



A Beginner's Guide to Small Business Blogging

How to overcome your blogging challenges and create content your readers will love



BEST PRACTICES GUIDE | SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



So you've been thinking about starting a blog for your small business?

That's great news! Blogging is a great way to tell your business's story and, if done right, can help take your online marketing to a whole new level.

But as you have probably figured out, creating a successful blog also comes with certain challenges.

This is especially true if you're just getting started. Whether it's coming up with topics to write about or figuring out how to find the time to actually do it—there are certain obstacles you'll need to overcome if you want to make your blog a success.

The good news is we've got the resources you need to do it.

Here's what we'll cover

- Why You Should Start a Blog for Your Small Business
- How to Create Great Content (Even if You Think You're a Horrible Writer)
- 8 Things You'll Want to Consider When Starting a Blog for Your Business
- Where You Should Promote Your Blog to Get More Readers
- Simple Strategies for Creating Content Your Audience Will Love to Read

Read it from start to finish or find the help that's right for you. Either way, we hope this guide can take some of the anxiety out of getting started and give you the tools you need to make your blog a success.

Why You Should Start a Blog for Your Small Business

It's no secret that small businesses have a lot on their plates when it comes to online marketing. Whether it's keeping up with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or Pinterest or coming up with content for your latest email newsletter—it's easy to get overwhelmed.

But starting a blog for your business doesn't need to be an added burden to your online marketing strategy. It's actually quite the opposite. Creating a blog can help alleviate some of your biggest marketing pain points.

When you look at the stuff you're already doing on sites like Facebook and Twitter or with your email marketing, isn't coming up with great content already one of your biggest marketing challenges?

Having a blog allows you create that content in a central location and share it with subscribers, fans, and followers without any additional work. Not only will you have the flexibility to create better, more engaging content than a typical update on social media, but you'll also have the opportunity to get more value out of every piece of content you create.

What type of value can having a blog bring to your business? Here are a few examples:

Blogging can help you get discovered online

Now, more than ever, blogging has the potential to help your business get discovered by an online audience.

If you've been searching Google lately, then you've probably noticed that some results have a picture next to them. That's a sign that the author has integrated Google Authorship with their blog.

Google Authorship essentially links the content you publish on your blog to your Google+ profile. This link between the author and the content is designed to level the playing field for



businesses when it comes to getting their content discovered in Google searches.

For those businesses already using a blog for their business, this is a huge opportunity and could go a long way in helping your business get discovered online. For those businesses that have been on the fence about starting a blog, there's never been a better time than now.

Blogging matters because you matter

As much as your customers love your brand, they really love you. And since customer relationships are the single biggest advantage small businesses have over their large competitors, blogging is an invaluable way for potential customers to get to know, like, and trust you—while also deepening connections with existing customers.

Blogging lets you personalize your business

Your "About Us" page is great for expressing your company's main values, but a blog goes a step further by personalizing your ideas. The huge benefit of a blog is that it humanizes your business—making your company more engaging, relatable, and trustworthy.

Adding a blog to your website is like a personal invitation for your customers to get to know you better. By making yourself more available to them, your bond will become even stronger.

Blogging allows you to easily keep people informed

It's important to keep your customers up-to-date on any recent developments about you and your business. Even if you're already using social media for quick updates, a blog will give you the space you need to go beyond the basic day-to-day happenings.

Whether you're sharing industry expertise, or just a personal anecdote, your posts show your true dedication to your business



Get serious about creating great content...

For businesses that are serious about creating great content, having a blog is more important today than ever before.

It allows you to communicate your values as an organization. It also enables you to showcase your own expertise and share your experience as a business owner—topics which fit perfectly into your email marketing campaigns.

Overall, it allows you to humanize your marketing by communicating with your audience as a person with real thoughts, real advice, and real insights.

In the next section we'll take a look at some of the things you'll need to consider when you're ready to get started!

