RAJ SUBRAMANYAM

HOW TO BUILD A BLOG THAT COUNTS

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- Brian DeChesare
Founder, Mergers & Inquisitions
and Breaking Into Wall Street

BLOG SUCCESS

Complete Solutions for the SERIOUS Blogger

HOW TO BUILD A BLOG THAT COUNTS

Raj Subramanyam

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Endorsements

This book represents the latest in the evolution of Blog Success as a world leader in guiding blogs towards success.
~Jack Humphrey, Co-Founder of Blog Success, Inventor of CurationSoft
JackHumphrey.com

Whether you are an enthusiastic start up blogger or one of the legion who has floundered and gone from a daily or weekly post to 3x per year - Raj Subramanyam's new book – How to build a blog that counts – is filled with rich information for you. From key insights on high level strategy for your blog, all the way to key success factors, Raj guides you systematically from inception to success. Along the way Raj offers sage personal advice to keep you sane and focused. If you do nothing else read the first 20 pages and the final chapter but once in you'll be as hooked as i was. Read on!
~Gregg Davis, CEO, Impact Consults, Sr. VP at Teach for America

This is the most comprehensive and thorough resource I have found for anyone looking to find success through blogging. This book is written with an engaging writing style and is packed with knowledge so you can learn something new whether you are a beginner or advanced blogger.
~Jeff Sauer, Digital Marketing Expert and founder https://knowledge.land

How to build a blog that counts, by Raj Subramanyam is a fantastic, comprehensive guide to building and maintaining a top-rate blogsite. He takes you through all the steps for creating the site itself and crafting interesting, effective content in a clear and consistent format. The step-by-step instructions are filled with insights that will give a diligent blogger a head start in the highly competitive blog market. I absolutely recommend this book to any emerging serious blogger who wants to master the craft.
~Merry Farmer, award-winning author “In Your Arms”

"*Blog Success* provides a great road map for turning your blog into a successful business, with real, paying customers. Many other resources only give partial information or unrealistic

estimates of what it takes to succeed, but Raj gives a blunt assessment of what is required, along with the step-by-step guidelines that you need to move from 'idea' to 'valuable asset.' Highly recommended for anyone serious about building an audience online and creating a real business."
~Brian DeChesare, Founder, Mergers & Inquisitions

How to Build a Blog that Counts contains well-researched content with real world and hands on examples. This book is equally valuable for the beginner and the professional blogger. The book is well-structured and exhaustive. The content is presented in a logical layout with ready reference checklists at the end of the book. I use the internet for almost everything and I find great value in a lot of different areas concerning me. This book will help me to share my knowledge so other subscribers can benefit as well. Blog Success definitely gave me new insights and new ideas. I highly recommend this book to anybody working with blogs and other social media content. Raj has provided an excellent framework for taking a blog from idea to success. If you follow this framework, success will be yours!
~Dr. Heiko Hecht, President, IBIS America LLC

1. INTRODUCTION

The ways that we work and earn money, and the way the entire Planet's economy works, have changed drastically in the last decade. And every bit of it (which is amazing in itself) is because of the Internet.

The opportunity to work for yourself, start your own company, and make a living with blogging is something our kids will absolutely take for granted. They've never lived in a world without the level of entrepreneurial spirit we presently enjoy. Nor have they ever lived in a world where there weren't myriad tools available to us to become independent.

And nothing represents these opportunities better than blogging. It's called "Content Marketing" and web publishing, among other different names. But the world knows it as blogging.

The Huffington Post was sold to AOL for $315 million in 2011. The biggest blog on the Planet, Huffington Post set the standard for what is possible with an idea and blogging software. Blogging is a full decade past the stereotype of teenagers keeping online diaries. Today, the world knows it to be big business.

There are now tens of thousands of "Mommy Bloggers," as well as tech, consulting, personal development bloggers among many, many other categories, making a killing for themselves through their blogs.

In decades past, in order to create a business that generated the billions that blogs do today on the web, you had to go into franchising or some other costly, complicated business to start and manage. It is SO powerful that today, you simply need a domain name, Wordpress, and hosting and you have the full infrastructure, the foundation, of a business. A business with profit potential that can beat the pants off of your local McDonald's franchise owner.

More than just adding content!

I'm excited by the history and evolution of Blog Success—the original blogger training center on the web, starting before blogging was considered "cool" and viable as a means of making a great living.

This book represents the latest in the evolution of Blog Success as a world leader in guiding blogs towards success.

How to Build a Blog that Counts will give you the exhaustive, end to end activities that are required for a successful blog. If you are a serious blogger, you cannot go wrong with this book. In fact, you should not start a blog without going through the concepts detailed in this book.

If you want your blog to become your career or your business, then you have to do more than just add content. This book gives you the complete details presented in a very structured, easy to understand and task-oriented manner.

You are in the catbird seat.

There isn't a better place to begin your journey as a successful web publisher than right here, right now. I wish you all the best in your endeavor and your growth as you go through this book.

Welcome to the cutting-edge, the digital age, to the very best way to start and grow a profitable business with the least amount of overhead, experience, and effort of any kind of business model that has ever come before it.

Sincerely,

Jack Humphrey, Co-Founder of Blog Success & Inventor of CurationSoft
JackHumphrey.com

2. ABOUT THIS BOOK

Did you know that:

*There are more than 160 million blogs

*60% of businesses have blogs

*LinkedIn has more than 200 million profiles of real people

*Blogs influence purchases; LinkedIn profiles assist in being found for jobs

So, whether you want to sell a product or service, showcase your skill sets and expertise or establish your credentials to a headhunter, your chances of success increase many-fold with an impactful blog.

But wait a minute, before you start building a blog, consider this:

*Only 15.5% of blogs are ACTIVE. A large number of the remaining blogs have been given up on by the blogger.

*The 2014 BlogSuccess survey also indicated that less than 1% of blogs are considered successful by the blogger.

*Bloggers face huge challenges!

Whether you are thinking of starting a blog, or already have a blog and are facing some challenges, you are about to get some invaluable insights to make YOUR blog successful!

This book is for the SERIOUS blogger.

A blog is an online site used to showcase expertise to interested people.
A blogger is someone who owns and maintains such a site.
You can also use a blog to store knowledge and information, push it out to relevant people and build a digital, online presence that can be seen by anyone who visits the site.

A LOT of thought, activity and time goes into a blog.

The successful blogger can make a career out of a blog, use the blog to attract job leads or even leverage it to boost product/service sales.

Such a blog becomes a full-time vocation and must be taken as seriously as a person would their own career.

This book contains three main components:

First, this book lays out EVERYTHING that you need to know for building a successful blog.

Most bloggers start out incorrectly assuming that writing is the most important skill required for a successful blog. A large number of bloggers also assume that writing is the ONLY activity associated with a blog. As you go through this book, you will realize the fallacy of that assumption. While writing is one part, there is a lot more to a blog.

Second, this book classifies blogger's activities into critical and non-critical.

This classification is crucial for prioritizing a blogger's time and effort.

As with most things, there is an 80/20 principle influencing the results.

A blog is no exception.

Twenty percent of a blogger's time and effort influences 80% of the results. The tips provided in this book clearly identify those tasks which MUST be performed by the blogger. Also marked are those which can (actually must) be delegated to unlock time for the blogger to pursue the 20% activities.

A 2014 survey conducted by Blog Success highlighted major challenges faced by a blogger. This book cites pertinent data from that survey and also addresses each of those challenges.

Last, I have included my own framework on getting organized, being disciplined and setting myself up for success.

This is NOT restricted to blogging, but to any activity in general. This framework has worked very well for me. Anytime I set myself a goal and work towards achieving it, I deploy this framework.

So far, it has **NEVER** failed me.

If you are a serious blogger, this book is your key to success.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Whether you are starting a blog, or already have a blog that is up and running, you can get the most out of this book by reading it in the order the chapters are written.

There are a few tables towards the end of the book. After you have read the book and understood the concepts, these tables can be used as a checklist. Simply print them off and keep them on your work desk for ready reference.

The last chapter also contains an online link where you can find all the images, tables and

work-sheets listed in this book.

Chapter 13, Key Success Factors is intended to be a motivator and a generally effective framework. The power of the framework lies in understanding it first, and then internalizing it. Once you taste success and feel the power of the framework, you will deploy it in every activity you take up.

3. BLOG TYPES

As you start thinking about your blog, it is essential to keep in mind the type of blog you want to set up.

While you may still be able to change the blog type from one to the other, or combine them, it is better to start with the appropriate type right at the outset.

FOUR TYPES OF BLOGS:

Blogs can be broadly classified into the following four types:

A. Ad-only: Blogs that simply rely on page views per month and whose primary or only source of revenue is from advertisements

B. E-Commerce or transaction fee-based blog: Blog that builds interest in readers, and sells other vendors' products. These could also be blogs that provide a platform or marketplace for customers and merchants to transact and then generate small revenue per transaction

C. Own-product: Blog that builds interest in readers that will aid in selling the blogger's own products and/or services

D. Membership blog: Blog that provides services on a monthly basis and earns revenue through periodic subscription, license or membership fees

NOTE: This book focuses only on blogs whose success is defined in terms of revenue

Now let's examine each type in detail:

<u>The ad-only blog:</u>

As the name suggests, this blog depends on advertisements for revenue.

This is ideal if your blog can have a huge number of page views per month. You must have some kind of service or interesting content to generate such a huge number of visits. An "exchange" type of blog, a site where people can share information or thoughts or a site which depends on contribution from a large number of visitors, is best suited for this kind of revenue.

The ad-only site must be heavily optimized for search engines.

The dating site, PlentyofFish.com gets 2 billion page views a month and consequently can command huge advertisement revenue. A photo-upload site where people simply upload and others come to view photos or a site where recruiters could post jobs is another example.

For such a site to be successful there has to be a strategy to dramatically increase page views.

From a revenue perspective, Google AdWords can provide an initial source of income, but very soon you need to approach corporations who can advertise for a few months on contract.

Visitors per month, page views per month, advertisement information (number, form, cost and subject of ads) and revenue are key metrics to be considered.

Keyword ranking, revenue (or profit) per month, or per visitor, would be the parameters to maximize.

Transaction fee blogs:

This type of blog offers some kind of service or a product in exchange for a small fee. The fee is per transaction and generally not repeatable. Therefore revenue sources can neither be consistent nor predictable.

Craigslist or iStockphoto are examples of this type of blog. I can go to Craigslist whenever I need to post a job or have something to sell. I list my service/item and pay a small fee. Once the transaction is over, I owe Craigslist nothing.

Similarly on iStockphoto, I can list a photograph that I have taken and have the opportunity to sell it. The site draws visitors by allowing them to search for royalty-free pictures and then sell them premium photos (such as yours).

Such sites must have a huge following (so that the seller has confidence that a large number of buyers would be looking at the listing) and also be optimized for search engines.

A variation of the transaction fee-based blog is the e-Commerce blog.

This type of blog is a marketplace, or an exchange. Amazon is a great example. Folks go to Amazon to purchase books which are not written by Amazon. Now Amazon sells a lot of products just like Wal-Mart. The big difference is Amazon is online.

When you start out, your blog will have to be effective in attracting visitors to your site. To have an effective marketplace, you will also have to attract merchants who would want to list their products on your site. Slowly, over time, you can build an exchange where buyers and sellers flock to your site to transact.

A good customer experience will continue to bring repeat visitors to the site. Site look/feel, ease of purchase and delivery, fast website load, security of monetary transactions, robust support and after sales service, etc. all contribute to good customer experience.

An e-Commerce site must afford excellent customer experience to enable repeat business.

Own-product blogs:

These sites primarily have products to sell. The blog helps in creating awareness,

discussion, engagement and constant expectation amongst visitors and members.

Brian DeChesare's site, "Breaking Into Wall Street," is an excellent example. As you keep reading Brian's blogs and if you are looking to make a career in investment banking or to become a guru in accounting and financial modeling, you will want to purchase his training material.

If the product is software-based on a license-fee model, then the revenue could be repeatable. It is still a product which should provide value for continued use.

Traffic inflow per month, subscribers to list, number of customers or revenue and unsubscribes per month would be key metrics. Advanced metrics would be customer life-time value and multiple product sales per customer.

Conversion factors such as rate of subscribers to list (i.e. how many subscribe to the list vs. how many visit the product page) and then rate of sale (i.e. how many customers purchased the product/service vs. how many subscribers) would be the ratios to focus on for improvement.

For such a site to be successful, the product must have immense value to their customer.

Membership blog:

As the name suggests, this blog has members who pay a periodic membership fee. Members usually look forward to some kind of offering every month.

There are two variations to the membership model.

One is where the member pays month after month to utilize the platform provided by your site. Dating sites, job boards (for employers), technology information, health and fitness, etc. are sites that are conducive to the membership model.

The offering should be valuable and distinct from what was provided the previous month. Simply taking the price of a product, dividing it by 12 and charging it every month does not constitute a membership model.

The member's experience, knowledge and business will evolve from month to month. The site offering should contribute to this.

Fresh content, a vibrant community and a solid blog are mandatory for a profitable membership site.

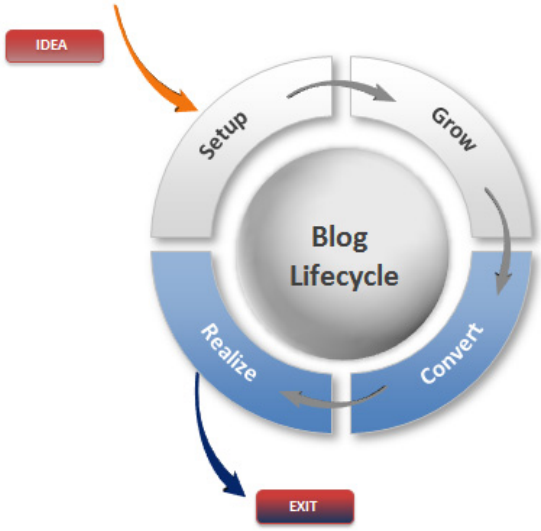
A great example is the CIO Executive Board which has a hefty membership fee and targets CIOs of corporations. Every other day there is some insightful publication on problems that CIOs face every day, a survey or results of past surveys on similar topics, articles on how other companies faced up to some vexing problems, seminars and conferences (with discounted rates for members), etc.

These publications and constant engagement of members with top-value material are what makes the membership valuable.

BLOG FRAMEWORK:

Having seen the four types of blogs above, let's take a look at a typical blog framework, i.e.

how a blog evolves from "idea to success." The following picture will help in understanding this evolution:



1. Idea—this is the stage when you think about the topic for your blog. There is a significant amount of thought that should go into your blog even before you come up with the name of your site. Chapter 4 covers this topic in-depth.

2. Setup—this module involves laying the groundwork for your blog or site. Needless to say, this is what gives concrete (well, virtual) "shape" to your blog. Chapter 5 covers blog set up in detail.

3. Grow—Once your blog is set up and you have settled on your blog topic, you need to get it growing. Growth comes from traffic, generating content and targeted marketing.

Assets could be product and also content. Content is the life-blood of any blog, and is the single-biggest challenge that bloggers face. This book devotes one full chapter to content, specifically on the types of content, scheduling those and creatively engaging your "list."

The book also covers marketing (traditional as well as social media) and search-engine optimization as part of the GROW module.

1. Convert—Once the setup is complete and the site is growing, you will need to start converting the assets and the traffic into paid customers to generate revenue. Chapter 9, Convert Subscribers into Customers, will help you systematically convert visitors into customers, show you how to draw insights from the data collected in various components (that you have strategically set up) and use those to target

prospective customers with a high likelihood of success. It will also enable you to consider the type of product(s) that you can build and put out for sale.

2. Realize—This module takes your blog to the next level. Two critical topics are covered. The first is on the various ways in which you can monetize your site which is now in a very advanced state. The second is on how to exploit the maximum revenue potential from a hit product.

3 Exit—If you choose to exit, you need to know the value of your blog. This important chapter talks about how a blog can be valued (hint: it's not straightforward). Conversely, you can also use this knowledge to value other blogs that you may wish to acquire and further grow your blog business. Chapter 11, Beyond Blog Success, covers this topic.

4 Chapter 12 - Blog Survey Results - To ensure success for your blog, you need to be strategic and disciplined. Based on our survey in May 2014, we uncovered two major reasons for the failure of several blogs. This chapter also lists the 80/20 prioritization for a blogger, i.e. what tasks you must do as a blogger, and what to delegate to an expert.

5. Chapter 13 - Key Success Factors—So if you know the framework and what it takes to succeed, and are motivated to make it all happen, what else could be missing? This chapter will describe some meticulous organization and self-motivation ideas that will help you stay the course and reach your goals.

The mission of this book is to help YOU take YOUR blog to success.
Let's move on.

4. YOUR BLOG IDEA

Module: Blog Idea

Strategic vision is of utmost importance, especially when one embarks on an initiative that could span an alternative career.

Such initiatives consume time, effort, money and emotions.

So it is very important to know your inner most feelings and really know "where you want to go" with this initiative.

Just like collecting antiques, stamps, currency, and even cars and jewelry, one way to think of a blog is a way to collect information.

You collect or put out information—chiefly on topics belonging to your interest and passion—and showcase them in such a way that gives you tremendous satisfaction and at the same time benefits others that need such information.

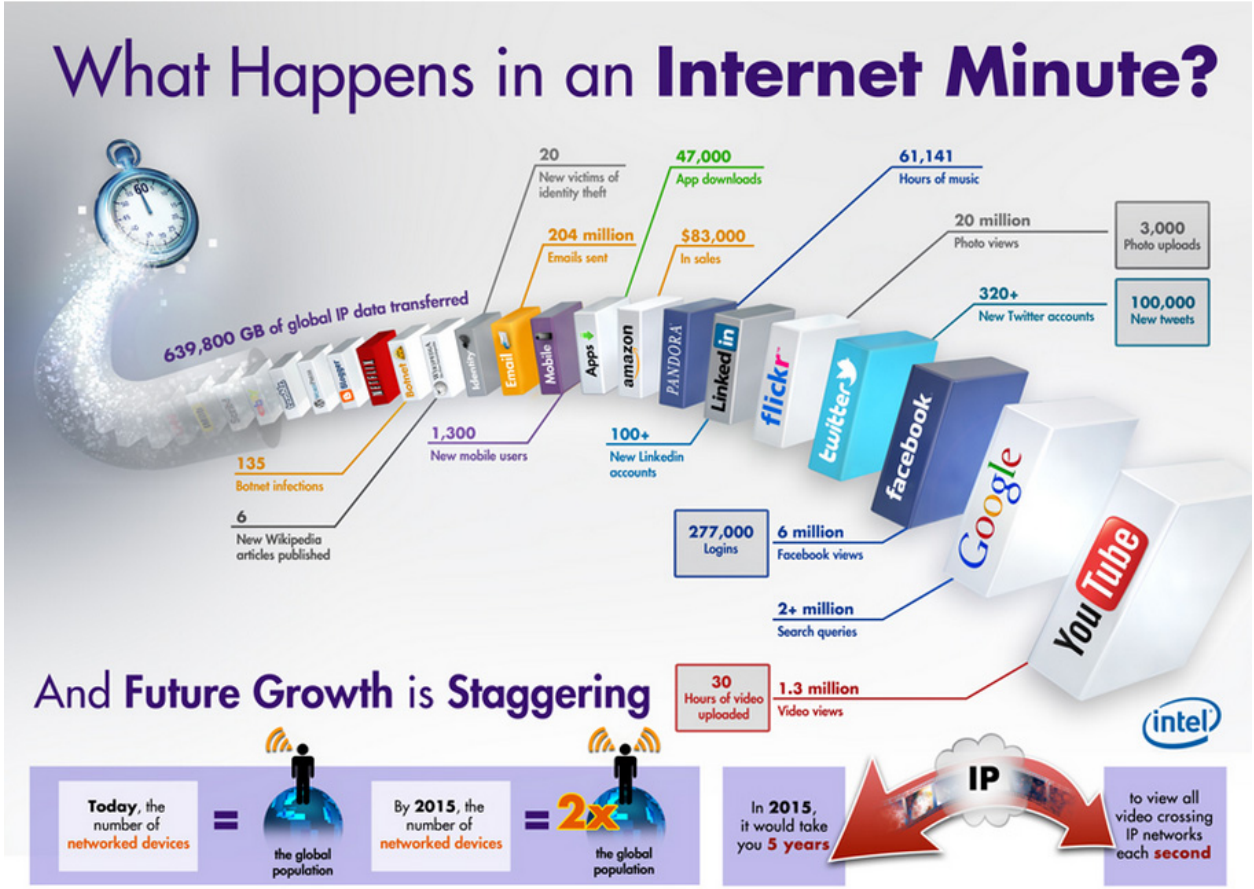
Your blog is your showcase. You can store your knowledge, experience, expertise, opinions, thoughts and teachings for anyone who cares to visit it.

You are in control. You can put it out for free. You can push it out to people who want to know when you have a new addition to the repository. You can charge for it (yes, people pay good money for valuable information).

A unique quality of a blog is that the information you put out can be available long after you are gone. How cool is that!

The Internet is already cluttered with more information than anyone can imagine.

An Intel infographic from a few years ago showed that more than 275,000 Facebook logins are registered, 100,000 new tweets are sent out and 3,000 photos and 30 hours of video are uploaded all in an Internet minute.



(Source: http://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/communications/internet-minute-infographic.html)

So, any topic you choose to write about will already have an Internet presence, multiple blogs and most likely a sizeable following.

You need to bring your uniqueness to the Internet. The way to do that is through your own experience, passion and a niche subtopic that is of great interest to you.

Make no mistake, this blog will become your baby very soon. You will be thinking, breathing and living this blog all the time. You will be putting in a lot of effort and time; therefore you need to carefully pick your topic.

To begin, you must first answer the "why" question, which basically defines the goal of your blog.

Why are you considering setting up a blog?

Here are some thoughts to get you started in answering the question.

The following are some of the primary reasons cited in our survey for people wanting to blog:

Money-making reasons:

* Generate awareness about and market services/products
* Set up a secondary, passive source of income

* Earn income from blogging and quit day job

Non-monetary reasons:

* Voice an opinion on a matter of wide, general importance
* Build an online presence to showcase expertise
* Leave a legacy, boost self-esteem
* Set up a knowledge/experience repository for posterity

Once you define the primary objective for setting up a blog, you must come up with a few measurable goals.

This is a very good time for you to establish your "expected results."

Write the objective down on a piece of paper and keep it on hand, preferably in a place where you can see it every day.

The way to write the objective is as follows:

Specific: Instead of writing "blog on fitness," write down: "blog that will contain tips for reducing lethargy, increasing speed and flexibility for middle-aged men."

Measurable: You must have measurable goals. Consider measurement from a few different angles. For example, 30 posts in three months or 15 videos in six months. Make sure you establish a time constraint. Cover key areas such as blog progress, list building, marketing activities, etc.

Realistic: While your objective must be challenging, please ensure that it is realistic. If you are able to spend only two hours a day working on it, it would be impossible for you to set goals that require you to spend eight hours a day. Understand your situation and make the goal challenging, but not unreachable.

Quality: Ensure you build in some measure of quality. The Internet already has huge quantities of information. Your blog can be an outstanding success only if you provide high-quality information, insights, opinion, recommendation and advice.

Work stretches to fill the time allotted to it. So unless you set a time boundary, your work will meander and the blog will not go anywhere.

Now think about what the next logical goal would be AFTER you have reached the goal for your blog.

As an example, you could have your blog showcase your expertise to get a job in alternative energy consulting. To pursue such a goal, you would have your blog contain posts that abundantly convey your expertise and experience on the topic, your opinion and judgment on key aspects related to alternative energy and current events and development in the area of alternative energy.

Your readers (who could comprise of people interested in breaking into this "sunrise" field, recruiters, industry-peers, product-developers, other bloggers and even hiring managers) would start visiting your site for rich information on the topic. Your social media presence, consistent posting and user activity would bubble your site up in Google search results for most-searched

keywords related to the topic.

It won't take long for important people in the alternative energy industry to find you.

TIP: Build a strategy for your blog; understand your long-term goals and how the blog would get you there.

Establishing the goal of your blog helps you understand its importance; especially as it relates to reaching your long-term aspiration, dream job or end goal.

As you think about and realize the importance of your blog, you will start developing respect for it.

