

Making Media Connections 2009 | Better Blogging Tips

Know Thy Purpose

Everyone wants to attract readers, but you need a clear purpose beyond building traffic. Are you blogging to become known as an expert in your field, or to promote events or advocate for issues? Most blogs have some cross-over, but knowing what you want to achieve will help determine the writing style and format.

Who's Your Blogger?

Now that you've figured out *why* you want to blog, the next step is finding *who* will blog. Not every staff member has the time, motivation, knowledge or skill to blog effectively. Identify those who do, and allow time for research, writing and interacting with readers.

Set the Tone

In general, blog entries should be written more informally than other professional communication. Think of these entries as mini newspaper columns – substance matters, of course, but so does personality. Readers are more likely to become regulars when they feel a connection with the author, so engage in thoughtful discussion. Most important, respect your readers; let them know their opinions count.

Add Context

Blogging is a great way to promote your organization – just make sure you're posting more than a press release. If there's an upcoming event you want to highlight, include fun, interesting and relevant links: video of the speaker, for example, or recent news articles about the topic.

Get Out More

Read other blogs -- and use the comment feature. Include your URL so other readers can click through to your site. If the post is about something you've written about, it's fine to say, "I also blogged about this over here" (and include the link), but always add more to the conversation than self-promotion. Don't be afraid to engage in debate.

You can also send an e-mail to authors of like-minded blogs introducing yourself and your site. Ask for a mention or inclusion in the blogroll, if appropriate, but remember the best way to get noticed is to be active.

Invite a Guest

Know someone who is an expert in the field? Invite that person to submit a series of blog entries (you can give them author access or post entries on their behalf). Encourage the guest blogger (or their organization) to promote and link to the blog when the entries are published.

Be On Time

Write about current news topics and connect your work to issues other people are discussing. That way, you'll be in position to attract readers searching on those key terms.

Be Social

Register and participate in social networking sites like Digg and StumbleUpon. If you have a Facebook or MySpace page, add your blog entries there. Also try out Delicious, a terrific system for archiving and sharing web pages, and include your Delicious link on your blog. Cross-post your blog and Twitter feed.

Get Free Stuff

Take advantage of free, super handy tools to enhance your blog:

Technorati: <http://www.technorati.com> - blog search engine and tracking service

Feedburner: <http://www.feedburner.com> - add email delivery and social media

Feed Informer: <http://feed.informer.com> - create a feed digest from other content sources

Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons> - find photos that can be used free of charge

Know Thy Reader

Sure you want to track visitor numbers, but don't overlook the referrer list your stats program provides (or your Google alerts). Has your website or blog been mentioned on a much bigger site? If so, you're likely to see a bump in traffic that will last for several days. Use it to your advantage by posting a "Welcome [Chicago Tribune] readers" entry inviting visitors to check out other areas of the site and subscribe to newsletters or search the calendar for upcoming events.

Build a Better Blogroll

Some blogrolls only show the company we keep. Offer your readers more – add links to related sites and resources and keep everything well organized. Set aside time each month to update links and delete sites that are not staying up to date. Find blogs to read and link to at www.technorati.com and www.google.com (try an open search and also try limiting your search to blogs).

Show Off

Promote your site in other mediums. Add it to letterhead, e-mail signatures, business cards, newsletters and magazines. Whatever promotes your organization should promote your website and blog.

Read and Respond to Comments

Check for comments at least once a day. If someone asks a question, or needs more information, respond immediately or find someone who can. Always be polite and professional, even if your guests are not. Use the delete-comment option sparingly – it's better to try to sway opinion than to hope the issue goes away.

Keep Them Coming

Blog design is often considered secondary, but good design is crucial to attracting and keeping new visitors. Visitors might find you via individual blog pages – not the homepage – due to RSS feeds or links from other blogs. A good blog design is such that every individual entry includes the same website navigation and promotional features, along with extras like an events calendar or newsletter sign-up.

Do Your Homework

Unless you can provide sharp, original analysis, try to avoid linking to old stories that readers probably read last month. Expand your list of news sources by signing up for newsletters and listservs, as well as RSS feeds from other blogs and online news sites.

Team Up

RSS Feeds are great for content distribution, and they can also be used to share content. Think of other organizations that might benefit from running your blog headlines on their site – or other blog RSS feeds that you might want to add to enhance your site. By letting others disseminate your content, you'll expand your audience and connect with new visitors.

Find a Sitter

If you're going on vacation, make sure someone from your organization is available to fill in should something timely need to be posted in your absence. Alert your readers to the amount of time the blog might go without updates, and consider pointing to five other great blogs to read while you're gone.

Know When to Fold 'Em

There's nothing worse than coming across a blog that hasn't been updated in months. Unless properly archived, it sends a negative message about the state of the organization behind it. There's no shame in putting a blog to rest – especially blogs that were created for a brief, specific purpose. Depending on the archive value, you can decide whether to remove it from public view. If it does remain public, add a note at the top that explains the blog has been archived. If no one will be checking the blog regularly for new comments, close off all comments to limit spam.