 **Tweet it! 4 Benefits of Starting a Blog for Your Small Business**

8 Things You Need to Consider When Starting a Blog for Your Small Business

The reality is that starting a blog isn't always as simple as just wanting to do it. For a lot of people, overcoming the anxiety of getting started is the hardest part of the entire process.

If you're serious about getting started, here are 8 things you'll want to consider:

1. Why are you creating a blog?

You understand what a blog can do for small businesses as a whole, but what can a blog do for your business in particular?

More importantly, what added benefit will having a blog for your business bring to the people who are reading it?

Identify your goals from the start and let that guide the rest of your decisions.

2. Who are you going to be speaking to?

What you decide to talk about on your blog will depend entirely on who you're creating content for.

Who are the people that are going to be reading your blog? What type of knowledge can you share with them? What are the questions they need answered?

Our blog for example, is all about providing helpful insight and practical advice for small businesses and nonprofits that are interested in online marketing. Every piece of content we create is written with that audience in mind.

Identify your target audience before coming up with ideas of what you actually want to create.

3. What are you going to talk about?

Every blog is built on certain "cornerstone" topics.

These topics are derived from a number of key elements—the most important of which are your audience, your industry, and the community in which you work.

By establishing the topics you're going to focus on, you'll be able to make better decisions about what ends up on your blog. This will enable you to build a community around your blog and increase the chances of having readers refer other people to it.

This will not only put your content in front of a wider audience but will also be valuable for boosting your presence on search engines like Google.

4. How frequently will you be able to post?

Similar to all the stuff you're already doing to market your business online, frequency will need to be an important consideration when starting your blog.

But, if you try to do too much, too early, you risk getting overwhelmed or burnt out by the blogging experience. But post too infrequently and it could be difficult to build a meaningful audience.

If possible, commit to doing at least one post a week for your first few months of blogging. Look at your calendar and set hard deadlines for when you want your posts to go up.

These won't all be groundbreaking pieces of online literature, something as simple as a photo and a few words can go a long way toward letting your audience know you're serious about staying active. From there, you can make more decisions down the road about whether or not you should be generating content at a different pace.

5. What type of content do you want to create?

One of the biggest misconceptions people have about blogs is that a certain level of writing expertise is required to create one.

But the fact is that for a lot of people, writing isn't something that comes easy nor is it something they particularly enjoy doing. For those people, incorporating other type of content like photos and videos may be a better alternative.

6. Where will your content come from?

For a lot of people, the thought of blogging conjures up images of being stuck alone in a room staring at blank computer screen.

A Beginner's Guide to Small Business Blogging

But creating content for your blog doesn't need to be a one-man or one-woman show. In fact, encouraging other members of your staff to get involved can help keep your content stay fresh and will give readers varying perspectives on the topics you're talking about.

You can even look outside your organization to other businesses or people whose opinions you think would fit well on your blog. There are a lot of people who would be happy to contribute to your blog just for the opportunity of getting more exposure for their content. All you need to do is ask.

7. How will your blog fit into your other marketing efforts?

Chances are, you've already been creating content for quite some time—whether it's coming up with stuff to put into your latest email or figuring out what to post on Facebook or Twitter.

Having a blog should make those efforts easier, not more difficult. If you commit to writing one blog post a week for an entire month, you'll have four valuable pieces of content to fuel your online marketing.

Subscribe to our Hints & Tips newsletter or check out Constant Contact on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, or YouTube and you'll see plenty of stuff that originated on our blog. Doing the same for your business will not only take a lot of the stress out of your online marketing but will also help get your content in front of a wider audience.

8. Where do you want your blog to live?

One of the hurdles that often keeps business owners away from blogging is the challenge of picking a service that will be right for their business.

Much like picking the right email marketing provider or figuring out which social media sites to sign up for—you want to choose a platform that makes sense for your business and that offers you the tools you're looking for.

When starting out, it may make sense to go with a free provider. As you get more comfortable with blogging and want to make it into a more central part of your operation, you can make the switch to a self-hosted service. Today, the top



three services that we recommend are: Blogger, WordPress, or Tumblr.