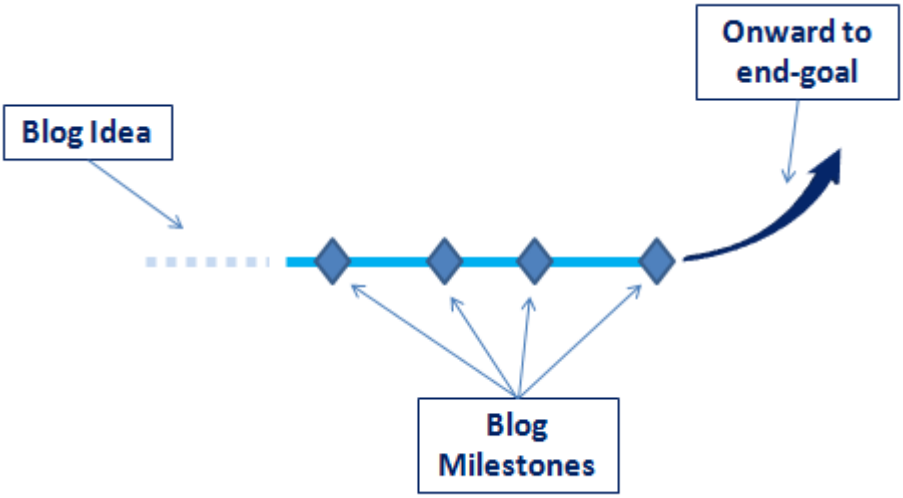
This is a very important state of mind because it is this respect for the blog that will make you eager to take up all activities related to the blog every day.

Otherwise, you will be like the child whose parents are pushing her to prepare for exams and the child's heart is just not in the studies. The child has no respect for the preparation and therefore cannot bring herself to do the hard work that is required for preparing for the exams. She just goes through the motions. Somehow the passion and desire show up in the results.

TIP: If you understand the importance of a certain activity, you will respect it, and then you will find it much easier to do all the hard work and make all the sacrifices required to accomplish the activity.

A blog is NOT a sprint. You cannot get there quickly. You cannot buy yourself the reputation of a blogger. You can acquire a blog, but building your expertise, online presence and image takes time.

Recognize this upfront and set your milestones accordingly.



On the Internet, stuff never dies. Whether it's an old picture or a video or simply a comment that you posted, you will be surprised to see it online even if you forgot about it. Therefore, it is highly important for you to be yourself and publish content that reflects you and your thinking.

Of course, thinking and beliefs do change over time, and such evolution is fine.

But pretending to be what you are not reflects in your content and you will build a sub-optimal image. Since content accumulates over time, it's very easy to see a pattern after a while. When you are publishing content one piece at a time you won't see the results, but the pattern will definitely be indisputably clear over time.

It's in your interest to showcase your unique personality, stand up for what you believe is right and focus on your thinking as you publish content for your blog.

Choosing the best topic for your blog

If your only objective is to store all your knowledge online by way of your blog, then you can skip this section. You already know what your blog is about and you do not wish to grow traffic or to make money from your blog.

For all other blog topics, you must consider the following two important criteria:

A. The topic must be sought after, i.e. a significant number of people must be looking for information on this topic online

B. The topic must be "commerciable," i.e. people must be willing to pay money for information and things related to the topic.

So, what would you consider a "significant" number of people and how can you tell whether people are looking for this topic?

Any topic that yields more than 1,000 global monthly searches on the Google Keyword

Planner is a good topic. The Keyword Planner is explained later in this section.

Start making a list of all areas which you like and those which you are an expert on.

As you test each topic, look out for surges of excitement, goose bumps and anything that gives you a thrill. Those are the topics you want to write about.

As you spend time on a topic, and write more and more, you will not only improve your writing, but also build expertise on the topic. It could very well be a boring topic, one that does not excite you. In that case you will be a **miserable expert**. That is not a good place to be. You will feel dragged, jaded and pushed. You will still be an expert, and may well make money, but you will lose out on happiness and satisfaction.

So be very careful and pick a subject that interests you.

For me, I picked cricket strategy, leadership, business process improvement and entrepreneurship as four topics. There were other topics related to technology and quality assurance where I have built sufficient expertise over the years, but I chose to not shortlist those.

Of the four topics that I shortlisted, I picked leadership and self-development for my first blog. This blog has now grown to over one hundred posts and has a decent mailing list.

It helps if your topic appeals to a large section of the population, such as fitness, technology or cooking. But if your interest lies in something obscure such as chalk-drawing on the pavement, then you will have a much smaller audience. Bear in mind that the Internet has infinite power to scale, and Google's constantly evolving algorithms take the competition out of the equation, for the most part.

A topic of interest to a miniscule section of the population will limit the number of people that can read your blog and the volume of earnings that you can derive from it. But if your definition of success is to lay out all your experience and learning out on the web for benefit of posterity, then more power to you. You don't have to worry about reaching a critical mass of readers.

Open a Google AdWords account (it's free) and then use that account to log into Google Keyword Planner.

This is where you can find out how many people are searching for a keyword (such as cough cure, rose trimming) or a permutation of keywords. You can narrow the searches by match type (exact, broad, phrase), by geography and region (not just the U.S., but the whole world) and even supply a list of words that must be excluded from the search results.

Google also gives you the competition level for that keyword (the volume of competition that is bidding for that keyword) and the average cost-per-click.

At this time, you do not want to go too deep into the Keyword Planner results.

All you are doing is ensuring that:

A. The global monthly searches are more than 1,000, or so

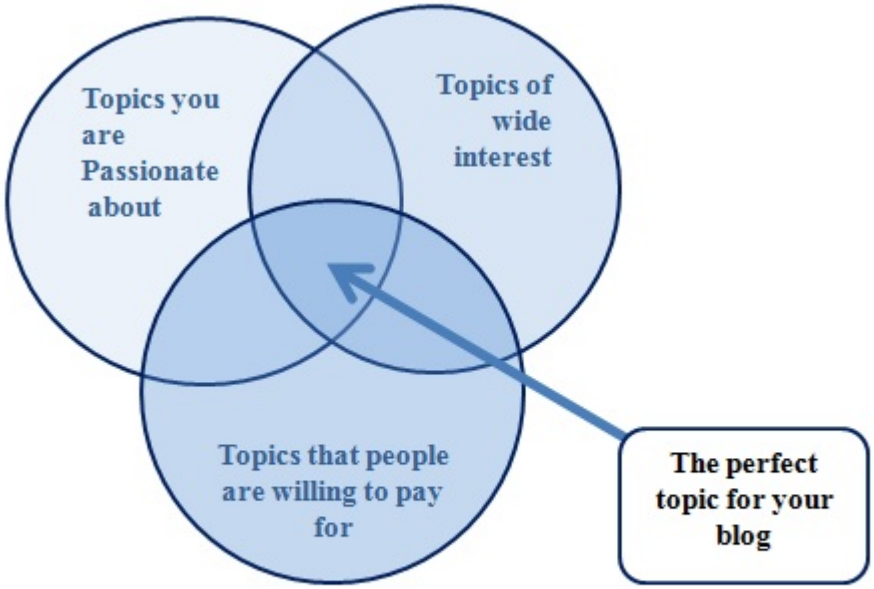
B. The average CPC (cost per click) is not zero (i.e. advertisers are willing to pay for results related to that topic)

C. There is competition. Competition always indicates the presence of a market

That's it. Note these numbers down and go on to the next topic.

You can also plug the keyword into the Google search box. The number of search results returned will give you an idea of competitive sites for that keyword. Look at the first few results and notice if they have a very light pink shade in the background because this indicates advertisements. The column on the right also shows advertisements for that keyword. The presence of advertisements indicates that people will be willing to pay for information or products related to the keyword.

When you have three to five topics, it's time to narrow your choices down and you may want to use the Google results to find the best topic for your blog.



When you are tied between two topics, pick the one that is more interesting and closer to your heart.

Also be aware that once you start a blog on one topic, your thoughts on another, related topic will flow into the blog.

In my blog is on leadership, self-development topics started creeping in. And now I have published a few posts on business strategy (related to communication) as well.

Your blog is your empire—you rule. Anything you feel is genuinely interesting but

somehow related to your topic can be posted.

Brian DeChesare's "Breaking into Wall Street" posts contain interviews with people who have secured positions in investment banking. Brian sells coaching materials on financial modeling.

Sometime in April 2013, Brian published a four-part series on how he quit his career as an investment banker and began his online coaching start-up.

These four posts were written in such a genuine, self-deprecating and straightforward style, that I felt disappointed when he switched back to the default interviews. Each of the four posts was more than 3,000 words, which is at least four times the average post-length. They were OFF-topic too. But I (Brian's reader) was asking for more!

From niche topic to business

INSIGHT: Your blog will become a small business

It helps to think of your blog as a business, right from the beginning.

After all a successful blog will satisfy ALL the conditions of a business, i.e. it will have:

* Assets
* Products
* Customers
* Competition
* Costs and Revenues

As you think about your topic and your capabilities, consider how the capabilities match up to the customer needs. And it is here that the more segmented you can get, the better your chance for success. Finer segmentation of the target customer at this stage helps you build a more unique offering, with significant differentiation.

Consider the following example of a foreign money-transfer service. Generally, people who remit (transfer) foreign currency back to a home country are interested in three major things:

1. Speed of transfer—need the money to reach home as soon as possible (such customers do not care about the charges, but speed is of paramount importance)

2. Exchange rate—need the most favorable exchange rate, i.e. largest amount of converted home currency (such customers may not mind delays, but they want the maximum amount possible)

3. Security of transaction—need a guarantee that their money will reach their home safely (such customers do not care about exchange rates, other fees or delayed delivery)

As a company, your service can be tailored to target ONE of the three parameters and focus on capturing only that segment of customers. If you do this, then you consciously pick one

aspect to excel in and be the BEST in that.

Or you can choose to do ALL three and be AVERAGE.

The foreign currency remittance service xoom.com focused ONLY on speed of remittance. They went from getting money from a bank deposit in the U.S. to the account holder's bank account in India in four hours from the traditional (and accepted) five-day period.

Within a year, xoom.com had a tie-up with HDFC Bank and claim "instant" transfer of money to accounts with HDFC bank in India (and of course, within four hours to all other banks in India). Then they went to instant transfer with HDFC and another bank, while maintaining the four-hour transfer period to other banks in India.

So not only does xoom.com cater to the customer that demands the FASTEST money transfer, they also kept getting better and better and what they do.

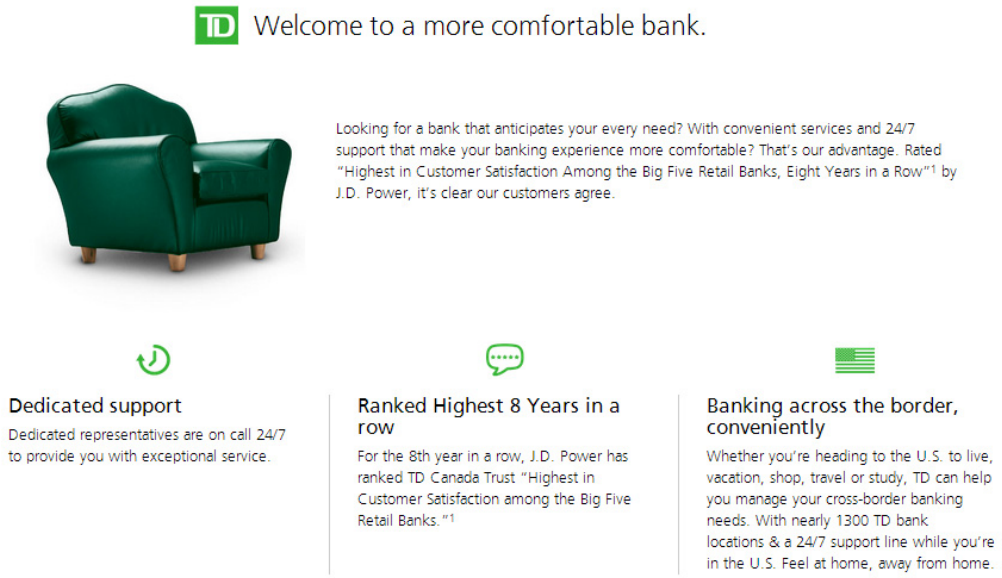
5-days > 4 hours > INSTANT

You cannot get faster than instant!

So xoom.com went from a "better" service to the "best." They have a unique differentiation in the marketplace and their customers would not want to go anywhere else!

Another example is the banking service. TD Bank has consciously chosen to make banking "comfortable." That is, their single-minded focus is on customer service. But their fees and interest rates of deposits are not the most favorable from a customer perspective.

This is because of their singular focus on one parameter. Had they gone to cover all parameters, arguably they would have been average. Notice in the image below how they only talk only about customer service.



(Image source: https://www.tdaeroplan.com/privilege/td-advantage.html)

And what a comfortable looking chair they've put out on their site!

So, too, for your blog, try hard to identify your "target" customer and what service, information or product they would like to see. And tailor your blog around that segment.

5. BLOG SETUP

Setup Components:

As part of setup, there are six basic components that get your site going. They are:

1. Domain name registration
2. Hosting service provider
3. Blog platform
4. Google Analytics
5. Social media sites
6. Mailing list manager

These components are described in the following sections:

1. Domain name registration

A domain is your site's address on the web. It is usually depicted as www.yoursite.com and you must register "your site" by purchasing it from a domain name provider.

You can go to a site like Namecheap.com or GoDaddy.com and find domain names that are available.

Three things to note:

A. You must get a domain name that is your own name. For example, I have rajsubramanyam.com—this ensures that when you are successful and famous, you have your own name. This also prevents someone else's profile from coming up when people search for you by name. Of course, for common names such as Michael Smith, you need to have substantial online presence to show up on page 1 of Google.

B. Make sure you get a dotcom domain. Stay away from anything else. DotOrg is good if you have a non-profit.

C. Get at least two domains. One should be your personal name and one for your site.

Namecheap offers domains starting at $10 a year. So this would be $30 a year if you register three names. For your site, ensure that you have multiple years of registration (this helps in a higher valuation for your site). Sites whose domain name registrations are valid only for a short time give the feeling that the business is not "in it for the longer term" and hence are valued

lower.

If you can come up with a short, catchy name, that is the ideal scenario. Examples are: Google, Yahoo, Tumblr, Roku. Such names do not come with their own search capabilities, but need to be built in. Their value grows with the growth in your business.

Second, a commonly-used alternative is to have your blog name as your domain name. Kayleadershipacademy.com, smartpassiveincome.com, whatismyip.com are some examples of domain names that immediately convey the purpose of the site.

2. Hosting service provider

While the domain provider registered your address, you need a service that will actually "host" your site. Hosting means they will store all your files, web pages, images, documents, plugins and other informational assets. The hosting provider will give you a cpanel (control panel) which is a cockpit for executing most technical functions related to your site such as email setup, email forwards, WordPress setup, databases, user account setup, etc. The cpanel is also a treasure trove of very useful data related to your site traffic (more on this later in the book).

GoDaddy and HostGator are two common hosting providers. I have chosen to go with HostGator because they get the job done at a nominal rate ($15/month per site).

Hosting is nothing but a huge bucket which stores all your files, images, documents, html code, etc.

The hosting service is important because it provides you with all you need to keep a website functioning such as emails, database, blogging platform, backup services, user account maintenance, etc.

Occasionally, you may need to log into your hosting service, by way of cPanel (or control panel) to create new user accounts, email forwarding, download files, etc.

3. Blog platform setup:

The next step in the setup of your blog is to decide on a blog platform.

A blog platform provides a structure or a framework for your site. Additionally, the platform also provides functionality such as multiple pages for your site, navigation (menus), media library to store pictures, pdf documents, etc., connectivity to Google Analytics and other features.

Google's Blogger, Tumblr, Drupal, etc. are platforms on which blogs can be built.

Without a platform, your blog will just be a collection of objects and not usable at all.

I recommend WordPress for the following three main reasons:

A. WordPress provides a pre-configured page for blogs which is constantly upgraded to align with current blogging trends. WordPress also allows you to set up other pages to enable a complete web-site. This is accomplished without writing a single line of code.

B. There are tons of plugins available for WordPress—more than 26,000 - that make

a blogger's life very easy. Plugins will help you achieve a lot of functionality without the need for programming. A plugin is to WordPress what an app is to iPhone!

C. WordPress has a bunch of themes which can help you design your site with provided colors, fonts, templates and a host of other utilities.

WordPress—100% free—is the most popular platform with about 40% of all blogs running on it. Your hosting service can install WordPress for you to work with. You then have to log only into WordPress to manage your blog on a daily basis.

Moreover, WordPress is highly recommended by Google—the God of the Internet. This is in spite of the fact that Google has its own blogging platform—Blogger.com

NOTE: From here on, the book assumes WordPress as the blogging platform.

While most of functionality I cover in this book are standard and expected to be provided by a popular blog platform, it is conceivable that the non-WordPress platform you choose may not have them.

4. Google Analytics:

As soon as your site is set up, Google Analytics MUST be set up.

You need a Gmail account which you can use to access your Google Analytics, and the html code provided by Google Analytics must be inserted into your WordPress general settings.

You want to do this right at the beginning to enable analytics from the first interactions by visitors to your site.

5. Social media sites:

Consider the following:

In one Internet minute, more than 275,000 Facebook logins are registered and six million views take place on this medium.

With almost $2 billion in revenue from advertisements alone, this is a great example where clicks, visits, eyeballs, etc. have high value.

If Facebook were a country it would be the third largest in the world!

For the objective of purely growing your traffic, Facebook provides the biggest opportunity for reaching an insanely high number of people. You just cannot put a price on the power of a Facebook "like" and a "share."

All you need is that one post or picture or video to tug at the heart-strings of a few people.

This is true of some of the top social media whose number of registered users is shown below:

Twitter (200 million), LinkedIn (200 million), YouTube (300 million), Google+ (500 million), Formspring (290 million), Habbo (260 million), Qzone (China) (480 million), Sina Weibo (China) (300 million),

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites)

FACT: Social media marketing works.

Your blog MUST have a social media presence and a **very active one** at that.

However, you have to spend considerable time and effort to have an active presence on social media. This has to be weighed against the benefits you gain from that presence.

I recommend having a presence in about three social media sites but not more than four with the following strategy:

1. First site—general purpose site, mainly text articles and notifications and with the maximum reach. For sheer size and reach you cannot beat Facebook for your first social media site.

2. Second site—this should be Google+. Given Google's search capabilities and reach (more than 80% searches are run on Google, with 2 trillion in 2012 alone), you want to optimize your site for Google. A presence on Google+ should be part of your strategy whilst ensuring that your blog profile on Google is complete, including Google Places (verification for legitimacy of local business) and Google Authorship (verification of your personal credentials and removing anonymity). This ensures that your blog posts show up in search results higher, with full Google backing.

3. Your targeted readership should align with your blog topic. For example, for business, corporate, technology and other topics where career, money, etc. are involved, a site such as LinkedIn would provide great value. If your blog caters to a specific country or language, then you should pick a site with maximum coverage in that geography. A LinkedIn page would provide an online presence on the forum, but having a vibrant and engaging LinkedIn group for your topic would be more valuable.

4. If you can creatively build non-text depictions of your posts such as audio posts, pictures, sketches, images and video, then you must have a presence on graphic social media such as YouTube (for videos), Pinterest (for images and infographics) and Flickr or Instagram (for photographs).

Staying with three social media sites gives you the highest return on time investment. You get the maximum marketing and publicity exposure for the amount of time and effort you spend.

If you go for more sites, then you risk spending more time which could otherwise be deployed for generating high-value content.

With a well-optimized website, valuable content and three strategically chosen social media sites, you should be able to reach most of the traffic that is searching for content provided by your blog.

Just remember that registration on ALL social media sites **does not equal** 100% market capture!

6. Mailing list manager:

In the age of the Internet, you MUST have a mailing list manager to manage your subscribers. If you heard the phrase, "the money is in the list," the list is nothing but the email addresses of your subscribers. This list would contain current and prospective customers.

Consider the following questions:

* What piece of information do Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, and other sites use to communicate with you?
* What do airlines, banks and credit card companies demand to be able to communicate with you?
* How do you get notification from your utility companies, mobile phone service provider and homeowner association?
* Other than the secret questions you set up, what other tool helps you in resetting your password for most accounts?
* When you join a new company, what is the first thing you need to communicate with people in the new place?
* What are all those executives checking on their smartphones?

The single answer to all these questions: **EMAIL**

FACT: Email still remains the key contact information for any person!

Therefore you must build a strategy for compiling your MAILING LIST right from day one.

For this you must have a mailing list manager. Any one of AWeber, Infusionsoft or MailChimp will get the job done.

So what does a mailing list manager accomplish?

A mailing list manager accomplishes the following four activities:

1. Provides effective sign-up forms to invite people to subscribe to your list, then it maintains your list in an organized fashion. This includes knowing which forum people signed up from.

2. Helps you send out a broadcast email to your entire list, even if the number is in the thousands or hundreds of thousands. The mails are sent quickly, and designed to bypass spam filters so that they land in the subscriber's inbox to the extent possible. Without a mailing list manager, it is just not possible to send out emails of that volume.

3. Mailing list managers can also "schedule" your mailings. You can set up and store multiple emails which can then be scheduled to be fired off at specific times on specific days. The more sophisticated services also provide "time warp," a term to indicate the time at the mail recipient's location will be used. For example, if you want to send out a mail at 8 a.m. using time warp, the mail will be sent at 8 a.m. based on the time at the location of the recipient.

You can also schedule a series of auto-responders—i.e. static content in a series of emails designed to strategically drip content to the user in a pre-determined frequency.

4. By way of lists, groups and tags, segment your readers into logical buckets or categories, so that you can send specific email messages to a selected bunch of readers.

In addition to the above, mailing list managers provide excellent information for data analytics, based on actual user behavior. Such data can be tied back to a named person in your list!

We cover more of data analytics capabilities of mailing list managers in Chapter 9.

Gradually as you become an expert blogger, you will mostly interact with your mailing list manager, since this tool helps you directly engage your customers by email.

ADVANCED SET UP:

To begin with, your blog needs to have a hosting provider, blog platform, social media and a mailing list manager set up.

As your blog grows, you will need other components set up, such as:

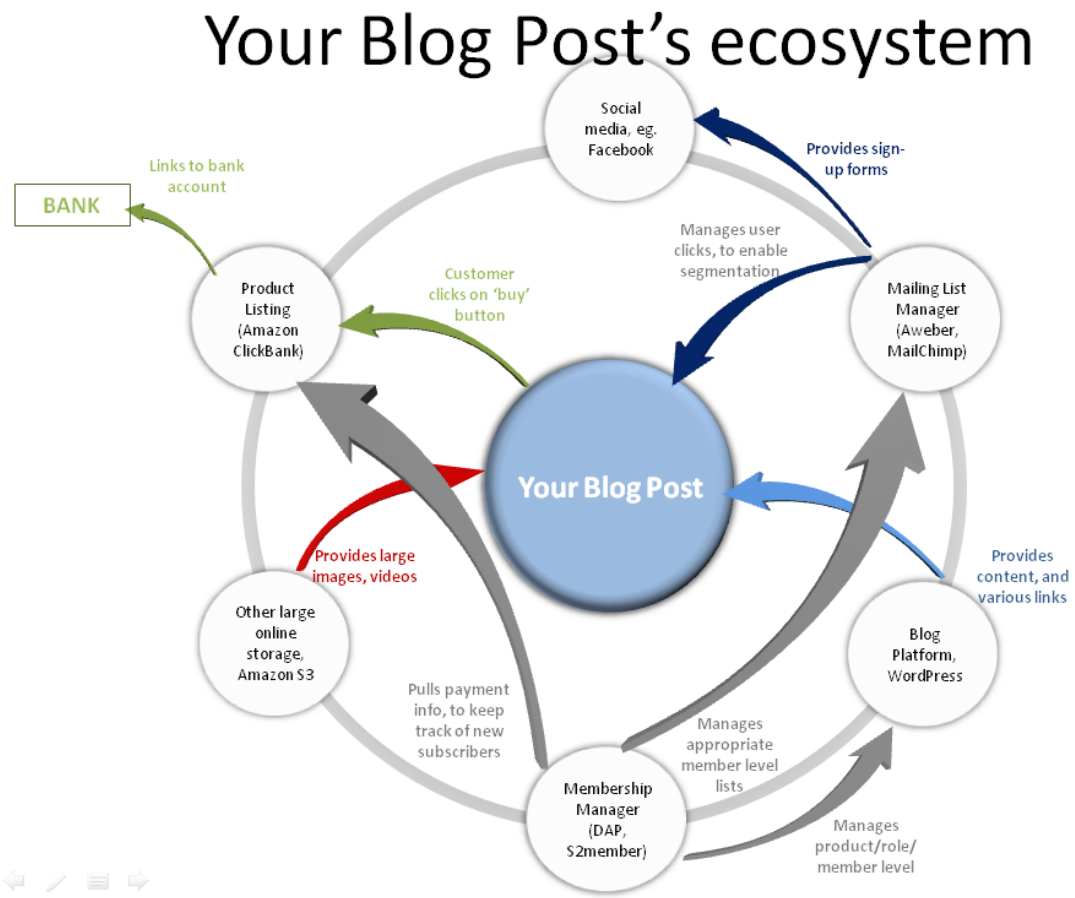
1. Large file online storage: Amazon or other large cloud-based storage systems should be set up and connected to your WordPress, so that large files such as videos and high-resolution images can be stored there.

