run.

This past weekend I attended Word Camp Philadelphia, and last month I went to Word Camp in Baltimore. I am trying to learn all I can about WordPress since I don’t have an IT department or anybody handling my website (which is a long story).

I learned a lot at Word Camp Philadelphia (and kudos to the organizers who made this volunteer run event run smoothly and professionally). Here are some main takeaways:

Make security a priority

All websites are vulnerable to hacking. There are several steps you can take to minimize the risk. Among them:

- Do not use admin as your log on name
- Have a strong password
- Always update to the newest version of WordPress

- Be sure your plugins are compatible and updated

Backup often

We heard this time and time again—make your back ups happen automatically. There are many plugins (free and paid) that make this easy. The one mentioned by many presenters was BackupBuddy.

Plugins are cool

Plugins are little programs that add functionality to your WordPress site. There are thousands of plugins available for download from WordPress.org, providing the ability to share posts, create backups, and add lots of bells and whistles. You should keep plugins updated, and you should remove any you aren't using. Too many plugins can slow a website down, and create issues.

A few that were mentioned repeatedly were:

- All in One SEO pack
- AntispamBee
- Akismet
- Yet Another Related Post (YARPP) (running on this site)
- Digg Digg (for social sharing)

Content is crucial

If you don't have interesting and relevant content on your blog/website, why would anybody want to visit? Keep in mind that people don't like to read long chunks of text (as Jess Ostroff from Don't Panic Management put it: **TL;DR**, which stands for too long; didn't read). Also, to avoid long uninterrupted text is why we break up content using headings, bullets and images. To organize your content, you should use some sort of content management system. Jess Ostroff

recommended DivvyHQ.com (paid) or the WordPress Editorial Calendar (free).

Websites should be accessible

There is such a thing as making your website “handicapped accessible.” For example, blind people use web readers to visit websites. If you have images on your website, you should make sure to add alt text so that these readers can include a description of these images.

Another type of accessibility is for mobile devices. The newest version of the simple WordPress theme (Twenty Twelve) adjusts the dimensions of your website to make it fit to a mobile phone screen.

WordPress: it’s not just for blogging anymore!

The most important takeaway is that WordPress is not just for blogging. Large organizations have already migrated their websites to a WordPress platform.

Go to camp already!

If you are interested in learning more about WordPress, I highly recommend going to Word Camp. However, not all camps are created equal and it may be worth it to travel to a camp that is well organized.

Making blogging easier

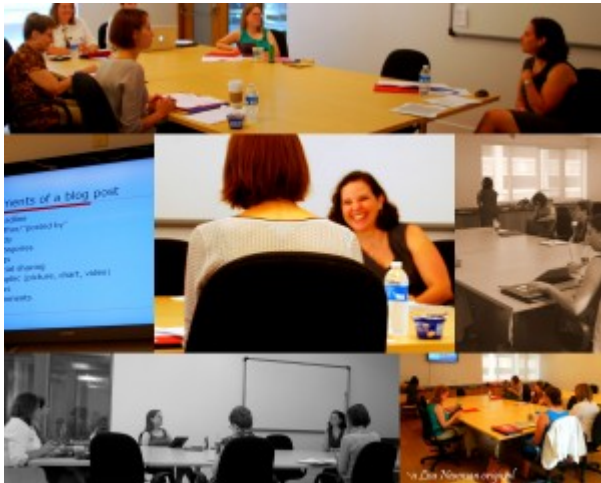
The reason I created the How to Write Your Blog workshop—which I just presented on Tuesday at the Silver Spring Civic Center—is because I have spoken to many people who think blogging is hard or that it takes too much time. I have found blogging to be fun, and wanted to teach people that it doesn't have to be overwhelming.

The workshop leads you through reasons to blog to writing a blog post. We discuss keywords, categories, tags and headlines. We discuss what you should and should not do on a blog. And what most participants find helpful is the part on generating blog post ideas.

Out of the three hours allotted to the workshop, we spend 20 minutes writing a blog post. The idea is that when you realize you can write a whole post in 20 minutes, it seems doable and perhaps even easy.

One of the participants said that breaking up the process into its parts makes it seem less stressful, and that is exactly the point.

My colleague Lisa Newman took photographs of the workshop and created this montage:



If you missed the workshop this time around, you may want to sign up for my newsletter so that you can find out when it's being offered again.