Once you've found a service that works for you, make sure that your blog provides a path back to your business. Add a signup form for your email newsletter, a link back to your website, and a call for readers to connect with you on social media.

Overcoming the anxiety of getting started

Okay, you know what you need to do—now it's time to do it!

Don't be afraid to start small. For a lot of people, using that first post to introduce your blog takes a lot of stress out of getting started.

The good news is by answering these questions you'll already have the bulk of that first post written.

Why are you creating a blog? Who are you speaking to? What topics will you be writing about? How often will you be posting? What type of content do you plan to share?

That's a post we'd like to read and we hope you'll share it when you finally get started.



Tweet it! 8 Things You Need to Consider When Starting a Blog for Your Business

How to Create Great Content (Even If You Think You're a Horrible Writer)

At this point you may be saying to yourself, "This is all well and good, but I'm a horrible writer!"

But here's the thing—you don't have to be a talented writer to create content your customers will love.

In reality, great content is all about answering the questions of your audience. As a subject matter expert in your field, you're probably already answering these types of questions every day.

It's only when you're asked to write out the answers that things go crazy. This is because the focus shifts to writing rather than just answering the question.

How does a horrible writer overcome this problem?

The answer is to have a simple structure in place that allows you to just answer questions.

Then you can write out your answers or record yourself answering the questions, transcribe it (or have someone do it for you) or you can use a dictation tool to turn your voice into text (Try the free Dragon Dictation app iOS.)

Once you have your transcription you'll need to clean it up a bit but the "writing" part essentially takes care of itself.

Sounds a lot less intimidating doesn't it?

So what does this simple structure for writing engaging content look like?

If you plan ahead by outlining your content with the following structure you'll have all the components necessary for an engaging piece of content, such as a blog post or article.

Here are the parts you'll need:

Headline: This usually is just the question itself. Or the question reframed as a how-to. The headline is designed to get attention and let the reader know the benefit of reading the content.

Intro: This is the setup or context for the content. What's the problem? What's the solution?

The 5 W's: Expand on the solution. Outline the sub-questions you need to answer about the solution. Usually the who, what, where, when, and why of your topic.

Example/Objective: Can you offer an example that demonstrates your point? Or can you anticipate how the reader may object to what you're saying? (If yes, address that point of contention.)

Summary: Give a brief summary of the information you've just shared. (This can be in a paragraph or in a bulleted list.)

Next Step: What should the reader do next? How can they put this information to use?



We used the 5-step structure for this section of the guide. Check it out!

Headline: How to Create Engaging Content (Even if You Think You're a Horrible Writer)

Intro: What's the problem? Everyone needs to be creating engaging content but most people believe they're horrible writers.

What's the solution? Use a simple structure to answer questions about a particular topic in your area of expertise.

The 5 Ws:

So what does this simple structure for writing engaging content look like? List the parts.

How should each section be used?

Example/Objective: Use this section as an example.

Summary: Recap

Next Step: How can you put this simple structure for writing engaging content to use?

Armed with this outline, we dictated a draft and then cleaned it up and plugged it in.

How can you put this simple structure for writing engaging content to use?

Think of one of the questions you get from your audience on a regular basis. Now just take that question and create an outline with the structure.

To make it easier, open up a new Word or text file and then copy and paste the following structure into it. Save it to your desktop as "content-structure-template" then open up this file to use as your guide when you're "writing" your next piece of content.

- Headline
- Intro
- The 5 W's
- Example/Objection
- Summary
- Next Step

This process may feel a little weird at first, but once you've done it a few times you'll start to get the hang of it. Then you'll "write" more engaging content, easier and faster.

Keep in mind that every blog post doesn't have to be 1,000 words either. Look for opportunities to use other types of content—like photos, videos, or audio—to alleviate some of the burden of having to write every post.



Where You Should Promote Your Blog to Get More Readers

Beyond not being confident in your writing expertise, one of the other concerns business owners often have when getting started is figuring out how to get people to actually read their blog.