This ensures that your site performance (load speeds) are not impacted adversely by these large-size files.

2. As you build products, you will have to find appropriate listing managers for your products. ClickBank (for informational products), Amazon (for almost anything), iTunes, etc. These listings should then be connected to your WordPress (for delivery of the product, if informational) or your order-booking system and to your bank account or PayPal account (for receipt of payment).

3. If you choose to have a membership type of blog, then you need a membership manager (such as S2Member, WishList member or Digital Access Pass (DAP)) to manage various membership levels and the delivery of "member-only" assets.

The following image shows how the various components are inter-related:



6. BLOGSITE LAYOUT

So what exactly is a website comprised of and how does WordPress help?

A website has the following components:

A. Address: provided by your domain name registration

B. Structure and layout: provided by the theme you select for your site

C. Design (colors, look/feel, implicit messaging): to be thought out and implemented for your website

D. Content: your core, critical, transactional activity for your blog

E. Static links (internal menu pages, social media): these come with the design of the site and choices that you make for your blog

F. Dynamic links (links to other posts and external sites): in each post you have the ability to provide instant hyperlinks to related sites to make it easy for your reader for more detailed reading, to visit other sites

G. Forms to get information from users: part of the design of your site, to elicit information from users (such as comments, messages, survey, etc.)

SITE DESIGN - Pick a theme for your site:

As you determine how your website should look, you have two options:

1. Get it custom-programmed (you will need an html and css programmer for this)
2. Get one of the many WordPress themes available that make it easy to "plug and play"

The first option is for advanced sites. It requires time and money and you need to know your requirements upfront before you engage a programmer.

In this book we will cover the second option, with WordPress as the blog platform.

The best way to decide on a theme is to visit a number of sites on the Internet.

When you come across a site that looks attractive and you'd like your site to have a similar look and structure, note down the website.

Then input the website name into http://www.wpthemedetector.com/ and you will get the name of the WordPress theme.

If the site does not run on WordPress, or has a custom programmed theme, then the result will state that.

Be sure to run the tool on a number of sites related to your topic. That way, if there is a common theme in use, you will get to know that.

You can then make a conscious decision to either join the herd (use the same theme) or be

different.

Site Setup:

A WordPress site should generally have the following components:

* Pages (Home, About Us, Blog Posts, Products/Services, Privacy Policy, Terms of Use, Testimonials)
* Menu—for easy navigation
* Site map—to enable search engines understand the layout of your site. This is important for "on-site SEO" and must be taken care of at the outset
* Plugins—tools to facilitate commonly-performed activities
* Connection buttons—so that reader gets "feeds" whenever you update or put out new content
* Sharing buttons—make it easier for your readers to email or share your site with their friends on social media
* Integration with mailing list manager—to help you display a sign-up form to build your list

Your blog/blog site/website is actually a collection of web pages and several components from the above list would be found on each page.

The following pages are required for a website:

* Home
* Products/Services
* About Us
* Testimonials
* Contact
* Privacy Policy
* Terms of Use
* Blog Posts

NOTE: Writing the content for the above pages is a core activity, something that you should carefully write or review. You are liable for the accuracy of this content.

Home:

A "Home" page serves the following purposes:

A. It is a landing page for most visitors who find it through search results

B. It sets the "theme" and the "brand" of your site

C. It is a place where you can announce upcoming events, any accomplishments, winners of any contests you've run or other miscellaneous things for which you do not have dedicated pages

D. It could also be a redirect for pages not found on your site (you could also set

your blog page to receive those visitors)

E. It can also be used as a sales page

A home page should be attractive, have catchy content and be able to make a very good first impression on the chance visitor. If you have good SEO on your home page, you will have many chance visitors. To make your home page really effective, here are some tips:

I. Make the purpose or objective of your site well-known right at the beginning of the message on your home page (i.e. above the fold). Don't leave the reader to "guess" what the site could be about. This could also be your domain name

II. Use appropriate colors to reflect the "brand" of your site (more on branding later in this chapter)

III. Use white space appropriately. Use colors minimally, no more than three font sizes and generally the same font style

IV. Some sites use their home page as the sales page as well. They provide the whole value proposition, including quantification of benefits and provide a "buy now" button when the reader scrolls down. Use your best judgment on whether this will be effective for your site

V. List a few testimonials—your best ones—right on the home page. Anything else that can instill trust in the reader must be displayed on the home page.

VI. If you have a product or want to get people to give you their email, you can place that "call to action" very prominently on your homepage for maximum effectiveness

VII. Don't clutter the page with too much text, images or video. This is to ensure that the page has a fast response time (i.e. it loads faster when someone accesses it over the Internet)

Products/Services:

A "Products/Services" page provides details on your product.

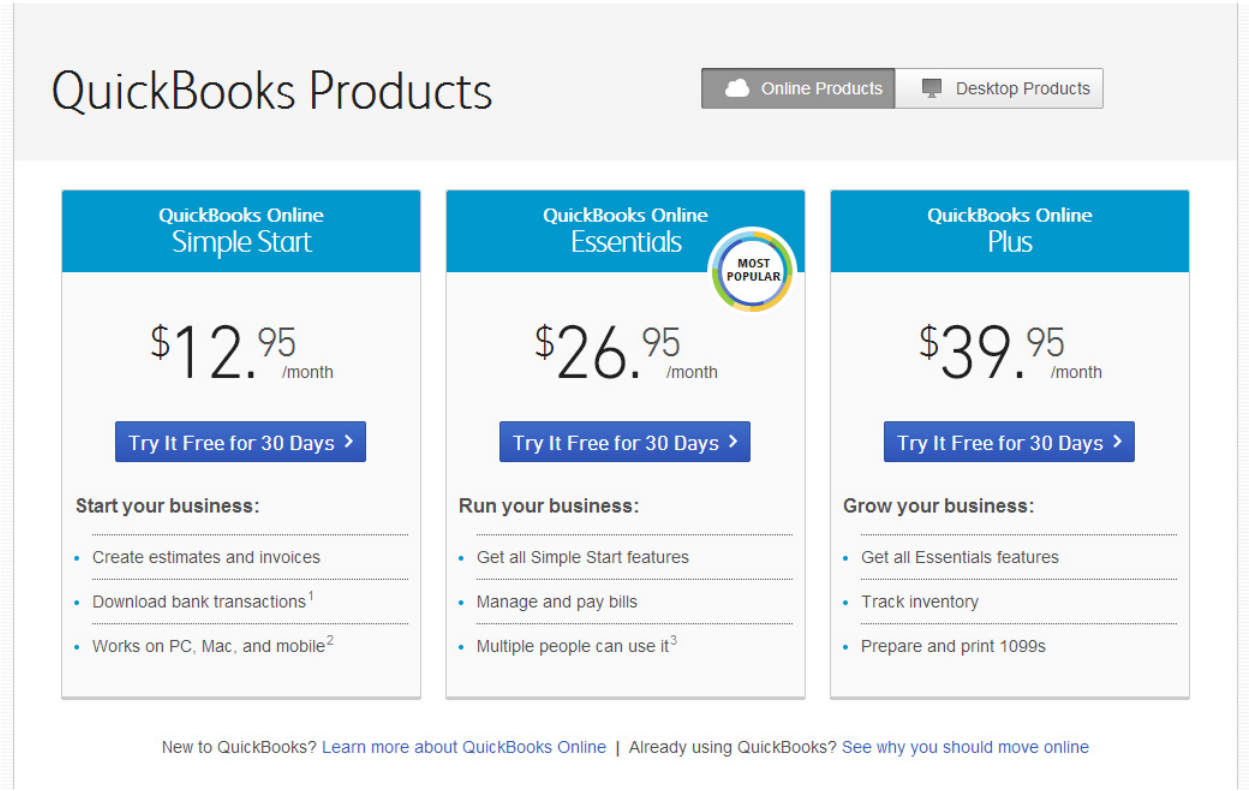
This could very well be the selling page for the product.

Based on the nature of your product and how it fits in with the product suite, you may have additional product pages, such as one for comparing similar offerings.

For example, if you have a free version, a basic offering and a premium offering, then you may want to have an additional page which "compares" all three versions. The main product page and the additional product page can BOTH contain "buy" buttons.

A good example of a product comparison page is the following image taken from the site

http://quickbooks.intuit.com/products/



The product page should contain some or all of the following:

A. Name and version of the product, including logo.

B. Unique selling proposition, or the value that the product provides or the pain the product solves. This is best achieved by a short, impactful video of two minutes or less.

C. A brief bulleted listing of the product features. There is no need to explain each feature in detail on this page. In the QuickBooks image above, note the "most recommended" note for the product in the center. This recommendation has a very positive psychological effect on the buyer. The company is showing thoughtfulness in not recommending the highest-priced product variation.

D. User testimonials. Use the best testimonials and reviews about the product on this page. Photographs of testimonial providers, headshot images or video testimonials provide greater impact. Limit testimonials on this page to five.

E. Quantification of benefits. If you can come up with a comparison of the savings that your product can generate or if you can quantify the main benefits of your product, put it on this page. For this purpose, make sure you prominently highlight the primary problem that your product will solve for the customer. You should also be careful not to "give away" too many features of your product on this page. You can be sure your competition is also carefully scrutinizing your product pages and trying to analyze your business model.

F. Any impactful statements, such as why the product is better than the nearest competitor product in the market place should also be stated on the page.

G. Any closing statements and of course, the "buy" button.

About Us:

Generally, the 'About Us' page is the page most new visitors go to after they land on your site. This is the page that tells the reader about you, the person behind the site. It gives you the best chance to showcase your personality, your accomplishments, your experience, your interests and anything about you that can help build trust in your reader.

Respect the intelligence of the visitor enough to know that he or she may also have absorbed other information about you from other sources on the Internet (such as your LinkedIn profile, social media and other sites that mention you). It's important to make sure there isn't any contradictory information presented. Less is more, so show yourself in the best light. Put up a picture so that people can associate your name with a face.

A video statement will add to the effectiveness of the page.

Testimonials:

The "Testimonial" page is a great page to build further "proof" from third-parties about your expertise. As a visitor I also like to go over the testimonials that are available on a site I am interested in subscribing to. Get an assortment of testimonials, text, quotes about you, audio and video statements.

TIP: Use the scrolling testimonial plugin to showcase testimonials on the side-bar of your blog page.

Contact us:

The "Contact Us" page is another important page that lets readers contact you. This is also a great source for ideas, questions and more business for your site. It is in your best interest to make yourself reachable.

Some sites list a number of contact emails such as: sales@yoursite.com,

info@yoursite.com, bizdev@yoursite.com, questions@yoursite.com, etc.

Use this if you wish to convey a large corporate setup. A simple will also get the job done. Or you can put up a contact form using free WordPress plugins available.

I have chosen to use a contact form using the free Laborator plugin. So far I have had a few emails and nothing overly voluminous has filled my contact inbox yet.

TIP: You can also use a contact form to get information from people that send you messages.

Ensure that any contact form contains a CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart) code to prevent spam mails from overloading your mailbox.

Privacy Policy:

As the casual visitor gets exposed to your site, she may consider voluntarily divulging some personal information such as email address and other contact information.

Your privacy policy addresses how you manage that information.

Needless to add, this is the place where you build trust with your potential or actual members.

People don't want to be scammed and their contact information shared and sold without their permission. This page is your opportunity to declare your site policy upfront.

I have seen privacy policies as brief as two paragraphs, and as lengthy as fifteen paragraphs.

As you consider the policy, a few things that you must state are as follows:

A. What the potential member can expect. Statements such as, "We will never share or sell your contact information" help breed trust.

B. If your site has information that is not for the younger audiences, then a clear statement to that effect must be noted.

C. If you expect to periodically send out emails, whether educational or marketing related, then state that here as well.

D. Some sites may have other partners that combine to provide a certain type of service. For such businesses, the contact information must be shared with the partners to provide the service. This must be disclosed in the policy page. If the partners are bound contractually to NOT further share the information, then state that on the policy page as well.

NOTE: You must not violate any of the terms that you have stated in the privacy policy page ANYTIME.

TIP: Once you cover the mandatory requirements relating to privacy, less is more.

The more details you provide, the more you restrict yourself.

Make sure you periodically review your privacy policy and all your team members and service providers are aware of and follow the policy as well.

Terms of Use:

While a privacy policy states how you will interact with the member and their information, the "Terms of Use" page states how the member should interact with your site and materials.

Any restriction or permission on sharing of your blog's content, or expected customer behavior on your site forum can be listed here.

Blog-Posts:

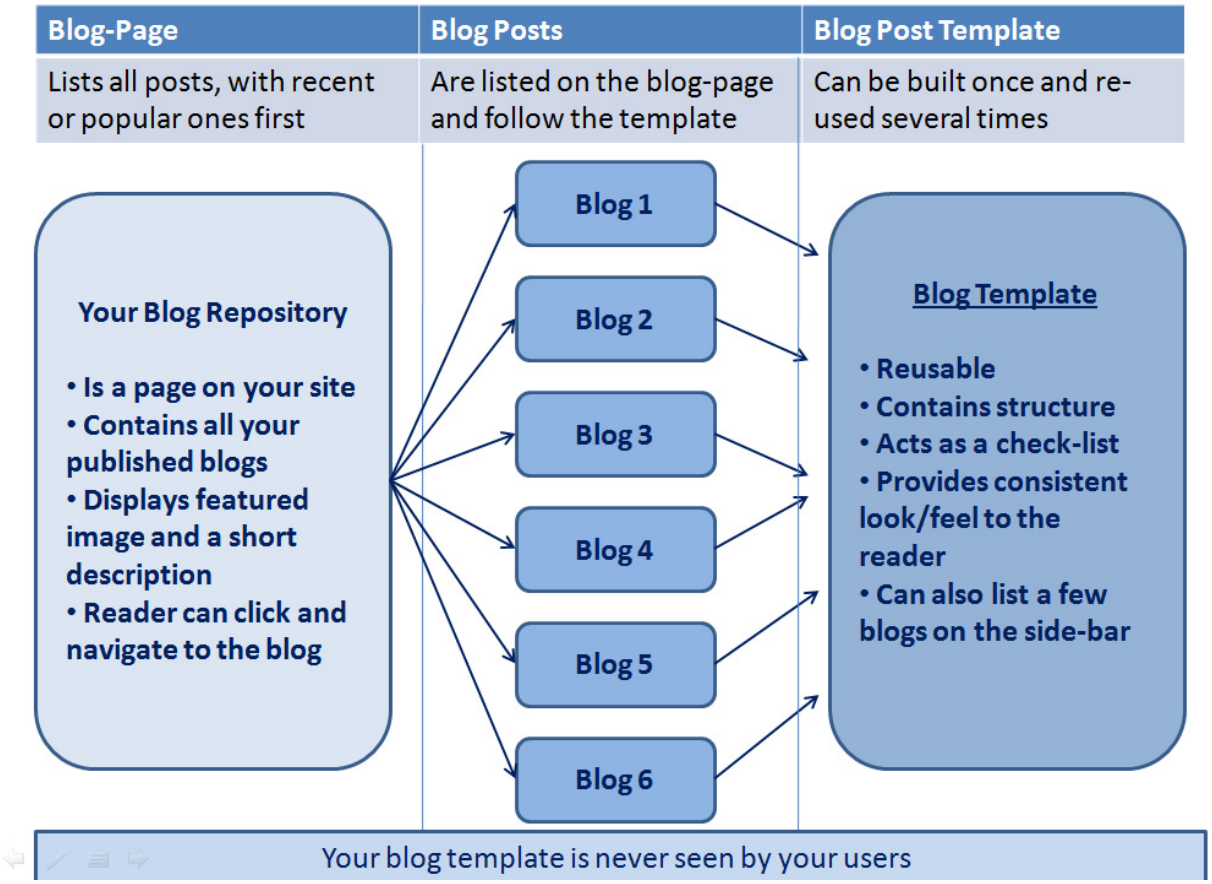
There are three pages required for successful posting of blog posts.

1. A blog post page. This is a page on your site where all the published posts are listed. This page is normally seen on the menu along with Home, About Us, Products, etc. For each post, the image and short description can be made visible so that the interested reader can click and then go on to the post to read further.

2. The blog post. This is the actual published post. The reader will see the post (generally) in the broader column and then other interesting information in the other (narrower) column. Such interesting information could be recent posts, popular posts, social media sharing/connecting buttons, a signup form, recent events announcement, product snippet or even advertisements.

3. A blog template. This is the template that you fill in when you are writing your post. Usually this is provided by WordPress, but you can modify the look, feel and functionality by introducing various plugins. In this "template" you will not only write the post, but also embed hyperlinks (to your other posts, or to external sites), add images or videos, indicate categories, set a featured image (which will show up on the blog posts page), input values for on-page SEO and even show related posts.

Your readers will never see this but they will see every post that you create using this template.



You need to pay special attention to your blog page.

After all, this is the transactional page where you will publish most of your work and this is the page where all your readers will spend most of their time.

While the title, font, colors, logo, etc. are derived from the main site, this page will have a different layout.

You must also consider the following:

A. Make it easy for people to "connect" with your blog site

B. Make it easy for your readers to "share" a blog post with their friends or email it quickly

C. Readers must be able to see your other posts—they could be the most recent ones, the most popular or the ones related to this post. The idea is to keep the reader engaged on your site. As a reader keeps clicking on links on your site, Google notices these activities. When clicking, a reader can either go to another site or go to another page/post on your site. This makes it easy for them to navigate to other posts on your site and spend more time on your site, which is also noticed by Google. This

helps improve your site authority in Google indexes

D. Have a comments section below the post

E. Put up a sign-up form on your site

F. Always indicate sources for images or other external information or attribution to properly account for intellectual property ownership

Connection buttons:

Connection buttons allow your readers to pick and choose the forum where they get alerted whenever you put out a new post. Connection grew in importance with the advent of social media. Anytime someone connects with or starts following your blog, their friends are alerted and get a notification about this connection. People to people connections and people to website connections all spawn messages.

WordPress plugins allow you to make it very easy for your users to connect with or follow your blog.

This is the power of social media and you want to enable this to the fullest possible extent.

FACT: Marketing is incomplete without leveraging social media.

An RSS feed is a non-social media type of connection, which allows new posts to "feed" the reader's mail-box, thus alerting them to activity on your blog.

TIP: You must have connection buttons on every page on your site.

Sharing buttons:

In the age of social media, as a blogger you want to maximize its power to market your blog and to publicize the good posts that you publish so consistently.

You want to make it easy for people to share. All they should have to do is "click a button."

(Image source: http://www.graphicsfuel.com/2013/03/popular-social-media-icons-psd-png/)

On a blog post, when a reader clicks this button, they instantly share it with their friends and connections on that social media (of course they need to be logged in otherwise they will be prompted to do so).

All you need is one post or video to go viral.

☞

TIP: Social media along with SEO is very powerful and contributes immensely to the scale of the Internet.

Comments:

Comments are a great way for a blogger to interact with readers. In a healthy, vibrant blog, comments work as follows:

* Blogger puts out an interesting post and invites comments (call to action)
* Readers begin to comment on the post
* Blogger responds to comments (some of them) and builds an interaction
* Other readers chip in and some readers address other readers' comments, without blogger's intervention—**this is the most desirable state your blog can reach**

But it cuts both ways.

Comments can be a huge drain on the blogger's time. Before you know it, as a blogger, you are inundated with comments (especially for the more popular topics, and with a large reader base).

Unlike posts, you cannot schedule responses to comments ahead of time. This has to be done in real-time. And when you are not able to get to a comment or two, the readers perceive it as lack of attention or even disrespect.

Your blog image and readership could get affected adversely.

There are two ways to handle this:

1. Limit the period during which you can allow comments. There are WordPress plugins that allow a limitation period—say 30 days—after which new comments won't be allowed.

2. Don't invite comments at all. While this may seem contrary to accepted principles, and a bit cocky on the part of the blogger, this can liberate the blogger from huge time commitments. Do make the contact form or an avenue to submit questions available and communicate that to your members.

CAUTION: Comments can demand a huge chunk of your time which can otherwise be utilized to greater value elsewhere.

Side-bar links to earlier posts:

Most themes allow for setting up a side-bar in the blog-template page. Once set up, this will be static for ALL blogs that you post. Usually a side-bar contains connect buttons, upcoming event announcement and links to older posts (most read, most commented, most recent, etc.). Once you decide on putting up advertisements on your site, this is another area where you can put up ads.

Sign-up form:

We will discuss various types of sign-up forms in detail when we talk about the mailing list manager. For now, it is sufficient to note that a sign-up form is a MUST on your site. This is an easy and proven way to start building your mailing list.

Typically the form contains a short message, a blank field for the reader to input an email address, and a submit button. You can add a short footer message, if needed. Depending on how you set up the form, you may authenticate an email address by sending the reader another link via email to click and confirm their email—this is called "double opt-in"). Some list managers such as InfusionSoft force double-optin to subscribe members to your list and do not allow any other way.

Once the reader confirms the email address, boom, you now have a new subscriber in your mailing list. This person has consented to the terms of use on your site. So, legally you can now send them emails, the content of which should conform to your privacy policy.

Plugins:

When you install WordPress, we recommend that you also install the following plug-ins:

1. Akismet—anti-spam
2. Contact form DB—puts up a contact form on your site
3. CurationSoft—for content curation for your posts
4. DISQUS comments—to managed comments on your posts
5. Feedburner email subscription—provide RSS feed to your subscribers

6. Google xml sitemaps—to set up sitemaps on your site
7. Microkid's related posts—to display related posts on your blog
8. Pretty Link—shortening/customizing your links and tracking downloads
9. Shareaholic—social media share buttons
10 WordPress SEO by Yoast—SEO plug-in for WordPress

With more than 26,000 plugins available, you can find a plugin for almost anything including controlling spam, managing comments, search engine optimization, modifying links, sharing buttons, etc.

Start thinking BRAND from the get-go:

Have you wondered why people pay hundreds of dollars for a Coach leather bag, when you can buy a similar one without the name for a lot less?

The difference is in the Coach **BRAND.**

Once you have a solid brand, you can charge high prices. People will seek out your brand because it will implicitly guarantee certain things to them.

Branding is being known for something in the mind of your reader. It could be trust, quality, dependability or other desirable aspect of your service, product or company. Over a period of time, with consistent look/feel of your site, being exposed to consistently high-value information on a topic of their interest, your customers will come to "know" your personality and your blog.

A solid brand adds huge value to your products and can enable you to charge premium prices.

Right from the outset, consider the brand your blog will stand for.

While gradually putting out high-value content on a consistent basis is mandatory, there are a few **structural components** to branding as well.

You must do the following to begin branding, even in the set up phase:

1. Choose up to three colors for your blog. Blue/grey/black is one combination, with green/yellow/black or blue/yellow/black as other possible combinations.

2. Choose no more than two fonts for all information on your site. Exceptions would be text that is in the form of an image (such as a Google search result image) where you cannot change the font lest you distort the information. You can use bold, italics or underline for emphasis.

3. Restrict the text to three font sizes. Ensure consistent application for each of the size. If your blog is geared toward senior citizens, then you should use 12 or 14 font as the minimum for your text.

4. Have a logo that your readers can associate with your blog.

5. Build a tagline for your blog. The tagline is just a line and should convey in ten words or less the core essence of your blog. Apple's "1,000 songs in your pocket" summed up the iPod and is a great example of a highly-effective message in five words. Blog Success, has "complete solutions for the serious blogger" as its tag line.

6. Now you need a short description. This can be up to a paragraph. Between three and five sentences long, this paragraph must not only give an idea of the topic of your blog, the value proposition must also be clearly conveyed.

7. As you design the structure and layout of your site, do also pay attention to the "white spaces." Less clutter or more clutter is also a component of branding and your blog topic can give you an idea of how much white space to leave around content and images. You must ensure that consistency is maintained.

For example, banking sites have less clutter and more white space. They also use light colors such as light blue, grey and light green. Music and gaming sites, on the other hand, have a more "busy" appearance and darker colors, sometimes even dark backgrounds.

So what do you do with all the above brand components?

The answer is **consistency of application**.

On all your social media sites, your products, your blog-site, your advertisements, business cards, emails, Google and other profiles, you must ensure that these components are consistently visible with the same look and feel.

TIP: Branding is all about consistency of look, feel and trust.

FACT: Branding makes businesses (and blogs) more valuable.

7. GROW CONTENT

Content Writing:

Content is the life-blood for any blog.

As a blogger, you are the Chief Content Generation Officer. **You must not outsource this work.** Sure, you can have someone write out the draft for you, or you can have someone proof-read, edit and even publish the work.

But the idea and the content must be your own.

Otherwise the uniqueness will be lost. Your readers will know in an instant when someone else's ideas and messages start flowing from your site.

As an exception, you can invite guest writers to write and you can also publish interviews with experts on your blog topic.

But the expertise, insights and control over your blog has to be your core activity—the most critical one that only you must direct and perform.

Your blog post must exhibit the following properties:

* Showcase your unique mindset on the topic through your ideas, comments, recommendation, judgment and opinion

* Be interesting to read, add value and provide something that the reader had never thought of before

* Be (generally) timeless; consider whether the post would be relevant in five years

* Be concise and generally complete; in some cases you can have a Part 2 or a multiple-post publication

* Be no less than 300 words per post and generally no more than 1,000 words

These are general guidelines.

Let's break down the whole content-generation process.

I recommend deploying a four-step process for content-generation and publication.

1. Develop content types—stories, techniques, news, curated articles, interviews, reviews, surveys

2. Start off writing posts in bullet-form for initial drafts—have four or more posts

always available in the pipeline

3. Create a publishing schedule

4. Stock up on images, sketches, words (Wordle), photos, online news or post links, infographics

Publishing the final post to WordPress is the logical next step and we will cover this in a later sub-section in this chapter.

1. Content Types:

Since content is the life-blood of your blog, you will need to publish interesting posts on a regular basis. Also, in order to keep your blog interesting, you need a variety of content types—i.e. present content in different formats.

The following are some of the content types that have been successful on my blog:

A. Stories

Stories help to build a personal bond between your reader and you.

Any lessons you have learned from your experience on the topic can be converted into a story post. People love stories, and when a story is related to a topic and has your passion, your frustration and challenges woven into it, the story becomes very interesting to read. Finally, when you reveal how you overcame a challenge, or even when you failed, the lesson stays with the reader.

Most of all, if you can show the reader how they can possibly avoid a pitfall you encountered, your story becomes invaluable. My story of how I turned around a small bank where I worked for about a year generated very interesting feedback.

You cannot go wrong with stories.

B. Techniques

Any "how to" post can be converted into a technique. People are always looking for ways to accomplish things. Once they know how to do something, they are always looking for ways to do it faster, cheaper and more efficiently.

A technique type of blog post can help readers accomplish certain tasks. You can supplement a technique type blog post with a worksheet, image, questionnaire or other tools.

For my leadership blog, I have provided my readers with a technique on how they can start their self-development initiative. The tool I provided was a blank worksheet for them with tips on how to fill it out. I then supplemented the post with my own blog development worksheet filled out.

C. News

In this type of content, you can pull out happenings around the world in the topic of interest. Such content is more relevant to technology, politics and other fast-moving topics.

Consider that such a content type will not be "timeless," i.e. anyone visiting your site in six months may not find this relevant. Therefore, instead of adding a number of posts for "news" related to your topic, consider having news as a page on your site where you periodically (frequently) "replace" the content. Not all topics lend themselves to a "news" type of blog.

D. Review

People are always looking for reviews from sources they trust. Whether it's a book, a new gadget or software, reviews always generate interest.

Consider all the merchandise, software, training, subscriptions, etc. that your readers can buy (in connection with your blog topic, of course) and start writing reviews on those.

Your review will be meaningful only if you can talk from personal experience. Therefore, you must ensure you have experienced the product (bought the book, attended the training, watched the movie, etc.).

For non-products such as a game, a leader's performance, political action, stock performance, it is your analysis and then a judgment or conclusion which is valuable. In such cases, your expertise comes to the forefront.

For my blog, I analyzed and provided a review of Microsoft's new CEO Satya Nadella's first letter to his employees. I was able to analyze this based on my expertise in the topic and also leaned on the many principles and techniques that I had previously published posts on.

E. Interviews

One of the easier ways to start off with a series of posts is to borrow someone else's credibility and interview a few experts.

For my blog, since the topic was leadership and self-development, I shortlisted a few friends who were successful in their own right.

I crafted about 10 to 12 questions and picked their brains using those questions. One of them was a VP, one was a CEO of a non-profit organization, one was a radiologist and a published author and another was a student prodigy.

Each one was able to provide a different perspective, a different insight and a whole new dimension to the same question.

You must ensure that at least one insight is available for each interview.

The interview technique is very well-suited to some blogs. For the general blog topic you must mix it well with the other content types.

Brian DeChesare's site, "Breaking Into Wall Street," uses mostly interviews for blog sites. Since the blog is a training portal on how to attain coveted investment banking positions all over the world, nearly five out of six posts feature an interview with someone who managed to join an investment bank after overcoming a challenge.

Brian structures the interviews, provides his commentary and produces unique insights in each interview. This format helps him (and his blog) bring all types of challenges to the reader, and at the same, time provide solutions that actually worked from the people who overcame those challenges.

Additionally, interviews provide the following three side-benefits:

* They help with spreading the word—you can bet that the interviewee is sharing the post with her friends (when you are able to disclose the interviewee's identity)

* There is an implicit testimonial added to your blog when the "achievers" whose interviews you published share those interviews with their own contacts

* Your list of contacts grows and this, over time, can result in other business leads

F. Curated Articles

Content curation is the process by which you **gather** a bunch of **carefully-selected** articles on a **specific topic**, weave a story around these articles, provide your insight/judgment/recommendation, etc. and publish it to a paper or your blog.

As you curate content, you are providing the following services to your reader:

* Helping them get a sense of diverse perspectives from different people on the topic

* Assembling the information in one place so they don't have to scour the web for information

* Filtering the articles so that only the most relevant, interesting and high-value articles are selected for curation—your reader does not have to go through the irrelevant and low-value articles

* Putting your own spin on the topic. Your spin, your story and your insights on the topic become the main focus. The articles you select simply confirm/refute any hypothesis you may have on the topic.

For the author of the original post that you are curating, the following benefits

accrue:

* Their post is now hand-picked and posted on an authority site—this helps them with higher search result rankings

* They get higher viewership (your readers now read their article) and this is more publicity and marketing for their blog

* You, as an authority blogger, become a contact for them

For your blog, you benefit from the following:

* A different type of content publishing that gives you more ideas for your posts

* Better value to your readers increases engagement with your blog

* Established relationship with experts in your focused topic

* Marketability for your blog, since the expert authors whose articles you curated are now sharing your post with their followers

Thus, curation creates a **win-win** situation.
It is hard to think of any other content type more powerful than curation.

TIP: Curation, without your insights, is aggregation—mechanical and of low(er) value.

CAUTION: Curating and publishing, without proper attribution of credit back to the author, is plagiarism. PLAGIARISM = ILLEGAL (neither recommended nor condoned)

G. Survey

Another great way to generate content ideas is to run a survey among your readers. Of course, you cannot run a survey on day one. You need to build a readership with your readers which will help you get at least 50-100 responses to your survey.

A survey, depending on what you use it for, should be run at very infrequent intervals.

Use Google Forms or Survey Monkey to create surveys and send them out to your readership. A survey is a great way to stay in touch with your readers, ask for suggestions to make your blog better, confirm or refute any hypothesis you may have and seek other topics which your readers would like you to focus on.

Feel free to throw in one or two open-ended questions. You will be surprised at the responses you get. The responses will give you more fuel to add a few more blog

posts.

When I sent out a survey in August 2013, for example, I received sufficient material for my next few posts. I built two additional posts simply by analyzing the responses and publishing the results. You can look for counter-intuitive insights from the survey, or simply to validate any hypotheses you had. Either way, readers get interested in seeing analyses of real data.

Then, surprisingly, I found I was able to easily build at least five blog posts by covering the three top strengths and two top weaknesses of leaders (as indicated by the survey). These posts were more than 700 words each.

Depending on your topic, the frequency of using a survey may vary. For my readership, I have decided to stick with one survey a year.

The ability to write seven posts with one survey is not a bad trade-off.

To make your survey successful, keep the following things in mind:

* Use them sparingly and don't overload the questions
* Use "other" to elicit subjective information from your responders
* Use a sophisticated survey tool such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey
* Publicize the survey on your social media, mailing list and your own website
* Offer prizes to elicit more responses

TIP: Users respond well to "anonymous" surveys. However, if you want to reward the responders (i.e. if you have announced prizes) make sure you include a field for them to insert their email id to contact the winners.

2.Effectively writing a post:

The best way to begin writing content is to jot down a list of bullet points. These bullets could also become your sub-headers or lists.

Play with the bullet points, move the points around until you get a good idea of how the post will be structured.

Practice writing posts in a list format. It becomes easy for the user to scan the lists and quickly understand what the post is about. In the digital age of extremely low attention spans, people skim through a post and then sub-consciously make a decision whether to read it completely. A list-type blog stands a better chance of being read.

Your objective is to have a complete post, focusing on one aspect of your topic. Work with this topic and finalize your focus keyword (from SEO perspective).

For a lengthier post, you can go to 10 to 12 bullets, expecting to write about six to eight lines per bullet. This length can be accommodated in one blog post.

Even for your stories, begin with the bulleted list and then you can put the meat around the

bones and start filling up the post.

Never try to finesse a post when you first start writing. The following three-step process helps me write quite effectively:

1. List out the bullets that form the post. Fine-tune the bullets and reorder them to best fit the story that you want the post to be about.

2. Slowly start writing out the content for each bullet point. Again, do not fine-tune the grammar, sentence, voice or length at this time. Your focus here is to put the content down on paper and complete the draft post. Then take a break.

3. Come back to the post after some time. The break could be an hour or two, or even a couple of days. The break will help you think over the post, give you more tips to add value to the post and then you will be ready to finish the post. Then perform grammar and spell check, check for repeated, redundant words and sentences and check for long sentences, ambiguity and lack of clarity (did you count the number of "ands" in the previous sentence?)

As you review your posts, keep looking for places where you can showcase your expertise. This must come out in the form of recommendations and sound advice. Also voice your opinion where needed and display sound judgment.

Do not be wavering, hedging or non-committal. Take a stand if needed.

TIP: Your blog must depict you as an AUTHORITY on your selected topic.

A reader comes to your site for information, help and expert advice.

Just imagine if the lawyer whose service you were seeking were to give you three different options and not tell you which one to pick. Would you go with him, or would you go with another lawyer who, by giving you a decisive answer confidently made a single recommendation based on expert judgment?

Decisive writing showcases your confidence and expertise and builds trust (sometimes awe) in your readers. The awe is something that you must always aim for!

Writing Style:

FACT: Your writing style is guaranteed to evolve.

As you write more and more posts, you will notice a difference. You will be able to write faster, settle into a certain tone and style, know the importance of focus keywords, titles, and sub-headers and know how to complete a post.

TIP: Be conscious of your writing efficiency.

Writing Efficiency

As your writing evolves, you must pay attention to your writing efficiency.

EFFICIENCY = VOLUME + QUALITY

Volume is the amount of writing you do. And blog quality is the tone, style, finessing and generally getting the work ready for publishing.

Bestselling author and blogger Chris Guillebeau has set a metric for writing. He suggests a target of 300,000 words a year. That is, an average of 1,000 words a day, for about 300 days in a year.

When you start out, the 300,000 number may seem unreachable. But when you consider the 1000 words a day, it looks quite achievable.

And then consider all the emails, the Facebook posts, the white papers, the notes that you take, the feedback you provide and the requirements or design document that you generate. Surely they all add up to more than 1,000 words a day.

Now when you start writing your blog posts, here is a strategy to follow, to deliberately build up speed and volume of writing:

1. Turn on the "word count" in the status bar in Microsoft Word. You can do this by right-clicking the status bar at the bottom. In MS-Office 2003 (this is the bar which has the page count on the left and the zoom slider on the right, at the bottom of the screen). Then click on "word count" so that the check-mark is seen. After that, MS-Word will count the words in your document. You can also select a certain paragraph or bunch of text and see the word count for that selection.

   As you write more and more, you will slowly not need to keep checking the counter, but in the beginning it will give you a good idea of your output rate.

2. Do NOT finesse your first few drafts. As you start on a new post or topic, your first exercise is simply to get as much text on an empty screen as possible. Don't worry about grammar, paragraphs, shortening sentences, etc. Simply get the story or the idea down on paper in as MANY words as possible.

3. Sometimes, I find it easier to jot down a few bullet points and then elaborate on each of those. Other times, I start off with an opening and a conclusion and then fill in the middle part. Depending on the kind of post or article you are writing, you will settle into a certain framework. As you write more and more, this will come naturally.

4. Have multiple documents in progress at one time. Do not feel that you have to complete one post/article, before you can begin the other. At a given time, you can

have more than three or four topics in progress. That way, when your publishing deadline looms, you can pick up the one that is most ready, finalize it and publish.

5. Do NOT pressure yourself to whip up a post from "start to publish" in one sitting. Instead, write consistently every day. Put yourself in the same place, same time of the day and turn all other distractions off (such as emails, phones, TV, etc.) and simply focus on writing. When you discipline yourself in such a manner, you will see dramatic improvements in your writing speed. Writer Sara Woods describes how you can write a book in only "15 minutes a day."
http://www.sunnyray.org/Write-a-book-in-15-Minutes-per-day.htm

And when you set yourself an hour, surely you can whip up high-quality content for your blog posts.

6. Most importantly, allow yourself at least one night to "sleep" on your writing before you publish it. A night does wonders for the mind, and every time I wake up, I find something interesting to either add or change in the article I had written the previous day. There is a certain calmness and thoughtfulness that works over your mind. This translates into new angles and thought that helps enrich your output.

So we covered volume and quantity of writing.

Let us focus on writing quality now.

Writing is an exercise, a muscular activity, which gets better with practice.

The more you write, the better you get.

In the initial stages you **WILL** experience some bad writing. The only way to get to the good writing is to do the bad writing initially. Every time I look at my older posts and previously published papers, I always feel the urge to make it "better." Every writer I know feels the same way.

Accept it, and simply write more.

HIGH QUALITY = GREATER VALUE

To have a high-quality output, your reader must get value out of your writing.

The following are some ways in which you can add VALUE to your posts:

A. Original research. When you do deep research and then write on the topic, your reader is subject to insights which are not available elsewhere. If the reader can take your insights and apply them in their vocation, they get value.

Google's Matt Cutts has a great example of a blogger who wondered which of the free email providers were more subject to spam. By simply creating free accounts in Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, etc. and monitoring the spam folder for a few months, the blogger was able to pull out numbers, do some analyses, present his conclusion and basically built a very compelling blog post.

B. Saving time. When you scour multiple sources for rich information on a topic and then present them in one place for your reader, you save them tons of time. You are spending the time looking for valuable content, then taking the effort to pull it together and present it logically, adding your unique insights to the post. Your reader gets all this in one place. Time savings equals value.

C. Unique experiences. Your experiences, your presentation and writing style and your expertise/experience in your topic make your posts unique. As you present your thoughts, you want your blog content to stand out from the rest of the clutter on the internet.

D. Solving problems. Anytime you solve a problem for your own self related to your topic and can present that in your post, others can use it to solve the same problem. When I had to fix a small dent in a car, I checked out this video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08iHSCxza2o) which provided me with GREAT VALUE. It's no surprise that the video has had more than 1.5 million views! That is one valuable video-post.

E. Go the extra mile. You always want your posts to be complete. That is, you take the niche sub-topic, question, problem or thought, give it an introduction, write your thoughts and bring it to a logical conclusion. Depending on the topic or the question, you can take anywhere between 300 and 1,200 words. In some cases, you may want to make the post longer to "complete" it. There is really no hard and fast restriction. The only consideration is the reader's attention. If you feel you are writing too lengthy a post, then you can break it up into two or more posts and you can number them as well.

F. Original images. Your readers will also appreciate any original images that you can provide for them to share.

G. Transform. Sometimes you can simply be creative and totally transform something that is already known. By presenting it in a more insightful and attractive manner, you add great value.

H. Writing Style. If you have a unique style of writing, make sure this comes out in your posts. As someone reads post after post, your personality will become evident. Whether you are humorous, logical, emotional, serious, or maybe calculative, your readers can paint an image of you through your writing. For an excellent depiction of statistics, read *The Checklist Manifesto* by Atul Gawande. To get good ideas for gripping openings and story-telling, read *Pitch Anything: An Innovative Method for*

Presenting, Persuading, and Winning the Deal by Oren Klaff. Let your unique style bubble to the surface through your writing.

TIP: Put great thought and effort into your posts; somehow this shows in the end-result.

Keep the following in mind as you write:

A. Style—write as if you are talking to one person. Make it a one-on-one conversation. Use "I" and "you" liberally. This helps personalize the blog; after all, you are trying to establish a bond with your reader.

B. Come up with an impactful title for the post. You can also carry over this title to the subject line of your email, when you alert your mailing list members about this post.

For excellent guidelines, a framework for conceiving impactful headlines and some vivid examples, check out "Headline Hacks," a free download by Jon Morrow.

C. Avoid long sentences. Write short and simple sentences. Check out the Flesch Reading Ease scale for your post. Aim for an average sentence length of 20 words or less.

D. Have one focus subtopic per post. This helps to stay within the 300-1,000 word average post length (too long and you risk losing reader interest). You don't want to be starting more than one thread which you cannot tie out within that post. For example, if a post is on building an effective schedule for self-development, you don't want to talk about the importance of self-development in that post—it is given.

E. Use sub-headers, so that when one simply scans through the posts, the bold and/or indented sub-headers catch the eye and are easy to read. They are also faster to read, and gives the reader a quick idea of what the post is about. The reader can then decide if she wants to read the text below the sub-headers. This is also called a list-type post.

To develop decisive writing and be seen as an authority, your writing needs to convey the following:

* Your wealth of experience
* Your expertise in the topic that you are writing about
* Confidence with which you present opinions, decisions, judgment and conclusions
*Deep insights which the general reader may not be aware of

The best case is for a reader to say, "Now, why didn't I think of that before?"

This is what will make them come back again and again to your site.

3. Optimally scheduling your post:

Scheduling the various types of posts is an interesting way in which to keep your readers' interest levels high.

You must have a strategy for publishing your posts. This strategy should cover a few aspects such as time and frequency of publishing, types of content, list of focus keywords you want to cover, etc.

This is important because it allows you to condition your readers to expect a post from you at specific intervals.

This allows you to experiment and find out the optimum time for publishing (or emailing your readers to let them know a post was published).

Data from your hosting system tells you when your pages were accessed. That will indicate to you the best time (day of the week and even hour of the day) when your readers are best engaged with your site.

As you experiment with the timing of your post publications, you can gradually settle into the optimal time of when to publish posts.

Seth Godin has a unique way of conditioning his readers. Seth has (in his own words) "shown up" consistently, EVERYDAY, without fail for the past seven years! His blog post is just a few paragraphs (sometimes just one) with an average length of 250 words or so, with no image and no comments. Seth is a marketing guru and his posts are on the topic of reaching out and making an impact on people in the new "permission economy."

Seth has chosen to condition his readers in this fashion.

You should find your own way. At least start with a way in mind, and let that evolve based on your customers' reactions.

Post (time) scheduling:

Over a period of time, after you have published about 20 posts, you will get a good idea of when your readers like to see you publish. We will cover this in the data analytics section later in the book. But you need to set a frequency—once a week, twice a week or once every two weeks for publishing your posts.

Then you need to pick the day, and also a time of the day, when you will publish your posts.

You do not have to do all this real-time. You can schedule these posts ahead of time. WordPress allows you to schedule posts well in advance. In fact you can schedule a series of posts in WordPress and then go on vacation.

TIP: Post on a consistent basis. This helps provide a lively feeling to your blog. This is also noticed and rewarded by search engines.

I had a personal goal of reaching 50 posts in about four months to build critical mass of posts. I went at the rate of three posts a week. Then, once I achieved the number of 50, I slowed down to one post a week.

I discovered that my readers like to read on Saturday mornings. All my posts get published on WordPress at 7 a.m. on Saturday, EST. I also send out a mail notification to my "list" from my AWeber mail manager at precisely the same time.

The WordPress post publish and the AWeber email broadcast can both be scheduled weeks in advance.

Content scheduling:

You must build a publishing schedule. Having a schedule prevents you from randomly putting out posts. When you plan ahead, you can mix the various content types strategically. This conditions your readers and helps you control their expectations from a content perspective.

For example, when you have a solid post that will exceed the word limitation and you are forced to publish it in two posts, you can schedule that ahead of time and let your readers know.

Routinely, in six to eight posts, you can throw in one or two technique-type posts, one interview-type post and two curated posts. The rest could be a mix of articles and stories. Of course all must be related to your blog topic!

Just put them in a schedule and see how it looks. If you cannot decide, you can ask your three friends for help with scheduling.

4. Embellishing a post for better user engagement:

Your own images:

Seth Godin says that we as a society have relentlessly gone about fitting each person with their own camera.

So now it is time to really use the camera. Every chance you get, click a picture—a bird, an insect, an inanimate object, one of the keys on your laptop, a dollar bill, almost anything.

Once you click the image, make sure it is high-resolution, make sure it is your own, and then give it a title. With this title, store it on your website (WordPress has a media library where you can store images).

Then when you are ready with your blog post, pull out an image with the most appropriate title and place it on the blog post.

You can also click your own photograph related to the focus keyword after you write the blog post (that way the image becomes even more appropriate).

Extend this model to sketches, cartoons, and infographics (a fancy name for an image with some information, usually statistics, in it).

Images from the Internet:

Another way to get the best image for your blog post is to go online. Google Advanced Image Search allows you to search images by keyword (your blog post keyword should be used here) and also by type of license.

Images have their own intellectual properties and royalty requirements. Even if you filter images by "free to use, share or modify, even commercially," you must still check the declaration by the author on the image itself.

If you violate either the royalty or the license condition and use the image without written consent, you are liable to the photographer or author for damages and compensation.

Sometimes it is very difficult to find or understand the conditions on an image. In such cases, take the safer option and do not use the image. Flickr images are notorious for this.

Wikimedia Commons contains images that are usually licensed under the Creative Commons licenses and the license conditions are quite easy to read and understand. Only use it when the author has allowed the sharing of the image. There will be credit requirements and these are easy to comply with. Just make sure that the site and the author/photographer's name appears in your post that contains the photograph.

I recommend using your own images to avoid accidental violation of intellectual property rights.

Why use an image on a blog post at all?

Images enhance your blog and provide a variety of benefits such as:

A. They give your reader a quick idea of what the post is about (of course, I am assuming the post contains an appropriate image)

B. Images remain in memory longer and far more vividly than text

C. Some images are so funny, cute or memorable, that people keep coming back to look at the image (the baby with a phone image on CurationSoft generated more views than any other post)

D. Social media sites such as Pinterest, that have huge following, focus only on images

E. Images have their own search engine rankings and your blog will rank higher with a very attractive "search engine optimized" image

TIP: Always use at least one image or graphic for every blog post.

CAUTION: Never use an online image without checking the license/royalty conditions on it.

8. GROW TRAFFIC

For your blog, you need a strategic plan to grow traffic.

Traffic is the number of Internet surfers that visit your blog.

Once you get the traffic to become a sizeable number, you then want them to sign up to your list.

In this chapter, the first part covers how you can position your blog on the Internet to maximize visibility. The second part describes how to get the casual surfer to subscribe to your mailing list.

Part I: Positioning your blog in front of your target customer:

The following steps help achieve this positioning:

A. Writing for search engines
B. Keyword-based research
C. Reaching out to target customers through social media
D. Boosting your blog's presence online
E. Offline advertisements

A. Writing for Search Engines:

TIP: Write for real people, one at a time, but write for search engines too.

Writing for search engines allows your blog posts and site to be featured on top of search engine results and thus be seen by users who are looking for things related to your blog topic. This is also knows as Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

Search Engine Optimization falls into three separate components:

1. On-site—done once for your site (part of blog setup activities)
2. On-page—for each page/post
3. Off-page—you have to build this over time, relying on external entities for the most part

Second and third are transactional, i.e. these are done for each page or post.