But as we mentioned before, you likely already have all the tools you need to distribute your content and get it in front of the people who matter the most.

Here's a look at some of the ways you can promote your blog:

1. Emails

If you're using email marketing to keep in touch with people, try including the first few paragraphs of your blog in your email newsletter.

That alone can help drive traffic to your blog and your website, and also provide inspiration for email newsletter content.

Financial planner for Resource Advisory Services, David Lewis, uses his emails as a vehicle for his blog posts. "We wanted to use our newsletters as a way to deliver blog posts to clients we're already serving," he explains.

Overall, he estimates his blog has doubled the number of clients seeking information from Resource Advisory Services.

2. Facebook

At Constant Contact, our social media team works closely with members of our content team to ensure that our blog posts get maximum exposure.

Sometimes, Facebook posts about blog posts can generate a whole new conversation on Facebook. And, don't forget to share your blog posts on your personal Facebook profile, too!

3. Twitter

Twitter is another great place to feature blog posts. Problem is, you only have 140 characters to work with.

To work around this, try tweeting a summary of your post, a quote pulled from the post, or just commenting on the post itself. Anything that creates traffic back to your blog is a good thing.

Want to really spread the word? Try starting a Tweet Chat about the blog topic. You can also include your blog's URL with your Twitter handle, so people can see that you have one.

If you know some industry influencers, tweet the post to them and ask for their opinion. If they respond, that can start a whole snowball of publicity.

4. LinkedIn

If you have a blog post that's talking about business—especially sales or marketing—LinkedIn has a lot of groups you can join to start a discussion.

This can broaden your audience, encourage readers to engage with you about the material, and might even give you ideas for future blog posts.



5. Pinterest

Pinterest is an extremely visual social network. To encourage pinning your blog post, make sure you have an interesting image to go along with it.

A funny picture or an infographic can get pinned and re-pinned a lot, which will also drive traffic to your blog.

6. Comments section

If you're a frequent commenter on industry blogs, you can also link back to your own blog as a point of reference when you leave a comment.

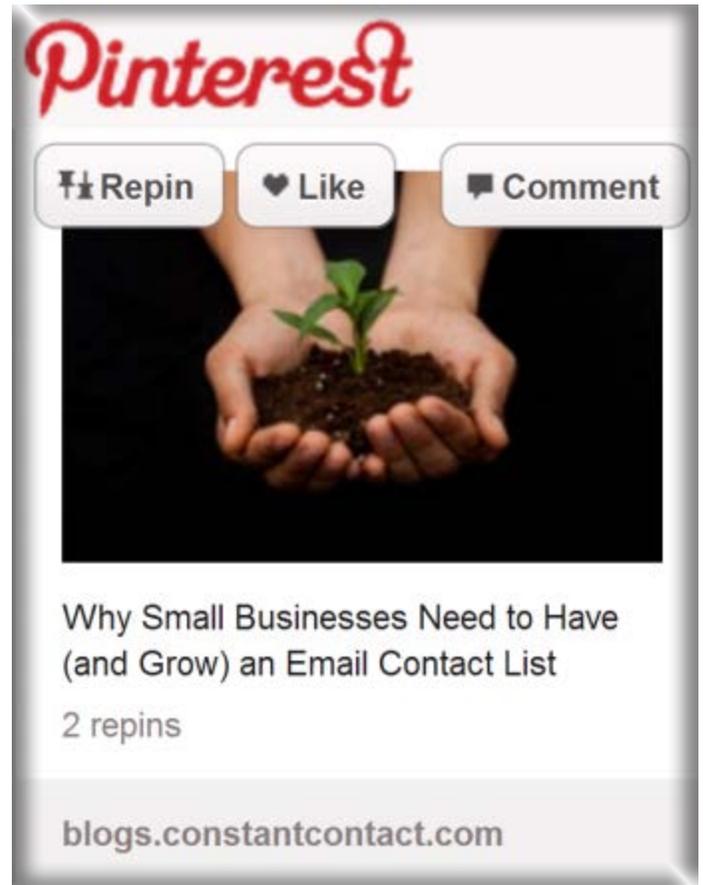
Just include it in the comments section that most websites have for anyone who wants to comment on a blog post.