You can input specific keywords and your domain name to check your Google page rank, in a number of sites such as: http://smallseotools.com/keyword-position/

As soon as you build a critical mass of blog posts (say more than 25), you will notice that your posts start ranking in Google.

However, you need to "prime" your posts for the Googlebot (also known as a web crawler) to add your website and blog post to the Google index.

For adding your page to the Google index, Googlebot needs to understand your site, your blog posts, and the topic for which you have written your post.

ON-SITE SEO:

On-site SEO is about making your site visible to the search engines. These are a list of the URLs (web addresses)on your site along with some pertinent information that enables search engines to be informed about pages available for indexing. Search engines accomplish this by way of web-crawler software, also called bots.

Search engines take the information provided by the "xml sitemap" from your site, and replicate these on their servers. These are then indexed according to the keyword. Sitemaps enable web crawlers to "intelligently" gather other information, such as the links available on your site. Once indexed, the search engines are then able to pull out and display the pages in the form of search results for the keyword.

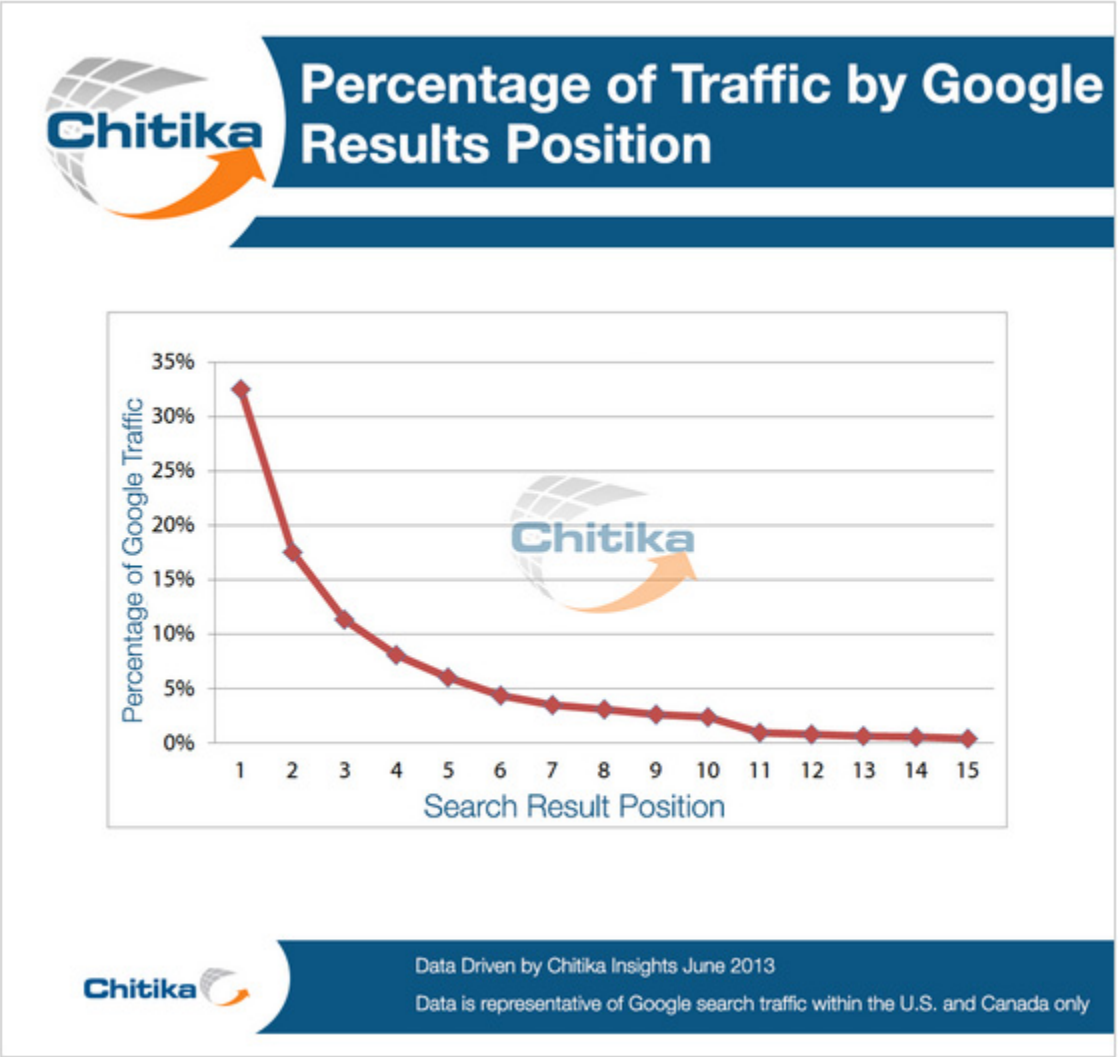
This is a one-time activity. WordPress makes it very simple and builds a sitemap simply upon checking a box on your WordPress site. This is available under Settings, General in the menu on the left column.

You can gain additional information and get details on the protocol from sitemaps.org.

ON-PAGE SEO:

Each keyword typed into Google gets a bunch of results. Your focus is to have your post listed in the results on page 1. When was the last time you searched for something on Google and very excitedly went directly to the 40th entry on page 3?

The importance of ranking your blog post on page 1 of Google is highlighted by the following graph:



(Source: http://chitika.com/google-positioning-value)

In the insights report, it has been found that page 1 gets about 91.5% of the clicks. Only 8.5% of users go beyond page 1.

HIGHER SEARCH RESULTS RANK = HIGHER NUMBER OF CLICKS

☞

TIP: It's imperative you write your posts to rank on Google page 1.

This is achieved in part by **on-page SEO**.

To accomplish effective on-page SEO, you must perform the following:

A. As you write the post, think of the best (set of) keywords that would most accurately describe the topic. Focus keywords can be multiple words, and the more elaborate they are, the better. Instead of "cough", or "cough cure", think in terms of "herbal cure for dry cough". That way your post will not only rank very high for the

focus keyword "herbal cure for dry cough," but also stay there for a while.

This is because when an online user searches for this elaborate keyword, and they click on your site (because it showed up high on Google), they will spend more time on the page (obviously, because the content is a very high match for the keyword; i.e. the user found what they were searching for).

This is noticed and recorded by Google and it adds to your page authority. As more and more users spend time on this post for that keyword, Google rankings will go up for that post.

B. Get a catchy title for the post and ensure that the focus keyword appears in the title. For the above example, effective titles could be: "The best herbal cure for dry cough" or "Nothing works better than herbal cure for dry cough." Notice it contains your focus keyword.

C. The URL, or the address for the blog post, MUST contain the focus keyword. Separate the keywords by dashes. So your URL for the post would look like: http://yoursite.com/herbal-cure-for-dry-cough/

D. The fourth step is to ensure that your content is all about "herbal cure for dry cough". At least in one place, preferably in the opening paragraph, make sure the keyword shows up. You can also have a sub-header with the focus keyword for added effect.

E. Lastly, the meta-data (fancy name for short description) must contain the focus keyword. This is a short description of about 100 words or so, which provides a little more (than the title) about the post. When your post shows up in Google search results, this description appears below the title.

That's all there is to on-page SEO.

If you religiously maintain these parameters for each and every post of yours, and slowly build a critical mass of posts, you will start seeing your posts on page 1 of Google for those keywords.

TIP: For super on-page SEO, ensure that all SEO parameters are filled in for the image on the post as well.

Before that, you will see a lot of hits and indexing activity by the Googlebot (this will be shown in your hosting system).

All the above on-page SEO activities are within your control. Think of on-page SEO as

inside out, i.e. you perform the actions within your page.

For off-page SEO, it is all about outside-in, i.e. others perform certain activities related to your blog post which tells Google that your post is an authority post for the focus keyword.

Such activities are not limited to:

A. Comments being posted on your post

B. Other sites linking to your post, preferably for the focus keyword (also known as backlinks). This is really great for your blog if the links come from .edu, .org or .gov sites.

C. Your post (URL) showing up in various social media sites

D. More people sharing your post on social media

OFF-PAGE SEO:

For off-page SEO, you are depending on other "authority" sites to drive to your site, preferably using the keyword for a particular post as "anchor text."

Anchor text is the word that is highlighted and contains a hyperlink (i.e. when the hyperlink is clicked, using the anchor text, the user lands on your post).

For this to be effective, two things need to happen:

A. The authority site must link to your site using a hyperlink, and

B. The hyperlink must be placed using your keyword as anchor text

Authority sites are sites with a high page rank, i.e. in the Google indexes, these have a high reputation. Sites ending in .edu, .gov, .org, etc. have automatically high reputation.

One of the best things you can do for building good off-page SEO is to get your site listed on school or college websites (.edu).

Then you want them to connect to your site using the focus keyword. i.e. you want a statement such as, "the **herbal cure for dry cough** was found to be highly effective" with the hyperlink to your site on the keyword. This is more effect than say, "visit **here** for more information on herbal cure for dry cough" with the hyperlink placed on the underlined text in both cases.

CAUTION: DO not fall into the trap of purchasing links.

Google algorithms are highly sophisticated and can detect when links are purchased. Google has a very slick way of penalizing sites that indulge in such "black hat" behavior, trying to artificially maneuver search engine rankings.

Once penalized, your site and your business will be hit very badly.

TIP: Stay with white hat SEO practices.

You want your site to rank based on the quality of content, user engagement and experience

that your site provides.

In 2014, eBay was hit with a Google penalty and you can read all about it in http://searchengineland.com/google-hits-ebay-manual-penalty-search-results-192454

More than 120,000 pages on eBay dropped in the search results rankings overnight, as soon as the penalty kicked in.

If a site such as eBay could suffer serious Google penalty, a small site stands no chance.

A. Keyword-based research:

It is critical that you understand where your traffic is coming from. Set up a period during which you will monitor your site performance against a list of **critical** keywords.

Compile this list of critical keywords. This list should comprise all the keywords for which you would want your site to rank number 1 in Google search results.

Sure, this is a wish list, and that's where you should begin.

Your site, especially your most-visited blogs, would already be ranking number 1 in Google. Others may not be number 1, but would be prominently visible on page one of Google.

Find out which keywords your competition is ranking for. You will discover that your site simply cannot match the position of your competitor no matter how much you optimize your site for some keywords.

For these keywords, you must consider a PPC (pay per click) campaign, i.e. put out ads on Google. In other words, you are paying Google to rank you higher than your competition for these keywords.

Keep looking at your critical keywords' list every month for performance. For those where you are paying for ads, monitor their performance and keep tweaking the list.

Ensure that your site does not slip in Google ranking for your own (non-ad) keywords.

B. Social Media—how to leverage it for your blog

Your writings, by way of your blog post publications and the information on your site, are one way your users get to know you and your personality.

Social media is another way they get to know you.

Social media can be less formal and a place where you can interact more freely (there is no need of a formal privacy policy on social media).

You don't need to stick to certain word limits or perform SEO on your writings on social media.

All you are doing is expressing your opinion and thoughts and interacting with people who have chosen to follow you on social media.

Seth Godin swears that the best advertisement is your customer talking to other people and driving traffic to your site.

Don't be afraid to ask your "list" to share your posts on their Facebook. In fact, make it easy for them to do so (by putting up those fancy buttons on your posts).

All it takes is for one post or one video to strike a chord amongst a small group of like-

minded people. Then they will discuss, share and drive traffic to your site.

Let us first restate why social media is necessary **for your blog**:

A. It helps you cast your net wider, i.e. you are trying to reach your blog and your topic to more and more people using social media

B. You want to try to get people to visit your blog and sign up, using social media as an additional source

So of the three main goals that we have (grow traffic, convert traffic into customers, increase revenue) social media can best help with growing traffic.

The following are three main activities you must perform on social media:

A. NOTIFY - Let them know of every activity you perform on your blog, such as: a new product, a new post that you published, a new page or site re-design, a competition that you are planning or a survey that you want to conduct.

B. ENGAGE - Keep engaging. Respond to comments, talk to others, add more friends, share interesting articles, comment on others' comments, post photographs, and simply be yourself.

C. ASK - Ask for them to share, re-tweet or pin your posts and pictures. Ask them to invite other friends and spread the word about your blog. Seek feedback. Ask them to visit your product page and BUY your product. Give them specific things to do (hey, after all they are following you and your blog).

How to use Social Media sites

Automatic notification on social media

First thing is to "connect" your social media account to your mailing list manager. This means that every time you send out a broadcast email to your mailing list, you can select which social media should also be updated with this activity.

When you check the box, a snippet (along with a link to the whole email) is also posted on your social media. On Twitter, a tweet is sent out; on Facebook a post is generated and so on. You can also post manually.

You can do this every time you send out a mail notification upon publishing a new blog post.

To shorten links on Twitter, use a service such as bit.ly or Pretty Link. These services take in your full URL and give you a much shorter link.

Specific engagement

You can choose to engage the users on each social media separately. For example, you can have a competition on Facebook or initiate a discussion on LinkedIn.

This activity can be separate from your blog publishing activity.

Your goal is to get your readers users to comment, discuss, share and generally interact with you so that interest in your blog is generated. You can then channelize all this interest into the growth of your blog.

Growth of your blog should show up in three meaningful ways:

1. Growth in traffic
2. Growth in customer base (conversion of free traffic into paid customers)
3. Growth in revenue (more products and variations, more distribution channels, more affiliate marketers)

TIP: Ensure that your social media page allows new users to easily subscribe to your mailing list.

Make it easy for people to share your posts

Make sure that you have two sets of buttons on **EVERY** post (this is easily accomplished by your WordPress sidebar settings)

1. social media connect buttons, so that users can connect to you easily on social media, and
2. social media share buttons, making it easy for your readers to share a specific post with their friends and followers.

C. Boosting your blog's presence online:

So far we focused on attracting traffic through social media and then through SEO. i.e. we build a critical mass of solid content, have good on-page SEO and do everything to get our blog post to feature on page 1 of Google search results.

But you can do more to attract traffic online.

Online advertisement:

You can opt to insert advertisements on Google, facebook, and other niche sites. For example, a month-long advertisement on Clickbank can run anywhere between $100 and $400. The variation accounts for the size of the advertisement and the location. The login page obviously is more expensive than an inner page.

ClickBank allows an ad to be placed just below the login button. Consider paying to get your ad in that position. It is quite prominent and your goal could be to attract affiliate marketers to pick up your product to sell to their list.

Have a simple message which shows a key figure. For example, you can highlight affiliate commission, if that is higher than normal. Or, if your product is priced high and affiliate commission is a sizeable amount, highlight that. High conversion or hot new fads for which your product can help are statements that can be put in that position.

As with everything, ensure that your underlying infrastructure is intelligent enough to

capture the data about the performance of this “expense”.

Pay-per-click:

Google pay-per-click is another form of advertising your site. The key is to find out those keywords for which you just have very slim chances of being number one on Google search results. These could be keywords captured by your competitor. But there is way to buy your way into the top spot. Google allows advertisements (and these are indicated as such) and you can feature your post in front of your target user.

Re-targeting:

Re-targeting is the process by which your ads follow an interested window-shopper online. The ads for your product show up in multiple areas where the customer visits on the Internet.

For example, if someone was interested in purchasing kitchen knives and they saw advertisements for one brand of knives on Facebook, Amazon, news sites and through emails, this would be considered re-targeting. This particular product (the brand of knives), follow or re-target the customer.

This is very similar to the credit card offers you may receive as junk mail that flood your physical mailbox.

A person can choose to buy a second set of knives or sign up for multiple credit cards. It is quite common to see re-targeting advertisements even after you’ve made a purchase, even when it’s something as expensive as a car. Chances are, however, the customer doesn’t need another car the following week. You need to determine whether re-targeting would work for you and your product.

Press Release:

Creating a press release is another way to publicize your site. You write up your own site, major release or new product and then send it out to the press release issuing sites. There are a number of sites, both paid and free, that will take your press release and possibly publish it. Usually a press release is about a page long, contains key information related to the company, the event that is being published and some impactful quotes from key executives.

PRWeb.org is one of the paid sites that is available online.

Distribution:

There are a number of aggregation sites out there that have a wide readership and are looking for new, interesting content. You need to have those sites link to yours so that every new blog post you publish is carried on those sites.

An example is Alltop.com. It took about three months to get my site accepted at Alltop. But once they started featuring each one of my blogs, I notice a decent traffic flowing from that site.

Submitting your website to these aggregation sites is easy. It just takes time to do so, and

you have to wait (for the good ones) until you see an acceptance note.

While you can blindly submit to the generic aggregation sites, you need to spend time finding out which ones relate to your site topic.

Event Participation:

Keep on the lookout for events, both online and local. Then see if you can participate and further spread the word about your site.

Commenting:

Find out some of the blogs that relate to the same topic as your site. Then closely examine the writer's style, content, engagement with readers, their "giveaway" and other qualities that make the blog unique.

Take the liberty of signing up and going through their offerings and even paid purchases. Interact with the writer through their comments section and even contact them with genuine requests.

Purchase their products and submit detailed reviews.

People take notice of readers who regularly interact and post comments. They really take notice when a reader responds to a question from another reader, especially when the response is of high quality.

The way to do it is as follows:

A. Pick no more than three sites where the readers very closely match the ones that you would like to have on your site

B. Engage with the author and use the comments section to really showcase your expertise in the subject. Take every chance to respond to questions in their comments section. Don't overly sell yourself or your blog. Show genuine interest (and trust me, phonies get found out very quickly)

C. At every opportunity, seek to send the author a note on articles of interest, other sites, anything that you have learned, etc.

This achieves two purposes:

First, it helps build a relationship with the site author. Second, your expertise slowly permeates through their readership, who would then seek out your blog. Thus you would get additional traffic flowing to your site.

Guest posting:

Google's crackdown on guest-posting in 2014 had some bloggers scrambling. Its focus is to filter out the "gaming" guest-blog sites and ensure only high-quality guest-blogging is encouraged.

ProBlogger is one of the sites that relies heavily on guest-blogging. Very quickly in response to Google's posture on guest-posting in 2014, ProBlogger announced that they were doing away with guest blogging. This was understandable because ProBlogger was churning out guest posts by the dozen. Hardly a day passed when you did not get a guest-authored post from ProBlogger. In fact, it was quite common to see two posts a day, both authored by guests on ProBlogger. Sure, we'd see the odd post by Darren Rowse. But by far more than 90% of the posts were from guests!

However, in my opinion Google's action is not against a site such as ProBlogger, where the guest-posting is of very high quality.

Guest authors benefit by getting visibility and attracting the site's traffic to theirs. The site benefits from increased activity that too of a high quality.

Guest blogging is a win-win situation and greatly helps fulfill your content generation objectives.

Google wants to see genuine guest posts, which indicate interest in your blog. So go ahead and encourage guest-posts, but keep it within limits. Don't go for ALL guest posts. And of course, ensure that the posting is of a high quality that contributes to rich user experience.

Hosting Webinars:

You can also provide value to your readership by bringing on experts who can talk on a particular niche within the topic of interest to your readers. For example, in marketing you can have an expert discussing pricing in one webinar, and an expert on retail shelf-space management in another webinar.

You can publicize the webinar event, circulate the LinkedIn profile/website of the guest and also invite specific questions that the guest can address.

The key here is to engage your readers, and constantly "wow" them with something new, interesting and relevant. That keeps your site vibrant and interesting.

Interesting site = More word of mouth publicity = more traffic

So what does the guest who is bringing their expertise, time and effort get in return? They get access to your membership, promotion of their site, the chance to publicize their own expertise and possible sale of their products to your membership.

Would this erode your membership? You can take a very narrow view and fear that all your customers would walk out the door, unsubscribe from your site and join the guest's site.

In my experience, it all comes down to the value provided by the guest speaker.

If the speech and the webinar were of high quality, relevant to your readers and struck a chord with them, your readers will sign up to the guest's site.

Will they unsubscribe from yours? Why would they, when they can expect another such high-quality guest the next month?

The only reason for your readers to unsubscribe from your site en masse would be when they feel let down and their expectations were not fulfilled, i.e. if the guest was of poor quality, there was too much hype and it was a general waste of readers' time.

D. Offline Advertisements:

Please do not, for one moment, feel that since your blog is online, everything has to be online. Especially if your service or site caters to a local audience, you can easily leverage traditional advertising.

Look for inserting an advertisement in the local newspaper, leaving handouts in the local grocery stores and even having the mailman deliver fliers with the daily mail. I am reminded of a quote from the chief marketing officer of a global soft drinks company some years ago (in the pre data analytics era). When asked whether he was getting value out of the advertising dollars his company spent, his response was, "I am aware that one half of my advertising budget is wasted. Trouble is I don't know which half."

Don't be like that CMO. For every advertisement you place, ensure that you have a coupon code or a specific link where you direct people. This is the power of data analytics. You can use the coupon codes to link your offline advertisement to your online data collection and analytics engine.

That way, when you analyze your web traffic, the code will tell you which advertisement yielded sizeable traffic and which ones were wasted.

TV advertisement:

If you can identify a niche TV channel where most of your target users spend time, consider advertising on that TV channel.

Just ensure one thing. When a customer visits your website after they've seen your advertisement, make sure that the site is all that they expected and more. Don't disappoint them. Do not hype up the ads. The goal of the advertisement is not to toot your own horn and promise more than you can offer.

The goal of the advertisement is to set a level of expectation in the customer's mind and insert a hook into them which leads them to your site.

On the site, they must be even more surprised and thrilled and end up becoming a customer. You want to aim for a rich user experience.

Let me give you my personal example of how effective a TV advertisement can be.

How many insurance sites have you seen that are easy and hassle-free?

On the Indian TV channels, I got so used to seeing an ad for visitors coming to the U.S. who need health insurance, that I could recite the ad from memory. The tag line that stuck in my mind was "affordable, easy and hassle-free."

Sure enough, when my mother was coming to visit me in the U.S., I tried to give the site a go.

They had their hook in me.

On the site there was a form with about five boxes for information (including my mother's age) and a "submit" button.

I filled out the form in 60 seconds, but waited on the "submit" button for 120 seconds, not

sure what to expect.

Expecting a phone call or some other engagement with an insurance representative, I reluctantly clicked on the button (I had to get insurance from somewhere!).

Lo and behold, the next page gave me a choice of 10 insurance products that I could buy for the four-month period for my mother, ranging from $250 to $2200. For each product, they gave me the underwriter's name, a brief description of benefits the insurance policy holder was entitled to and a link for detailed terms and conditions (fine print).

There was no medical exam to take and I could purchase the policy right there.

The site was fast, gave me what I wanted, and kept up my expectation.

It was indeed "affordable, easy and hassle-free."

I bought a policy from that site.

Billboard advertisement:

If you can afford it (when your blog matures and you want to take it to the next level) advertise on billboards. You will know a prime location simply by the quoted price. Just imagine the thousands of motorists that drive on the Pennsylvania turnpike every day. It is very difficult to miss a bill board. Keep the message short, crisp and provide a phone number or an easily-remembered website. Ensure there is a code built into the site URL. Or dedicate a landing page for users that would visit after seeing that billboard advertisement.

On the New Jersey Turnpike a bill-board on the Atlantic City area can attract 8 million motorists per season. Compared to that number, the daily motorist count in the Newark airport area of the turnpike is about 187,000.

A 3-month lease can get your advertisement viewed by possibly 18 million people (assuming one person to a vehicle). You have to determine what percent of this population could be your target user. Then you can determine the location and estimate the projected value, which you can then hold against the quoted price to see if it is worthwhile.

For sheer scale, a billboard advertisement is hard to beat.

TIP: You must engage your readers, consistently and constantly, across various media and forums.

Part II: Converting the casual Internet surfer into your list subscriber:

You need to start building and growing your list from day 1. This list gives you email addresses of real people who will eventually contribute to your revenue.

The best way to grow your list fast, and build trust amongst your readership is to give away something of value in exchange for their email.

You must utilize your mailing list for this purpose, and this is how it works:

A. Build something of value to your potential customers, such as an informational

product, an e-book. Make it easily accessible and give it away for free. Let the customer know that they getting it for free and that opting out is just as easy (at the click of a button). You must ensure that this giveaway is related to your blog topic and contains really good information. The marketing industry has used this concept forever and they call it free samples. You want your sample to look, feel, taste, smell so good that the customer will come back and pay for the real product.

B. You do not give it away exactly for free. You exchange it for the customer's email address. This helps in building your **list**.

C. Over time, as you publish posts on your site, you can send emails to this customer and others on your list, letting them know personally that there is more of what they like to read on the site. You start building a relationship with your customer as you get to know their behavior and they start expecting a certain behavior from you. Customers must get to feel your brand.

D. Much sooner than you would realize, they would be willing to pay for some product that you, as the expert, decide to recommend to them.

E. As they get value out of your expertise and trust your recommendations, they will share their experience with friends and help to grow your list even more. You just have to facilitate such behavior and make it easy for them to share your blog.

This is it. You don't have to be cold-calling people or building a sales force.

The key is in providing enough value so that the reader does not want to miss your next offering.

TIP: The sooner you build the giveaway, the faster you can build your list.

Your giveaway product should add value. It need not be very elaborate.

There are simple, short giveaways.

Sign up on "Goins, Writer" and check out Jeff Goins' giveaway product. This is a set of slides, with a total of less than 1,000 words, but highly impactful. This proves that the giveaway need not be an elaborately-written, time-consuming work.

My giveaway product for Kay Leadership Academy is an eBook of about 25 pages. Jon Morrow's *52 Headline Hacks* contains 52 ways in which you can write irresistible headlines to urge readers to open your email or read your post

Then there are other periodic, elaborate giveaways such as the McKinsey reports.

Have you ever seen an advertisement by McKinsey & Co?

How many times have you read, "A McKinsey report on the topics states …"?

McKinsey does not advertise. You will never get an unsolicited call from them seeking your business (well, they serve top corporations, huge enough to afford them). They do not have a sales force and their expenses may not show sales commissions paid out.

Yet, for years and years, they have been the #1 strategy consulting company, charging exorbitant rates for their consultants. They continue to get business from the top companies in the world.

McKinsey **shows** the corporate world their capability—but they do not **tell** about it.

How do they do it?

Through newsletters, research reports, data analysis, and other highly-rich informative posts, **McKinsey puts out their best industry work for free, on a continuous basis. By just giving them your email, you can get the McKinsey quarterly for FREE.**

This is a major reason why McKinsey is most sought after by the top corporations.

Not only do they give away their best work, once engaged they continue to provide very solid insights on businesses after thorough analysis and help you solve a corporation's biggest problems.

In the information world, especially for blogging, this is a fantastic way to attract customers.

Then there is the "free" software, such as a WordPress plugin.

If the McKinsey example is too far-fetched, let me tell you about a similar business model by Yoast.

Yoast, the founder being Joost der Valk, is best known for his free WordPress SEO plugin downloaded more than 11 million times.

I never publish a post without getting a dark-green circle from the Yoast SEO plugin.

This dark-green circle tells me that all required on-page SEO criteria has been fulfilled for that page. A very simple checklist, coded beautifully, works flawlessly and provides excellent results for my pages.

After I had about 30 or so posts, I could see that the Google crawler was indexing my posts almost within a day. My posts started ranking on page 1 of Google for those keywords within a week.

This couldn't have been achieved without the Yoast plugin.

You guessed it. I love Yoast! I can't wait to lap up the next offer.

Early in 2014, Yoast started offering a Conversion Review on my site.

Guess what the charge is—a whopping $1,700!

And do you get the review right away? No. He said "Pay the price and you will be added to the queue." There is no mention of the wait-time.

You think the serious customer is going to negotiate or wait till the price drops?

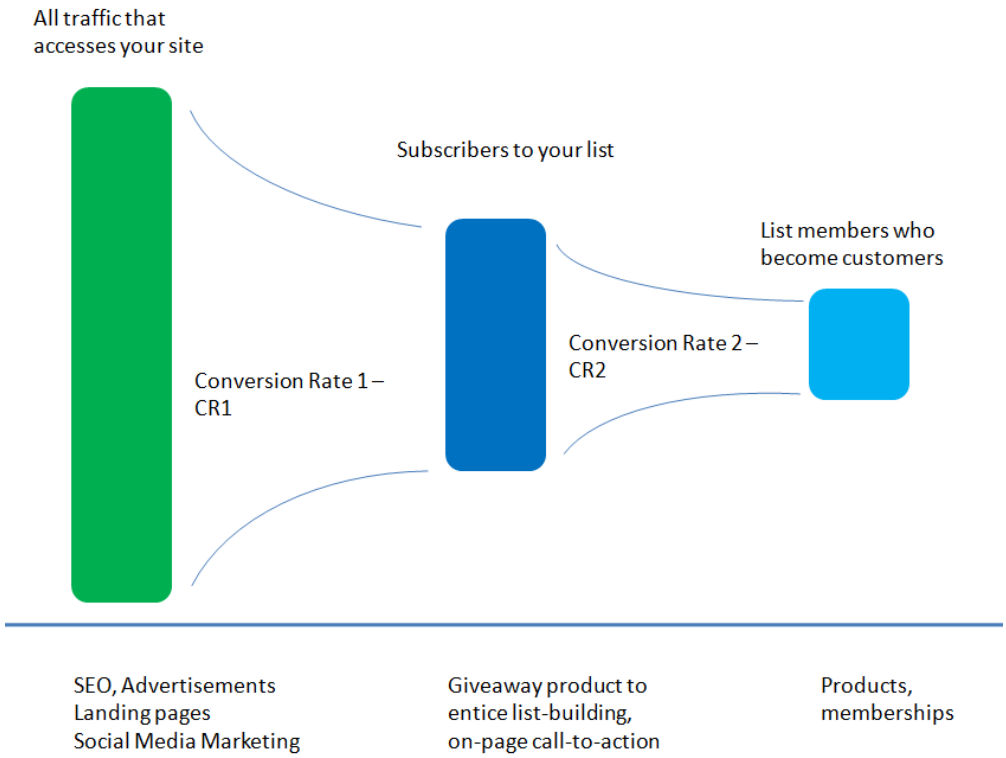
Just as McKinsey's price will never drop, I expect Yoast to jack up this price. I am convinced that if Yoast feels the report can be priced at $1700, the contents are definitely worth several multiples of $1700.

Yoast is doing exactly what McKinsey does.

The framework is to provide great value for free. Then, once a trust is built with customers, offer other high-value products. Watch customers willingly buy and help you grow your business.

9. CONVERT SUBSCRIBERS INTO CUSTOMERS

As your subscriber list grows, you should start thinking of converting that list into paid customers.



Once you have a critical mass of visitors it's time to focus on conversion.
Conversion is accomplished strategically by executing the following steps:

A. Introduce your first product so that there is something for the subscriber to buy

B. Build effective landing pages to attract visitors to purchase your product

C. Generate insights from analyzing the data on your site, so that you can more effectively engage with your list and increase conversion

D. Set up campaigns using auto-responders to achieve specific conversion objectives

A. Introducing your FIRST product:

FACT: There must be a product for the customer to buy, so that you can get revenue

Once the setup and growth phase is over and you are slowly converting traffic into subscribers, you must start thinking product.

In the information world, the following are **REAL** products and services that people pay **good** money for:

A. Books—published hardcopy or downloadable pdf
B. Audio books—physical CD format or downloadable mp3
C. SlideShare articles and Skillshare video courses
D. Video courses—physical DVD format or downloadable videos
E. Seminars
F. Speaking engagements
G. Software, including premium WordPress plugins
H. Membership model, where you disseminate new, valuable information periodically
I Online webinars
J. Consulting engagements
K. Advertisements (by other vendors on your site)
L. New enhancements/releases of existing products

As you engage your customers, start building your first product. Anytime you have a question, doubt or hypothesis, bounce it off your customers and see what they think of it. Their opinion will help you shape your product.

Do not build an elaborate product assuming that people will want it and buy it from you. Before you invest time, effort and money into such a product, check out the pulse of the customer. Leverage the list that you have so painstakingly built. Let the customer confirm it for you.

Before you release your first product for your customer buy, there are a few extended set up activities that need to be considered. The following paragraphs discuss those activities and also help you consider what kind of product your blog is best suited to make known.

Building & launching products:

If your blog is set up to promote the sale of your already existing business, then the product question is already answered.

If you are building a product for the first time, then read on:

When you start planning on selling products, there are two things you need to know:

1. Which product/s you should build, and
2. How will you sell and collect money

1. Let's start with the products that you should build. This is essentially driven by two factors:

A. Your customer preferences
B. Your business model and your expertise

A. Customer Preferences:

By now you should have a good idea of the behavior of your "list" and what topics and product forms they respond to. Dig deeper into your Google Analytics and HostGator statistics to find out which product would best suit your customers' tastes.

When in doubt, send out a survey. You can feel out your membership for the price point that they'd be comfortable with, the product variations they are looking for, the pain-points they are experiencing, etc.

Surveys are a great way to not only conceive products, but also to fine-tune functionality and put a price on them.

TIP: Find out from your customers what they'd like to see in your product—this gives your product a better chance of success!

Start with a few hypotheses (assumptions) and then tailor your survey questions around these hypotheses and have your membership either confirm or refute the hypotheses.

Throw in a few prizes to get good, actionable responses for your survey.

B. Business Model and Expertise:

Amazon's business model is purely based on a very effective supply-chain. Of course, the technology is there, but the supply-chain efficiency makes them focus on passing products through their supply-chain, and not build or create products. Later on, they came out with the Kindle but that provided a platform to promote other suppliers' products (books).

Amazon can be grouped under the "marketer" category. Another category would be "creator." You can create products or market someone else's products.

First, you have to decide whether your product is a physical product or an informational one.

For physical products you need to think about packaging, sampling, inventory, shipping, returns/refunds, breakages, loss in transit, etc.

For informational products you need to think about formatting, a download page, licenses, returns/refunds, etc.

In this book we will cover only informational products.

Finally, the "form" or variation of your product must also be considered.

For informational products, you can have an electronic format (mainly pdf), then a supporting audio and/or a video form. You can also have a printed/published book to go with the pdf, and a set of audio/video CDs.

While the pdf is a very easy and quick route to market, margins are higher in audio and video forms especially when you ship the CDs/DVDs to the customer.

2. The second part involves knowing how to launch products, sell and collect money.

We can break this very important activity down into the following four stages:

1. Before the sale/purchase
2. During the transaction
3. Managing customer experience soon after the transaction
4. Priming the customer for future sales

1. Before the sale/purchase:

Work on a marketing plan. Let the customers know what you have to offer or what is coming soon. Send out emails, advertise and ask the membership to share on Facebook, etc.

Let them know when it will be for sale. You can offer limited introductory pricing to attract more buyers. Clearly let them know what they will get, and the value that they will derive from the product. Explain which pain-points the product will resolve and let them know how they will benefit from using it.

Build landing pages so that they can see videos or text showcasing the product, features and most importantly, the value that the product carries.

In some extraordinary cases, you can play the "scarcity" card. That is, have customers book their purchase before release (make advance payment) because there are only so many (or few) copies that will be available. This is very popular with seminars or events, where seating (the product) is limited.

I have seen people sell "limited" copies of software and that's just silly.

TIP: Be genuine; if you pretend your product to be something that it's not, you will lose trust.

2. During the transaction:

Have you ever noticed how Amazon allows you to take a peek inside a book? You can see the table of contents and also read a few pages.

This is very similar to being able to smell perfume before you buy it, or taking a car on a test drive.

Testimonials (on your landing pages) and actual customer reviews (such as those on the Amazon products page) help persuade the prospective customer into buying your product.

In the case of software, you can allow a **full-feature access** for a trial period. Such

sampling ensures that when the buyer decides to purchase, they already know what they are getting and this reduces the chances of a refund request.

NOTE: Do everything in your power to reduce/eliminate chances of a refund

Be very transparent and disclose terms and conditions upfront.

You can bury the details in a very long EULA (End-User License Agreement), but when you throw it in a customer's face, you lose trust.

I recommend being very upfront on the terms of sale. If the customer does not buy because of your terms, then so be it. A sale that did not go through is much better than a sale that became a refund request because the customer uncovered something that was not transparent upfront.

Lean on other brands and borrow their credibility.

For example you can use PayPal for receiving payments. PayPal also allows you to accept credit cards.

ClickBank is another proven and trusted brand that helps you to list your products, make the sale, process refunds and manage affiliate sales. ClickBank has a standard 60-day refund period and is trusted by customers and affiliates alike.

By using these systems, you can declare that you do not store customers' credit card information, thus putting your customer at ease from a security standpoint.

Once you list your product, test the whole sale process thoroughly. Make it very smooth and easy for the customer to pay for the product and have it delivered.

Ensure that affiliate commissions flow through appropriately and that there are no bottlenecks.

While you don't want a situation where the product was delivered before the customer paid for it, you really don't want a situation where the customer paid for your product but couldn't get delivery!

TIP: Test, test, test and then test some more. Ensure that the sale process is flawless.

3. Managing customer experience soon after the transaction:

This is the stage where the customer has just paid for a product that you have so painstakingly sold to them.

At this time, your objective is to ensure that the customer has a great experience, gets hold of the product as quickly as possible, is impressed with the delivery and gets to use it immediately.

Ensure that any bonuses are properly lined up, the surprise punch is delivered and the customer is smiling.

Downloading or accessing the product, product keys, user log in information, etc. must all be appropriately and accurately delivered.

* Elegantly packaged product: no hassles while accessing, downloading, installing or beginning to use the product

* Clear instructions for use

* Any surprise bonuses: to increase happiness or satisfaction

4. After sales and priming the customer for future sales:

Along with user login information, product key or any other product-access information, be sure to send a heartfelt thank you note.

For the next few days or weeks, you should check on the customer and find out how he/she is making out with their new product.

Make it very easy for them to submit a support ticket if needed, and then ensure that your support system is in place to promptly act on such tickets.

This is the time for you to trickle some additional value-add information related to your blog topic in general and the product in particular.

This is best achieved by "auto responders" that can be set up in your mailing list manager.

When you send automatic emails, your customer gets valuable information to help them with the product, or the topic that it relates to. Slowly, your emails influence the customer to trust your product and then they are coaxed to try other products that you have available.

INSIGHT: When your customer in engaged in trying out the product and gets instructions to try out each feature after another, chances of a refund will be lower

Suspend any marketing or other selling activities to this customer during the refund period. This is best achieved by having a separate group, tag or segment in your mailing list manager.

TIP: Use segments/groups in the mailing list manager abundantly, creatively and effectively.

Once the refund period is over, segment the customer in another group. This can be a group to which you send appropriate marketing emails.

Set up your systems to understand customer behavior, ask customers for feedback and also see if they can provide testimonials for you to put up on your site.

TIP: Ask and ye may get. Don't ask and ye will never get.

INSIGHT: A satisfied customer will spread the word and also buy more from you

Shipping vs. perfection:

If you are building your first or initial product AND you have done sufficient reviews, go ahead and ship your product.

You need the first revenues to start flowing in. Nothing gives you greater confidence than seeing the first bunch of revenues hit your bank account once you put out your product. Customer feedback will also provide valuable insights to help you fine-tune your product and your sale/service process. Unless you ship, you will never know the customer's reaction. You can get into "analysis-paralysis" perfecting your product, and you will never see a dime in revenue.

Time and effort spent in perfecting the product increase costs and can easily frustrate you.

So "always be shipping."

But please do not ship out the first untested draft.

Now, if you are out to kill the competition and are aiming for a product that is many times better than what the competition has out in the market place, then by all means aim for perfection.

If you already have a product that is generating revenue, then go for incremental improvements, each of which can be tested thoroughly before release.

Product Synergies:

Once you start building and selling products, you must consider synergies between products. For example, if you are releasing a book and also have planned a Skillshare course, then it pays to think through these products and time their launch strategically.

If your customer base (mailing list) is expected to sign up for the Skillshare course more readily, then release that course first and not the book. Sprinkle a few hooks into the course to generate interest in the book. At the end of the course, you should "prime" your customer to purchase the book.

Alternatively, if your marketing can deliver excellent book sales, then you may want to provide a discount coupon at the end of the book. The interested reader may want to explore more after reading the book and you can position the Skillshare course as the next logical step.

TIP: Every product must have a strategic, well thought-out launch plan.

Product launch plan must consider the following:

A. List out every avenue where the product will be announced

B. Have a solid landing page that provides information about the product and has a single call to action, the "Buy" button

C. List the product in multiple outlets, e.g. Amazon, ClickBank, Apple App Store, your website (of course), etc.

D. Get your affiliates all excited about the product and send them review copies and other key information for them to send to their "lists"

E. Advertise appropriately. Do not ignore traditional media such as newspapers and TV

F. Ensure that the "point of sale" is tested and ready for prime time, i.e. customer should be able to buy and the revenue should hit your bank account

G. Have the product delivery tested and the support system in place

H. Ensure that affiliate commissions (rate and mode of payment) is clearly spelled out and also implemented in the affiliate management system. This is where you rely on the reputation of established sites such as Amazon and ClickBank.

I. Ensure that the customer clearly understands the product features, pricing and terms of use. Also the refund policy and return period must be stated unambiguously and the feature implemented in the delivery system.

LANDING PAGE:

A landing page is just that—a page on your website where the first-time visitor "lands."

While you are in control of the contents, structure and design of the landing page, you are not in control of the "source" from which visitors come to your site.

So how do visitors learn about your site which would cause them to visit? The following are sources from where the typical visitors could be expected to come to your site:

A. Result of your direct offline marketing efforts (advertisements on TV, newspapers, magazines, industry newsletters, display on your own car, etc.)

B. Result of online advertisements on other websites and social media

C. Social media marketing—links on your own Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. that lead people to specific pages on your site

D. Members on your "list" sharing interesting blog posts you have published

E. Google search results that feature your web pages and blog posts

F. Paid advertisement campaigns such as Google PPC, targeting specific keywords

G. Other sites and authors recommending your posts and pages by providing a link

back to your site

H. Aggregation sites such as Alltop.com where your posts are referenced

I. Other publicity, including seminars and events where you make presentations or distribute your site

So the typical visitor will turn curious and come to your site. They would first see your home page or a blog post that has been shared or a link provided, or perhaps they found your site through a keyword search in Google.

They would interact with the page that is provided, and then navigate around your site. Typically the "Testimonial" and "About Us" pages are the first areas of navigation. You can check for user behavior on your site in Google Analytics.

Then they would see the "giveaway" for signing up and perhaps give you their email and get added to your list.

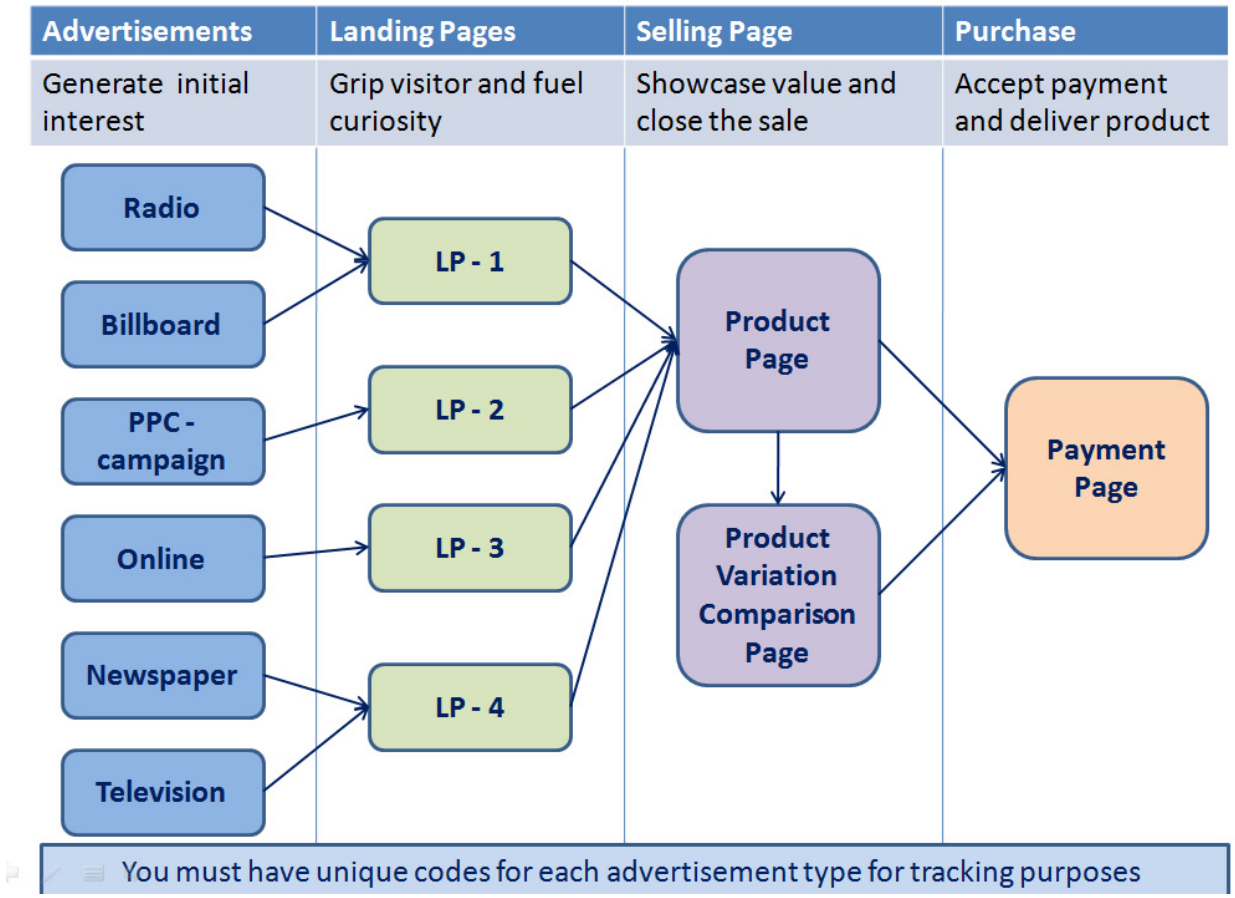
For this typical scenario, where probably six out of the above seven sources provide visitors, you DO NOT need a specific landing page.

You must build a landing page when you specifically target a certain demographic or a user group.

The objective of an effective landing page is to deliver the appropriate message to a selected group of potential visitors to ensure a high conversion (into subscribers or customers).

Some examples are mothers of newborn babies, senior executives in pharmaceutical companies, cruise aficionados, football fans, people who are crazy about campfire cooking, etc.

The following image shows how advertisements, landing pages and the product page work together to "close the sale."



It is critical to have unique codes for each advertisement. Such codes help you to monitor the conversion rate on each advertisement type, i.e. find out which advertisements result in greater traffic and sales. You can then make a data-driven decision to continue to spend on a particular type of advertisement.

Having multiple landing pages enables you to tailor messages for different types of visitors. For example, landing page 1 in the above image can be used to talk to people who have a commute. Usually people who drive a fair amount of distance to work or are on the road listen to radio. Such people would be highly likely to look at bill-board advertisements on the road. They would be ideal candidates for your audio-book, more than others. For these people, you would provide the URL:

www.mysuccessfulblogonfitness.com/1000.

Similarly, those sitting at home reading a newspaper or watching television might be expected to walk over to their laptop, fire up the Internet and visit landing page 2. This is achieved by providing them with a unique URL such as:

www.mysuccessfulblogonfitness.com/2000.

For PPC campaigns and online advertisements, whether on social media or other sites, you can have sophisticated tracking built in. Such tracking helps you to track the number of clicks,

their conversion, the demographics of the customers that are engaging with the advertisement and even the revenue generated.

To round off the analysis, you need to know the volume (and amount) of sales that are driven by each product variation.

It could very well be that TV advertisements are driving the largest amount of traffic (at great cost), but that audio books are not selling at all. Or that PPC is costing you a lot and generating a large number of clicks, but the revenue is not proportionate. Deeper analysis would then be required to determine root cause of the problem.

TIP: You MUST have a specific landing page when you are targeting a specific user group which most likely would want your services/product.

For your blog, go deep into Google Analytics and into your own keyword list to see what kind of people would be interested in your services or product.

Then go build NOT one, but multiple landing pages for those demographics.

Let us look at the following example:

You have a site that sells pregnancy test kits.

Two types of women are really interested in knowing whether they are pregnant.

The first is the lady in the happily married couple that is eagerly looking forward to expanding their family. They are excited and WANT to know that the woman is pregnant. She is excited and wants to promote this, take it forward.

The other type is the college girl who has indulged in unprotected sex and is totally NOT ready for a baby. This young woman fears pregnancy and wants to know sooner rather than later whether she is pregnant. She is fearful.

In both cases, the customers NEED the same product—your pregnancy test kit.

But their mindsets are different.

This calls for TWO totally different landing pages for these two different customer types.