7. Guest post

Look around for bigger websites that are looking for content contributors. The advantage of the guest post is that it gets your name and your organization out there, and you have the opportunity to link back to your own blog.

8. Syndication

Alternatively, you can try syndicating your own blog with websites, so that your blog's content appears on the site somewhere. That can open up a whole new channel for the posts and expose your blog to a new audience.



Tweet it! 8 Places to Promote Your Blog to Attract More Readers

Keep the faith!

Blogging is tough work! You never know what's going to take off and what's going to sink to the bottom of the virtual sea.

The key to building a following is, above all, staying consistent. Readers aren't likely to repeatedly visit a blog if they're not sure when a new post is going up, nor will they trust your opinion if you have two blog posts after three years.

Stay consistent, persistent, and blog, blog away!

You're almost ready to go. In the next section, you'll find some simple strategies that we've learned on our blog to help make your blog a success.

14 Simple Strategies for Creating Content Your Readers Will Love

You have the expertise of owning and running a small business. You have an understanding of the particular needs and questions your customers need answered. And you know the best ways to get those answers in front of the people who can help grow your business and introduce you to your next great customer.

We're already looking forward to reading your first post! (You can share it with us on Twitter (@ConstantContact) or on Facebook.)

Finally, we've put together a cheat sheet of simple strategies you can use going forward. You won't need to do all of these things for each post, but hopefully you can find inspiration from some of the best practices that have worked for our team of writers.

1. Put things in a list

Lists are compelling. They're easy to skim and most people skim when they're reading blog posts.

Lists are also easy to write.

Don't use them all the time, but don't forget them, either.

2. Use the word "you"

You wouldn't find this copy so compelling if I talked about what an anonymous "they" should be doing with their content.

Really, who cares about them?

No, this is a post for you, about what you can do for your content marketing.

If I'm talking to you, you're more likely to pay attention and keep reading what I've got to say.

3. Make declarations

Which blog post are you more likely to read: "14 Content Tips You May Want to Read Because They're in a List" or "14 Content Tips You'll Read Because They're in a List."

Probably the second post, right? Because the title makes a bold declaration.

Declarations show that the writer knows what he or she is talking about.



They are informative and valuable, too, because making declarations ensures that the reader will take something away from the content.

4. Write tweet-ready titles

You may have heard how you need to make titles of all sorts engaging, whether it's an email subject line or blog post.

But what does an "engaging" title actually mean?

Well, try picturing every title like a tweet. Think about what kinds of tweets drive the most traffic and model your titles after those.

5. Make sure your content doesn't blind people

Text on a screen is different than text in a book.

Keep most paragraphs to one or two sentences. Three can sometimes work, if you're feeling lucky.

Don't forget to make breaks in your text with subheads, and images to fully optimize your content for readability.

And pay close attention to your color schemes. Stay away from fluorescent colors that will blind your reader.

Making any of these mistakes can make your content completely unreadable.

6. Write what people want to read, not what you want to write

Your content should always have an audience in mind.

That means, you should have their needs in mind, too, not your own. Remember, content marketing should provide something valuable to people.

So although you may want to write about how terrible your day was or how someone should do something about the lines at delis in grocery stores, that's not the kind of thing people will want to read.

They want to read something that's written about the things they're thinking about.

So ask yourself what concerns and delights your audience, then go from there.

7. Remember: it's a blog post; not a sales pitch

Sell, sell, sell is a recipe for disaster when it comes to creating blog content.

Your content should give your audience something of value. In return, you're developing trust, authority, and expertise.

A blog post that ends with "BUY NOW!" each time will generate far fewer potential customers or supporters than one that ends with "Download our free guide!"

Why? Because people need to be convinced to buy something and one blog post probably won't do it. You need a lot of content to build a good relationship.