For the first type of customer, the page would be all purple, pink and light blue, with flowers strewn around, lots of white spaces, little baby pictures, and of course the "buy now" button, which could be made to look like gorgeous colorful butterflies.

The message on this page is congratulatory and that your kit helps them plan with certainty for motherhood.

For the second type of customer, a darker page, with very few bulleted instructions indicating how effective the test kit is and a glowing "buy now" button would make this customer buy your product.

This landing page has a different, somber type of message and can even have a different tag line.

Of course, both "buy now" buttons lead to the same PayPal page and facilitate delivery of the same product.

You want to ensure that your advertisements (both traditional and online) are able to present a unique URL so that the type of customer that you are targeting arrives at the intended landing page.

Things to keep in mind:

A. Understand the demographic and wants/needs of the customers you are targeting

B. Put out advertisements through appropriate channels and in specific places where customers can be expected to congregate

C. Craft appropriate and impactful message on the landing page

D. The message in the advertisement and the landing page should match

E. Be very clear in the singular objective of the landing page. Have just one call to action on a page

F. Set up your data analytics and measurements and monitor the results

Data Analytics—your own world of BIG DATA:

As soon as your blog is a few months old, you will start seeing data, and this will continue to grow. This is your most important insight into your reader and customer's behavior, their make-up and where they can be found.

Where to look for data analytics?

As you continue to build posts and publish them to your site, which is online, your site will start collecting data.

The following areas provide you with super-rich information that you can then leverage to better engage your readers:

* Google Analytics
* Your hosting system
* Your mailing list manager
* Social media
* WordPress

Google Data Analytics

Once you have the html code provided by Google for your site plugged into your WordPress (in the setup phase), your site will continue to collect data.

Such data is then available to you in Google Analytics—www.google.com/analytics

Log in with your Gmail account and you should see your site. Click on the site name to open up Google Analytics.

FACT: Google Analytics will collect more data about your site than you would ever know what to do with it.

TIP: Have a plan to know exactly what you are looking for before you dig into Google Analytics—otherwise it is very easy to get lost in the data.

First of all you need to set a baseline, the period for which you want to analyze the data. You can set this up easily using the "from-to" calendar on the top right of the Google Analytics page.

Then you can dig right in.

Some of the questions that can be answered using the information from Google Analytics are:

A. What kind of people engage with my site—age, gender and their location?

B. How do they find out about my site—referral sources, keywords, devices, operating system?

C. Which specific areas are they spending time on when on my site—pages, path of navigation, time spent on each page and the last page they visit before exiting?

D. Which components on each of my pages get clicked more often than others?

E. Which pages (content) are of higher quality than others? What's the page-load speed on my site (for each page/post)?

F. Which pages do my users visit after they arrive on my main landing page?

Google Analytics is divided into four basic sections:

1. Audience
2. Acquisition
3. Behavior
4. Conversion

Audience—tells you all about the people who accessed your site and their break-down by age, gender and geographic location. It also tells you how many were new visitors as opposed to how many were returning, and how much time they spent on your site.

A very important component of the Audience section is the Users Flow information. Depicted pictorially (and also in tabular form), you can see how your users engaged with each page on your site, which pages had how many visitors, where they went after that page and which page was their final engagement before they navigated away from your site.

Based on this information, you can opt to strengthen the pages where people spend a lot of time. Alternatively, you can also fix those pages which you consider are very important to achieving your goals, but where people are not spending as much time.

Acquisition—shows you how your customers are being acquired. It lists various sources such as direct (from your website itself), organic search, social, affiliates, etc. and the breakdown

for each.

You can also see which keywords generated traffic and details thereof.

If you have a paid campaign (such as a Google PPC) then you can see details and the effect of such a campaign.

For each of these views, you can always select a secondary dimension (which could be almost anything, such as user's time of access, operating system or device; keywords; pages and even custom variables).

Behavior—tells you how the users behave when they are on your site. This has more to do with your pages and indicates which ones are able to hold your viewers' attention for longer periods. Google also tells you which ones are accessed last before the users exit your site.

In-page analytics allows you to open up each of your web pages and then scan various components. Percentage of clicks are shown against each link and you will get an overall idea of what people narrow down to, when on your site.

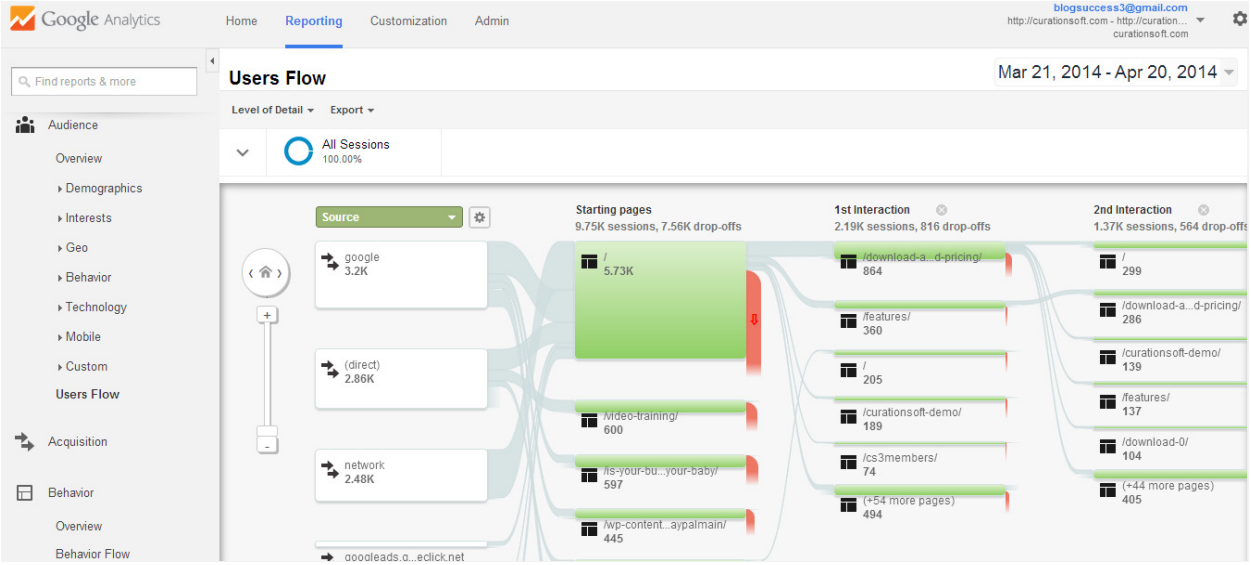
The "Behavior" section also gives you a fair idea of which operating systems and devices your users deploy to get to your site.

The behavior flow graphical depiction on Google Analytics shows you the interaction of your user with your site.

You choose a starting point. This could be a source (e.g. Facebook, organic search, direct) or country, or mobile device, or any other available parameter.

The graphic then shows the first interaction, i.e. the pages and the volume of users that first come into contact with this page. Of these users, you then get to see the percentage that move on to the next set of pages (second interaction) and so on. Flows are the volume of users who navigate between pages on your site. You can choose to view the statistics for each flow (i.e. between pages) or for each page, i.e. between flows.

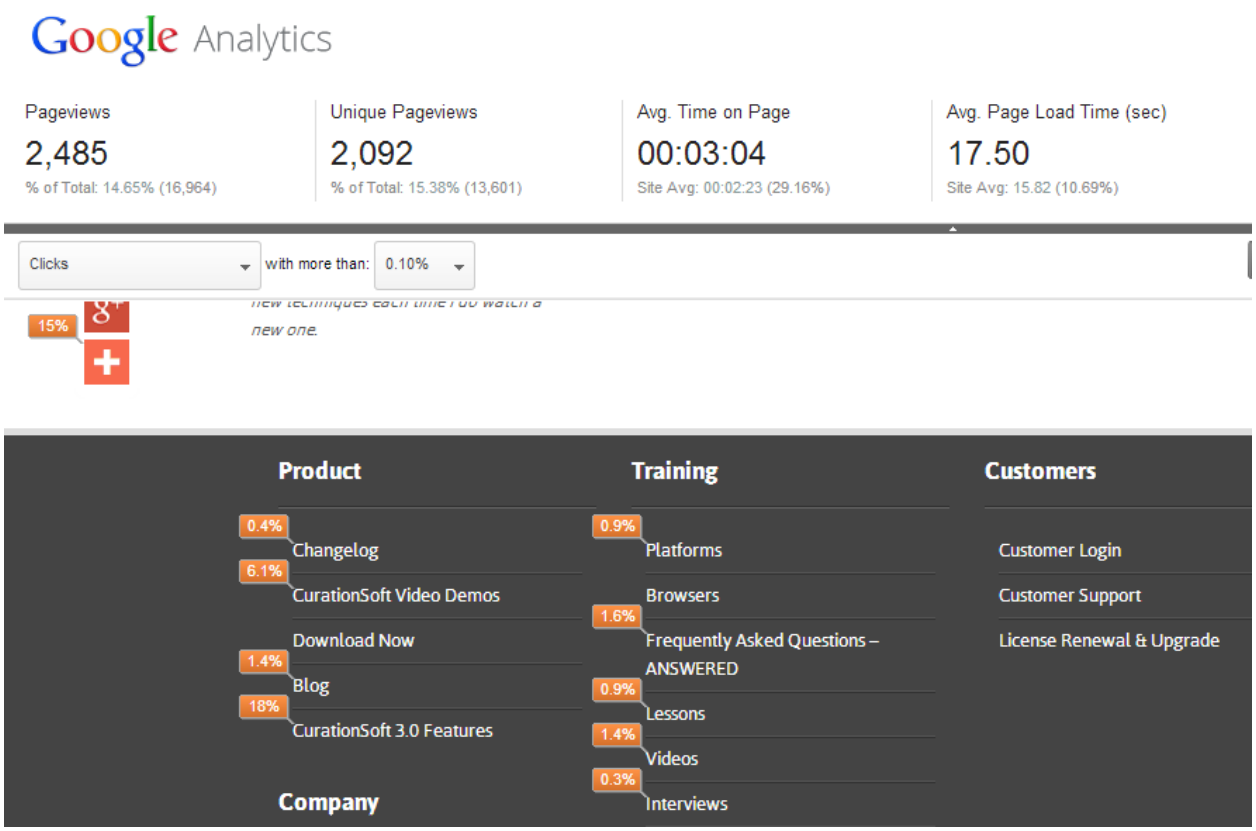
You can also choose to isolate or highlight (and this is really cool) traffic through a certain page, or explore the traffic that pass through that page.



In-page Analytics:

A very cool, recent feature in Google Analytics is the "in-page" analytics. As the name suggests, Google shows you the page or post on your site that you wish to analyze, and displays the percentage of clicks **on that page**.

The following is an example of Google Analytics in-page information:



This is the bottom of the page, where a bunch of links are provided. The brown shaded cells with white numbers are the percentage of clicks inserted by Google. Just below the black solid line you can set the threshold for percentages to be displayed. Summary data is shown on top.

You can work wonders with this kind of information.

Either you can take the high-clicks and further improve those pages for increased user interaction (further bolstering your strengths) OR you can go to the pages that have a lower percentage of clicks and improve those pages (improving the weak areas). OR you can do a combination of both.

And then you can come back and measure this page again after a month or so.

Conversion—is the place where you set your objectives and Google Analytics will then track user statistics through those paths.

In this book, we have illustrated the "conversion" by use of campaigns in mailing list manager, which is a similar functionality.

Hosting System

Some of the questions that can be answered by the information on your hosting system are:

A. How many visitors am I getting? Is this number growing month by month? During the month, is there a certain period when the visits go up? Is this spike

correlated to any action I perform (e.g. spike when I send out emails, or when I publish a new post)? What time of the day are users most engaged with my site—i.e. when should I send out emails, or publish posts?

B. Which sites are sending more visitors to my site? Did the distribution to aggregate sites help traffic growth? Which social media is performing well and which one is faltering in terms of sending traffic to my site?

C. Do I notice a drop in web crawler indexing? Are the visits from Google, MSN, Yahoo, etc. bots continuing and healthy?

D. What are the page counts against the various status codes—do I see a large number of broken links (404 code)?

E. Are my best pages or my most valuable posts continuing to produce the hits I expect?

F. Do I see an extraordinary number of visits from any new country or a change in the country pattern? What about visits from external sites—is there a new site suddenly contributing a large number of visitors?

Your hosting system provides the following information for your site:

* Unique visitors per month, page views and bandwidth used. This data is provided for each month, day of the month, day of the week and hour of the day. You also get to see this information for various countries from where people are visiting your site

* The visits information is also displayed for each of the IP addresses from where users have accessed your site.

* An important piece of information is the volume of visits by non-human users, i.e. search engine bots or web crawlers. For Googlebot, Msnbot, Yahoo! Slurp, and Alexa, it is quite exciting (in the beginning) to see these numbers go up. You get assurance that your site is being visited by these crawlers, indicating that they now "know" your site and are indexing your pages in their servers. It is from these indexes that your sites are ranked and displayed in search results.

* Your hosting system keeps track of all the file types that you have stored on your site. It also shows you the number of times each file was downloaded.

* For each page on your site, you get to see the number of visits, page size, number of entries to the page and exits from the page.

* You get to see the number of connections to your site from various sources. These could be social media or external sites. For external sites, you can see which sources contribute most visitors and which ones are absent or contribute very few visitors.

* A very important piece of information that your hosting system indicates is the number of hits on status code 404. The status code 404 is used to denote a broken link, better known as a "page not found" error. You must keep an eye on this number and minimize it to the extent possible.

INSIGHT: Your hosting system provides statistics and information from data collected at the back-end of your blog. Google Analytics observes interaction at the front end (WordPress site) of your blog—remember you had inserted the code that connected Google Analytics to your WordPress?

Mailing List Manager

You must have read the statement "the money is in the list." It is true and asking the following questions will help you "unearth" the money from the list and see it in your bank account.

Some of the questions that can be answered using the information in your mailing list manager are:

A. How many email IDs do I have that I can write to (or even sell a product) whenever I want?

B. Of these, how many have purchased from me in the past (along with their year-to-date revenue)?

C. For each of my broadcast emails, how many email IDs (and which ones) have opened the broadcast and how many have clicked on the links within the broadcast email?

D. How do I know which of my email IDs came through Facebook, which came directly from my website and various other sources?

E. How can I segment my email IDs according to their behavior, sources and preferences?

As you can see from the questions above, the mailing list manager stores valuable information related to a specific email (person). Your interactions with your mailing list are limited only by your imagination. You can extract very high value by sending out appropriate messages tailored to a small segment of your customers.

Once you start experimenting in that fashion, you will find out which message works effectively for spurring a certain segment into action.

TIP: You can create several segments in a mailing list manager.

Your mailing list manager stores the following information:

* It tells you how many subscribers you have, broken down by list, group, or tag. Each list or group is a basic classification. Usually you can link a specific sign-up form to a list or group and place the form on a web-page or Facebook. This establishes the source. You can use the list to interact with the source. For example, you can use your mailing list manager to send emails to the list called "Facebook." In this broadcast email, you will focus on some cool changes you've made in your Facebook or other forms of engagement on that forum.

Infusionsoft, one of most powerful list managers, simply uses tags for everything. You can then filter your list by presence of certain tags, and absence of certain tags. For example, you can find a list of users who signed up using Facebook, are interested in audio, enjoy football, but do not like golf, and then send your email communication to this fine-tuned list.

* Once you send a broadcast email, you can then look at the results of that broadcast. You can find out the specific email IDs that opened the mail (how many times they opened it), which ones clicked on the links in the email and the specific links that were clicked. You can then create new segments based on either opening (most likely a specific term or phrase in the subject line caused them to open) or on specific links that were clicked. If the same broadcast email contained a link to an e-book and another link to an audio book, then it is easy to mark a preference for audio or text and create segments accordingly for future engagement.

* When you send out sales emails, you can put a dollar figure against the clicks in that email. You can use these clicks in conjunction with the emails in your PayPal account and figure out the dollar value of your customer.

* Alternatively, you can set up automatic "thank you" emails from your mailing list manager and that broadcast will also tell you who bought from you.

* You can also segment those that do not open your sales emails at all, and find out how to engage those people differently. Similarly, you can engage those people who simply open your emails but do not click. Perhaps these folks will respond to a more enticing offer or a higher discount.

Mailing list managers provide excellent data based on mail recipient's behavior. It will tell you how many (and which) recipients opened the mail, which links were clicked, and also help you segment the list based on this information. You can then retrieve a certain segment (that you

saved) and then interact accordingly with that segment.

For example, if 250 recipients clicked on a link which provided an audio file (when there were two other links in the same email), you can create a segment called audio and save this 250 emails to that list.

Later on, when you want to sell something related to audio and to your blog topic, you can safely send that to this list.

An effective mailing list manager allows you to see detailed customer behavior and reaction to your email messages. It allows you to segment customers based on their behavior. Consequently, it allows you to interact with customers at a more granular (segmented) level either manually or even through automatic email sequences.

INSIGHT: Your mailing list manager ties the activity to an EMAIL- i.e. a named person on your list!

Your WordPress statistics

The single most important statistic that your WordPress site provides is your activities on the site.

This is the CAUSE. Reader behavior, interaction, page rankings, and product sales are all EFFECTS.

You need to tie the cause to the effect. And then based on the results, you can tweak the cause to optimize the effects.

Some of the questions that can be answered by the data from your WordPress site are:

A. How many posts were published during the period under review?
B. When the posts were published (date, day, time)?
C. Who was the author?
D. What focus keywords were covered in the posts?
E. Was the on-page SEO optimized for each post?

Social Media

On Facebook, you can click on "Insights" and extract information on your friends' behavior related to your posts.

The information is segregated into likes, reach, visits, posts and people.

You can tell from where your posts are being accessed, when the likes are issues and when your friends interact with your posts.

Insights on Facebook show both the CAUSE and the EFFECT, i.e. it shows when your posts were published and what your friends' reactions were to the post.

If you can spend sufficient time and get a good handle on the information provided by Google Analytics, your hosting service and your mailing list manager, you will have drawn enough conclusions to devise an actionable strategy.

CAMPAIGNS:

A campaign is a pre-programmed series of actions in your mailing list manager with decision points built-in at every step. The actions follow the behavior of prospective visitors and steer them towards certain intended objectives.

TIP: Every campaign MUST have at least one goal.

So let's break-down the definition and understand the components of a campaign:

A. It contains a series of pre-programmed actions on your part as a blogger. You need to decide these actions upfront. You can build one or a series of auto-responder emails which influence the reader to take some desired action, based on a previous action. These emails are all built ahead of time and are delivered automatically (hence the name, auto-responder).

B. Your automatic emails follow the behavior of the visitor so you must have a way of knowing the specific behavior or action that was performed by the customer

C. Every campaign must have at least one goal so your goal must be decided upfront.

D. Pre-defined tags must be in place. This will ensure that the behavior is captured appropriately in your mailing list manager. For example, if the user clicked on a certain link in a specific email, then you mark the visitor with a certain "tag" or slot her into a particular segment. If not, then you put them into a different segment for a different email message.

E. The mailing list manager is expected to automatically run the campaign. Your final segmentation should be available in the mailing list manager. You should be able to find out how many visitors clicked on certain links, unsubscribed from your list, reached your goal, etc.

What can you utilize campaigns for?

You can build campaigns for understanding your customer engagements and improving them. Any piece of information you need for which you manually write to a specific member can be converted into a campaign. The following objectives are examples that can successfully utilize campaigns:

A. Increase revenue, by converting a trial member into a paid customer
B. Increase revenue—upsell, downsell
C. Increase signups to your subscriber list
D. Creatively segment your list members

E. Reduce list unsubscribe rate

You can also set up an auto-responder campaign to trickle user support and to provide valuable insights related to the product and the marketplace. Time or date-based emails can also be sent to members for birthday greetings, periodic feedback on how they are doing or how they have been using your product.

You must set up campaigns for the following reasons:

*** Improving the open rate on your emails**

It is important that a high number of recipients open the emails you send for two simple reasons: (a) you want to get your message across and not have your email fall into a black hole, and (b) you want to minimize the costs of your mailing list service, i.e. why pay for emails that will not be opened at all?

Additionally, by sending content of interest to subscribers, you maintain their interest and lower the unsubscribe rate.

So by employing automatic tagging based on customer behavior, you want to ensure that you send the right content to the appropriate members (and not send ALL emails to ALL members).

Have "on-click" or "on-open" rules to segment subscribers based on their activity. Such activity could be related to subject line (for opens) and anchor-text (for click activities). For example, if your subject line clearly states that the email is about a survey, then any opens can be deemed to come from people who are interested in surveys.

Similarly, if your anchor text is something that indicates an audio book, then any subscriber that clicked the text (and went on to the hyperlink that contained the audiobook) can be tagged with "audio" or similar, to indicate their interest in audio.

So when you come out with an audiobook, you know who to send out the message to.

*** Increasing opportunities for cross-selling other products**

As your customer consumes the auto-responder emails, the refund-period slowly diminishes.

When you feel that opening the fifth or sixth email indicates the end of the refund period, you can start sending messages of other interesting, related and valuable products to the customer.

A good example of this is Amazon's "customers who bought this item also bought" feature.

Amazon uses that functionality to "lead" the customer to the next campaign with a goal of selling the next product to the same customer. Similarly, you can line up appropriate products to sell to customers, and hook up the next auto-responder campaign to the end of the first campaign.

*** Increasing customer engagement**

All campaigns need not have a revenue goal. Some campaigns can be designed simply to

engage the customer and to show them that you care.

With the powerful mailing list managers, you can achieve such objectives at no ongoing cost. Once the emails are set up and have been tested thoroughly, they will provide value even when you forget they are in place.

For example, if you send out a courtesy email scheduled three months after purchase, the customer will be pleasantly surprised you thought of them. If you follow good email engagement practices, the customer will get a "personalized" email and will be open to spreading a good word about your site.

*** Reducing the unsubscribe rate on your mailing list**

Every time you have a member that unsubscribed, you want to seek out the member and find out the reason. For this to be "campaigned," you need a set of pre-defined reasons that would be displayed to the member. You may even present another option depending on a specific reason (for example, provide a discounted offer, if high price was the reason indicated).

Over time, as you collect the various reasons for unsubscribing, you can discern the pattern and put in place appropriate measures to reduce your unsubscribe rate.

*** Reducing chances of a refund request**

If you do NOT send emails, then the customer is left on their own to work with your product.

Depending on their competence, the complexity of your product and their willingness to figure out functionality, some customers may choose to give up early on.

Sending periodic emails builds trust, guides the customer through the product and allows them to extract more value from it.

In the absence of all this, the customer may get frustrated and request a refund.

Refunds damage the product image in the marketplace, lower revenues and add costs (for supporting the customer, issuing refund, etc.).

Engaging a customer during the period soon after purchase keeps them interested and prevents them from seeking a refund.

You must set up as many emails as needed to cover the refund period. Don't overdo the emails. For example, if you have a 30-day refund period, do not send 30 emails. Four or five should be sufficient.

You need to experiment with this and test the volume, content and frequency of emails to determine what levels achieve optimum results.

Campaign example using auto-responders

As an illustration, let us consider the campaign to convert a "trial" member into a customer.

We plan to achieve this in five steps and each step contains an auto-responder email designed to influence a certain action by the reader.

Goal: Convert trial member into a customer.

Background: You allow "free" members to sample your software with the idea that they

will like the software, see value in it and then purchase it.

What you intend to do is provide the free member with the complete version of software for a trial period of two weeks. With the help of auto-responder feature, you intend to engage the member systematically and strategically. This is done by way of sending well-crafted emails at periodic intervals and work on the conversion of the free member into a paid customer.

Plan: During the two-week "evaluation" period, the member gets five emails, which is the campaign. The primary objective of the campaign is to sell the software to the customer for the full-price. If that is not possible, then offer a discounted price and get some revenue out of the customer. Failing that, the customer should be marked as "free" and subject to affiliate product marketing.