8. Talk to people about the problem, then the solution

Instead of asking if an audience has a problem, then presenting a solution (your product), content needs to meet your audience's problem, acknowledge the issue, and then show your expertise on the subject.

When the audience trusts that expertise enough, they'll be ready to take the next step and they'll think of you first.

9. Don't write your content in a bubble

When you're writing, always remember to pop the bubble of your products and services by showing how they impact real people and real things every day.



If you stick to isolated product pitches and studies, no one will be able to see it in the context of their own lives.

10. Don't forget about SEO

One of the most rock-solid benefits of blogging is boosting your website's ranking in search engines.

You don't have to be an expert to write content that's great for search engine optimization (SEO).

Just link phrases you think your audience is looking for to deeper pages on your website that relate to the topic and you're halfway there.

11. Show people how to do things

Google's Keyword Tool estimates that, each month, the phrase "how to" is searched 414,000,000 times and the phrase "how to videos" is searched 618,000,000 times.

So, it's more or less safe to conclude that people use the Internet as an informal instruction guide for just about everything.

Your own "How to" posts should discuss not just the things your organization offers, but anything else that your audience is interested in that can be related to what you offer.

We do this a lot with "How to" blog posts about subjects like Facebook.

We're not Facebook, we're not selling Facebook, but we do have Social Campaigns, a tool that can help people get the most out of their Facebook Page.

12. Pay attention to what's working

Always have a way to track what content is being read and what's being ignored.

With Email Marketing, you can do this by monitoring click-throughs and open rates.

With blog posts, check to see which search terms are leading people to your site and what posts are getting read and shared.

With social media, you can see who's "liking," retweeting, and engaging with posts.

All of this can show you who's actually reading and interacting

13. Tell people what you told them ... again

Blogging isn't just about making the content, it's about making sure things stick.

In the end, it all comes back to thinking about your audience before making any content in the first place.

Who's going to read the post?

What are they going to do with it?

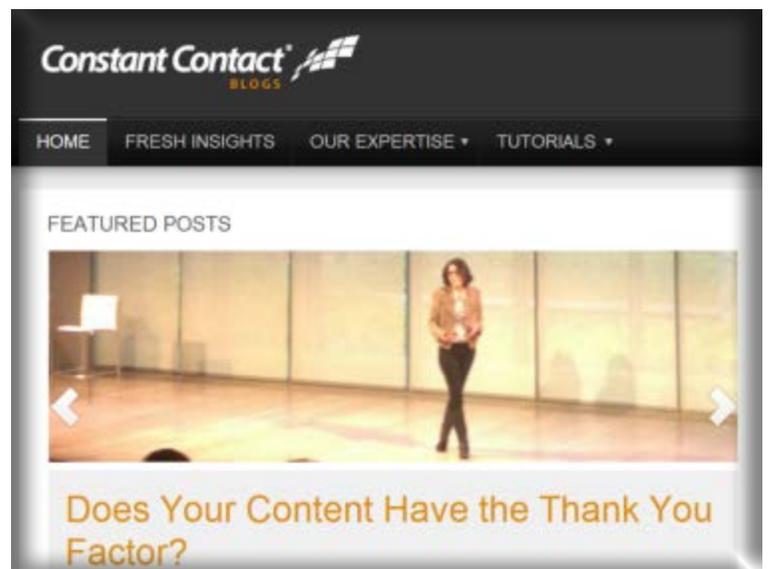
What are they going to take away from it?

What's your organization going to get from it?

14. Include a call to action

No blog post (or guide in this case) is complete without a next step of some sort, so here it goes:

Did you find this guide helpful? Share it with your friends or followers!



Want to learn more about starting a blog for your business?

Check out the [Constant Contact Blog](#) for daily updates from our team of marketing experts!



Online Engagement Marketing tools & coaching
to help small businesses and nonprofits grow.



Email Marketing

Get your message read
and shared by your
audience fast.



SaveLocal

Create deals your
way and find your
next great customer.



Social Campaigns

Turn Facebook "likes"
and shares into real,
measurable results.



EventSpot

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