The following table briefly illustrates the five-step campaign:

Mail	Reader's state of mind	Message in the Email	Auto-Responder function	Customer's Action	Result, Conclusion
1	Just downloaded the free version of the software; feeling excited	Thank you! Send more details on how to use the system and some additional guidance	Email with links to relevant guides	May click on pdf guide May click on video tutorial	Tag with "pdf" Tag with "video"
2	Customer used the guide and the software. Curious to know other functionality, and advanced actions	Provide advanced tips. Talk about what else can be done with the software. Get the customer excited	Email contains links to other sites, news articles, future enhancements for the tool, etc. but no "buy" button	Customer clicks on links provided in email	Customer is appropriately tagged for future, targeted marketing
3	Customer has tasted the tool and even input some data. May have become slightly dependent on the tool. Could be inclined to purchase	Introduce a slight panic about others that may get ahead. Induce purchase	Email contains the "buy" button, perhaps more than one, placed prominently. Also any data or comparison that highlights the value of this software in comparison to other similar tools	Customer purchases product	Tag customer appropriately
4	Customer is sitting on the fence. You need a firm push to spur the customer into making a purchase	Indicate upfront that the trial period will expire. The customer had better buy now or regret later. Reference number of users (i.e. competition) that are getting ahead	Email contains multiple "buy" buttons and data on number of other users and other software	Customer purchases product	Tag customer appropriately
5	Customer has still not purchased. Perhaps the price is too high, and they may be expected to buy if a discount was offered	Let them know that as a special case a discount is offered. Email is signed by a higher official	This mail should have an empathetic message and soft tone. Single out the customer as special, and this case as a one-time and ensure the "buy" button provides the discounted price	Customer purchases product at discounted offer price	Tag customer appropriately to separate this customer from the full price purchaser

If customer does NOT purchase the product in spite of the discounted offer, then tag customer as a "free" subscriber, downgrade from full version to basic/free version and line up other general marketing emails to this customer (as part of the general group).

At any point the subscriber may unsubscribe from the list altogether. Mailing list managers are built to abort auto-responder emails to unsubscribed list members.

How this example influences the members' mindset:

In this example, you are influencing the user by a series of deliberate messages.

In the beginning, the member is on the "outside," looking in. This person comes in thinking of getting a very basic version just to try out the software (because they have read your blogs, seen the testimonials, maybe even compared your software with that of the competition).

This person is curious at the beginning.

Immediately, they are thrilled at getting the full version, albeit for a trial period. The trial period is disclosed upfront, so there is some trust that is building up.

Now the curiosity slowly converts into thrill and then trust.

The next step is to guide the user with some valuable tips. This is an educational sales approach. The user is "learning" about the software and the topic, too. Even if there is one aspect that makes the user say "Wow, this is cool," you would have achieved your objective of building up trust in the software.

Next, you are allowing a short period, say a week, for the user to try out the product. In this time the person works on it, inputs some data and there is some dependency that gets built in. After all, every tool is intended to solve a problem, make work easier and generally help you do more with less. Once you get used to a tool, it becomes very difficult to do without it. For example, try writing without using MS-Word (or a comparable tool you are used to), painting without a brush (tool) or using a paper-board instead of a whiteboard.

You want to make the user get become dependent on the product.

Now the user's mind has progressed (or is influenced in the following manner).

Curiosity > thrill > trust > dependency

The following step is to remind her that this is not for free, and that a purchase is expected in case she wants continued use of the tool. This can be accompanied by a message that conveys future benefits of the tool, while at the same time a subtle reminder of the sale ("buy button").

At this time, you can also remind the user of the completion that has such tools at their disposal. Mention the competition and how your tool can bolster capabilities as this will also work towards getting a sale.

A serious email at this stage, with a combination of sale, competition capabilities and panic (i.e. upcoming expiry of the trial period), is very useful to induce a purchase.

The final progression of the mindset that influences a purchase is:

Curiosity > thrill > trust > dependency > competition > panic > sale!

To allow for a user who has some financial issues or is simply too busy, you can have a trial period extension email.

Basically this email says that you are aware they are busy and would like to give them another week to try out the software. This shows empathy and further solidifies trust.

In this case, your campaign would look like the following:

Curiosity > thrill > trust > dependency > competition > panic > extension > sale!

Also, you may allow a discount either in place of the extension or after the extension. Since the cost of producing one more copy of the software is next to nothing, you can provide a good discount at this stage. This assumes that the only reason for the user still not buying the software could be financial issues. After all, it is better to get some revenue than none from this

user.

Curiosity > thrill > trust > dependency > competition > panic > extension > discount > sale!

However, not all users will buy after all these auto-responder emails. Some reasons could be:

A. They did not open emails promptly upon receipt. Either they missed some or all, or opened one or two out of sequence
B. The member is just not your target customer
C. They never tried out the software, although they got your emails
D. Other reasons

While you cannot do much about the above reasons, the scale of the Internet and the power of auto-responders (i.e. little to no ongoing effort to send these emails) will help convert a lot more users into customers than you would otherwise.

Detailed Campaign:

First email is sent soon after download. It contains a thank you note, instructions for download of the software and the user guide.

Measure/monitor: source from where the member saw your product and number of downloads, i.e. how many "free" members actually download the software (you can assume that if they download, they begin the evaluation)

Second email is sent a few days after download. This email contains a few advanced tips and insights. Purpose is to make the customer better understand the software, use it more efficiently and understand the value of the software. If the user has interacted with the software (i.e. input data, generated reports, connected other sites to it), then the email highlights the value that the software would have provided to the user.

Measure/monitor: email open rate, unsubscribes

The third email should contain a straight up "buy" button. By this time the user has understood the functionalities, features and value of the software and used it. The user should be in a good position to decide whether to buy it.

Measure/monitor: Email open rate, number of clicks on the "buy" button, revenue generated and unsubscribes

Action: As soon as user has clicked on the buy button, "move" them to another segment in your list (i.e. take them OFF this campaign, so they do not get subsequent automatic emails). You are assuming that clicking the "buy" button has resulted in a purchase. A sophisticated campaign can separate between a mere click on the "buy" button from an actual purchase. Clicks without an actual purchase will result in the member receiving subsequent emails.

The fourth email is a panic email. In this email, you stress that the "trial" version will expire soon. To continue using the software and take advantage of its benefits, the member must purchase the full version. Highlight the "competition" that has purchased this tool and how the

competition is getting stronger as a result.

The purpose of this email is to get the "lazy" member who procrastinated in taking action.

Measurements are same as those in the previous email.

The fifth email is to extract some revenue out of the "ones who got away." You are now left with those members who feel the price is too high (they have all seen the value by using the software) or feel that the software does not serve their purpose.

These members cannot be expected to pay full price, so this email offers a discount.

You can offer to extend the evaluation period or provide a discount (with a limited time for purchase, of course) linked to a different "buy" button. This button takes them to a separate purchase page, which has the lower price.

Measure/monitor: Email open rate, number of clicks on the "buy" button, revenue generated and unsubscribes, if any

Action: If the member clicks on this buy button and purchases the software at a discount, move them into another "discount" segment (these are members that will respond to discounts) and take them OFF the campaign.

If the member still does not click the buy button, remove them from the campaign, take away the software full-version-access privileges, and move them to the free, general segment. To this general segment, you would freely market affiliate products for a commission.

Some additional notes:

1. For each email, write as if you are speaking with one person. While the emails are automatically sent based on pre-determined events, it must feel like a person is talking to the member.

2. Design your measurements to know which emails are eliciting clicks on "buy" buttons and which ones are causing "unsubscribes." Then modify the email based on your findings.

3. For each unsubscribe, see if you can send a note to the member seeking feedback. This could help you understand features that could be added, price adjustment, other competitive product, etc.

4. For the successful purchases, you must have a new campaign for the new customer. The goal of the new campaign should be to initially eliminate the return option and to cross-sell other products or services at a later date.

5. Clicking on the "buy" button does not mean that the purchase was completed. Sometimes visitors go to the purchase page, and then re-think their decision.

Your mailing list manager should also be linked to your WordPress and payment system (PayPal) to distinguish the actual purchase, from a simple click on the "buy" button. This is of

great value, since you may now have some visitors who are going to the purchase page, but not actually completing the purchase. Exploring the reasons for this could lead to the set up of another campaign, which can bring in revenues that would otherwise never be realized.

Free giveaway > auto-responder campaign > customer buys first product > second auto-responder campaign > customer buys second product > and so on

Key Metrics to follow:

A. Which source yields the most number of downloads (and which yields the fewest)
B. Number of sign-ups/downloads and unsubscribes per day/week/month
C. Revenue generated per day/week/month
D. Percentage of members who become customers

10. REALIZE VALUE FROM YOUR BLOG

With solid data analytics, effective campaigns and your first product in place, your blog is now well-positioned to realize much higher value.

To accomplish this, you can consider the following:

1. Multiply revenues from a single hit product
2. Find more and more products to sell to your list (affiliate products)
3. Get affiliates to market your products to their list

1. MULTIPLY PRODUCT REVENUE:

So now you have launched your first product.

Let's assume that your e-book is a super-hit. Let's further assume that you are making a ton of sales in the first two to three months.

You can multiply the revenues from this product, and extract more value out of this hit product, by employing the following methods:

A. Offer the product in different formats
B. Launch the product in different geographies
C. Make the product available to your customers through different channels
D. Bundle products
E. Repeat the launch process every few months, and during holiday seasons

Product formats:

Check if your hit product can be presented in a different form. For example, once you have a book (an informational product) for download, the next thing is to build an audio-book. The audio-book can be a downloadable offering or even a physically mailable CD set. Many readers have long commutes and the audio-book will ensure that your book's potential is further realized by tapping into this customer segment.

Not all products lend themselves to different forms. But, where possible, this will provide additional revenues.

You can very easily convert the e-book into an audio book, downloadable from your website. All you need is a microphone and you just read the book aloud and build an mp3 file out of it.

Now you can list the mp3 file as a new product on your site, build a dedicated page for it (with full on-page SEO) and list it on various audio sites such as iTunes, Sony, Zune, etc.

Push this out via emails to your mailing list, especially to the "audio" customer segments.

You can also outsource the build of an audio CD, and for a small fee, make the audio CD available for shipping.

What can be done for audio can also be done for video. Video can either be downloadable or purchased as DVDs.

CDs and DVDs can be easily gifted and therefore you can charge a higher price for these as compared to the downloadable version.

So, once you have a super product, i.e. high value (as determined by your initial product sales), you can convert that product into other formats and multiply revenue.

The important and non-negotiable part is the value provided by the product.

That must be in place, so the rest can follow.

Different geographies:

Generally European and Asian customers like what U.S. customers like. And what appeals to customers in Australia can be sold to U.S. customers.

People are people.

Wal-Mart started out in a small town in rural U.S. and fine-tuned their "everyday low prices" retail model.

Guess what? Everywhere in the world people love low prices.

The same is the case with Starbucks coffee, Lindt chocolates, Canon cameras and Chanel perfumes. The same is also the case with music, books, art and movies.

To reach different geographies, you can use the advertisement model. Find out the best places where you can put advertisements. As always, you can test and revise your advertisement strategy. Google Analytics and Infusionsoft campaigns can help you quickly discover what is working and what must be changed.

Of course, you need to work out the local language (building your site, advertisements, how to appeal to different cultures) and manage the local currency requirements if there are any.

For example, if you have a meditation site that is producing great revenues locally in Australia (i.e. your site has a ".com.au" domain name), then you can expand to the UK, U.S. and Canada by procuring a ".com" domain name.

Another way to reach additional geographies is to present your site in different languages. If your service or product does NOT have a strong cultural bias, you should be able to extend your product to additional geographies.

As an example, if your site offers reviews on Harley-Davidson bikes and makes revenues by selling Harley-Davidson merchandise, then it will be very difficult to market this say, in Asia. Harley-Davidson tribes are not as plentiful in existence in Asia as they are in the USA.

Distribution channels:

Channels are the way by which your customer gets access to your products. For example, books used to be available in bookstores for purchase. Then you have the online stores such as Amazon. So two different channels are available for books.

For informational products, online is the main channel and you could provide a physical hard-format which can then be displayed for purchase in stores. This would be the second channel to distribute your product.

For example, you can list your product on ClickBank, the world's largest online store for informational products. Listing on ClickBank also helps affiliates find your product which they can sell to their lists. Amazon is another avenue where you can list your product. Then, if your product is an eBook, you can also approach Wal-Mart, Barnes & Noble and other book-sellers to carry this on their online sites.

ITunes, Sony, Zune, LearnOutLoud, Yahoo, etc. are sites where you can list your audio product.

Ensure that the physical version (published book) and CD version are available on the shelves at Wal-Mart, Barnes & Noble, etc., while the audio version is available on iTunes.

MORE CHANNELS = MORE SALES

Bundle products:

Bundling products is a great way to sell more and gain a spike in revenue. This is a useful technique to employ during product launches.

When your main product is about to be launched, try to gather a bunch of other products. These can be your other products or affiliates' products. Offer these as a bonus, a one-time-offer or an accessory when users purchase the main product.

The bonuses can be free or heavily discounted to generate more interest in the launch. The one-time-offer can be an upsell, i.e. a higher additional price, or a downsell, i.e. a lower additional price.

The following image shows what a product upsell and downsell looks like during a product launch:

Customer purchases the Front-end lite version for $17. Customer is then prompted for a one time offer (OTO) of $37 as an upsell (like the famous McDonalds' "would you like fries with that?"). If customer does not purchase the upsell, then a down sell for $27 is presented.

While the customer is still in the purchase "zone", a second OTO for $67 is also presented as an up-upsell. The downsell for this is the $47 product.

Once you have the main product ready, you can also solicit products from your partners or affiliates to "form" the bundle. They benefit from additional sales; you benefit from generating buzz and sales for your main product. You also gain additional sales from your affiliates when they sell your product to their lists.

Repeat the launch process every few months

Remember your list when you marketed the product during initial launch? Did all 100% of your list open the emails? How about the ones that did not click on the link to purchase?

Three months after launch is a good time to hit the list again. Send one set of emails to those who opened the original set of emails but did not click the link. These are people who

were interested in the product but did not feel compelled enough to buy.

Send a different set of emails to those who did not open the original email at all. For these list members, treat the second emails as a fresh launch.

CAUTION: Your mailing list segment (CRM system) should tell you who has already purchased the product. DO NOT send marketing emails selling the same product to those who have already purchased it.

FACT: Very few people buy at the first email. You need to send repeated reminders to get someone to click the buy button.

During Christmas season (and Thanksgiving in the U.S.), consider sending out a fresh set of emails to free subscribers in your list. Throw in a creative discount offer and bundle products to make it appealing. As always, segment customers and tailor messages for maximum impact.

This results in a revenue boost for the same existing products. There is some magic about a holiday offer which appeals to shoppers.

FACT: Once you have a successful product, your opportunities to create multiple additional revenue streams are limited only by your creativity and execution.

2. SELLING AFFILIATE PRODUCTS TO YOUR LIST:

Affiliate Sale framework can be broken down into the following four activities:

1. Being ready for affiliate marketing

Before you start selling affiliate products to your list, you need to have a few things in place, and these are:

A. Customer segmentation—by geography, gender, preferences, even age-group

B. Deep understanding of your customer behavior—when they like to see emails, what kinds of mails (long stories, short bullet lists/posts), price point or price range that they are comfortable buying

C. Tracking mechanism—to know which customers opened those emails, which ones clicked on the link and which ones actually purchased the product. The last part will require reconciliation with your affiliate commission revenue

D. Well-oiled mailing list in place—you will use this list to notify your list members of the product that you desire to sell to them

E. Sale/Payment framework—using a service such as ClickBank or PayPal linked to your bank account gives you a solid, secure and trustworthy framework

2. Identifying the affiliate product to sell

There are a bunch of sites where you can find affiliate products that you can sell to your list such as ClickBank, Amazon and Warrior Forum.

Each of these sites will offer you products and provide you with some details on product performance. It's highly important you check out these products before you market those to your list.

While there are certain key elements specific to each of these sites, in general you want to check out the following:

What to check for	What is better	Notes
Functionality of the product	Must be aligned to your blog topic or your customer needs	Whether the product is physical or informational, Facebook marketing or gadget-related, this should be in sync with what your members/customers are looking for
Date of launch of the product	More recent	Beware of entirely new products (untested) or very old one (sales or support may be discontinued)
Number or volume of sales thus far, for the product	Higher	Indicates adoption of the product and that the product is in demand
Conversion	Higher	Can be easily sold
Return rate	Lower	A low return rate generally indicates that customers like the product and/or the quality is good
List price	Depends on your customer preferences	Some lists respond to single-digit pricing, others do not mind big-ticket prices
Affiliate commission	Higher	Obviously so. Also check whether re-billing (recurring payments by customer) also yields recurring affiliate commission payments
Product rating/reviews	Large number of highly rated reviews	For Amazon, ClickBank etc. you can find these easily. For other products, you may have to visit the seller's website (be aware that the testimonials will be biased – no one displays a bad feedback)
Seller rating	Higher/Better	You will have to piece this from comments in discussion forums

While ClickBank and Amazon allow you to pick out and market any product that they have listed, other sites may want you to seek the seller's approval before you can market the product.

Also, in some sites, the seller may have the choice to send you the sale-commission immediately or after a delay.

As an affiliate marketer, you need to check out the various sites, their look/feel, ease of use, terms and conditions and become familiar.

As with most things, you will settle down into one or a few sites and perform most of your functions there.

3. Checking out the product

This is a very important activity.

Once you have identified the product to sell, try it out yourself.

I have found that when you try the product yourself and really like it, your feelings are reflected in your email to your list. This of course, helps to sell the product better.

Check out reviews on Amazon. On other sites, ask the seller for an evaluation copy. Many sellers usually provide a trial version or login credentials for a limited period. They should provide this easily since you are working to help sell their product, after all.

Some sellers are wary of working with untested affiliate marketers, so you may have to provide some details on your list or explain how you plan to sell their product.

Conversely, if you are trying out a product from a new seller, test the product and support more than you normally would. Submit a support ticket and see the quality and timeliness of response. Watch videos or read their books if it is informational. Do some real work with their software. Test out their website and delivery mechanism.

Also get the product sale site links and make sure that your affiliate ID is incorporated securely. The last thing you want is for your list to buy and for you to not get the commission that you are legally entitled to!

TIP: No matter what the product does or how their support team performs, your customer will hold you responsible for anything that goes wrong.

4. Sending out the mails

Now that you have finalized the product to sell, you have a few more tasks to perform.

* Craft the email and subject line
* Get the links to the product sale page from the seller
* Adjust the link in your Pretty Link plugin to get your custom, shortened link
* Ensure your email contains the correct link
* Schedule your mailing and decide on when and how many emails to send

For products from new, unproven affiliates, you can choose to send to one small segment of your list to check out three things:

A. Whether the product appeals to your list

B. Whether the seller has set up the product, sale and support machinery effectively, and

C. Whether the affiliate commissions are properly distributed and make their way into your Paypal or bank account

5. Monitoring the product (and affiliate) performance

As with most mailings, you need to monitor the following:

A. Open rate of the emails. See whether your "list" is responding well to the mailing. If not, then try to see what the issue is. If it is timing or a sub-optimal subject line, then you can easily fix that

B. Click rate. Ensure that folks have at least one link in the email to click!

C. Whether any support tickets are raised on your forum (because this is where the customer received the email in the first place) and how you can address those

If the response is encouraging, you may want to send out a few more mailings. After all, you can make more commission if the product appeals to your customer.

Your customers must get value for their purchases. They buy based on your recommendation because they believe in your expertise and they have trust in you.

You want to keep this level of trust high.

This is done by consistently and constantly engaging your customers with the latest happening in your topics, providing them with review of products and sending tips and tricks to make their lives easier.

This is the magic formula to keeping your list vibrant, active and growing.

If all you do is send affiliate product sale emails, then the trust will start dwindling and you will notice a higher rate of people unsubscribing from your list.

So use the affiliate sales emails sparingly, and make sure that they add value to your users.

3. FINDING AFFILIATES WHO WILL MARKET YOUR PRODUCT TO THEIR

LIST:

Affiliates can be found on various forums such as Warrior, ClickBank and JVZoo.

While you need to establish a contractual relationship on Warrior and JVZoo with a simple "apply and get approved" type of contract, on ClickBank there is no such restriction.

On ClickBank any listed product can be picked up by any member for ongoing sale to their list.

For affiliate sales you are required to list your product, state the affiliate commission you are willing to pay, and if needed, approve the member.

Building a list of affiliates and nurturing that relationship helps build a nice sales force for your product. This proves useful when you have upcoming products to launch.

The relationship becomes a give-and-take one since they want you to market their product to your list as well. Therefore, it is important to establish relationships only with affiliates who are in the same space as you are, or whose products complement yours. That way your customers benefit from those offerings.

For your products, you have to indicate the affiliate commission you are willing to offer along with your listing. It also helps to follow the discussion on various forums (Warrior Forum is one such place), find out which affiliates would be best positioned to market your product and then go about contacting them.

As you check out affiliates' products, they would also check out your product before they send it out to their list.

So ensure that you have all "email swipe," sales pages, and affiliate marketing setup ready to enable affiliates to easily sell your product.

11. BEYOND BLOG SUCCESS

Once your blog is a success and is humming along, what next?

You can consider the following initiatives to further improve your blog and also nudge your enterprise towards a logical conclusion:

1. Further improving your blog:

A. Redesign the site—better look/feel, functionality, performance

B. Move towards a contract advertising model

C. Consider a membership model

D. Increase your site presence and reputation as an authority on the topic

2. Acquiring another business or site

3. Exiting the business by selling your site

For 2 and 3, you need to understand how businesses and more importantly, sites are valued. While business valuation is (relatively) easier, we will cover blog (and website) valuation later in this chapter.

1a. REVAMP & RE-ENERGIZE YOUR SITE:

Over a period of time, certain parts of your blog will begin to deteriorate. You can set up a periodic review process to identify areas where you can undertake rebuilding activities.

Some areas to consider are:

A. Look at your old(er) posts. Some of those could do with a rewrite. Some of those could be set up to invite fresh comments. You can even take one of your high-performing posts and re-examine the information in there for relevance in the current period. For example, if you had made a prediction in an earlier post, you can check out whether it became true. Going into the reasons for the prediction failing, or turning out to be true could be another interesting post and give you more content to post.

B. Just like you would remodel your home, give your site a facelift. Consider a change in design and addition of new features. Ensure that you keep the brand intact, while you try to improve the customer experience.

C. Send out a survey to your customers and find out which areas they'd like to see an

improvement in. As always, come up with a set of hypotheses and leverage the survey to confirm or refute those. Finally, go with what your customers would like to see. That is the surest way to know that what you are doing is in their interest.

D. Get a website assessment performed. Analyze information in your Google Analytics and figure out which pages are slow in loading. Work towards improving performance for those pages. Also consider moving larger size media files such as videos to an alternate site, and not keep them on your WordPress site. This helps to improve the page load time. Google recognizes faster loading pages as ones that give a good customer experience.

E. Look at your products as well. Find out which eBooks can do with a revision or even a rewrite. For software, you can work on the next release with improved and added functionality. You can set up a major launch when you release any product or even the re-designed site.

The goal is to create a buzz amongst the customer base to further enhance interest and engagement on your site.

1b. CONTRACT ADVERTISING:

Plenty of Fish is a dating site popular in the UK, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Ireland and the US. POF was not the first dating site to come online. What POF did was it found a huge scalable market for dating services, differentiated themselves from the competition, and found that they could make their money on advertisements alone.

There is only one reason why businesses advertise on POF. That is the insanely large number of eyeballs that view POF site on a given month. The number is two billion, yes, BILLION page views per month (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PlentyofFish).

POF simply negotiates advertisements on a monthly or quarterly basis.

They simply nurture their platform and ensure that a large number of members are always online, thus ensuring value to advertisers.

With such a large viewership, they can afford to negotiate higher rates with advertisers and thus enhance revenues.

TIP: Know exactly what business you are in, and where you are best positioned to generate revenues. Know your unique capability and highlight the factors that differentiate you from the competition.

Once you have a sizeable page visits per month, approach companies in your niche for advertisements.

For your general customers, seek out merchandise providers (e.g.. Bike Line, if your blog is

on biking; Gerber, if your blog is on child-care or infant-parenting; Coleman, if your blog is camping-related).

Negotiate bulk-period advertising with such partners. Partners would want to know your customers spend, number of customers, number of times you engage with your list and other pertinent information.

1c. MEMBERSHIP MODEL:

A very attractive business model is based on recurring membership fees.

A membership based business provides a consistent and predictable revenue inflow. Membership also forces you to continuously think about adding high-value services to your customers.

Not all products or services can be converted into a membership model.

In a membership model, customers avail of similar or different services every period for which they pay membership fees. Informative material, additional services, access to the same services to carry out transactions are reasons to have a membership.

On the front-end, ensure that you have all components setup to attract traffic and then convert them into member-customers.

On the tail end, when members unsubscribe, ensure that you can tap into the reasons why they are leaving.

In between, you should have a small, core group of members who stay on from month to month.

Then you simply have to ensure that the inflows on the front-end are greater than the outflows at the tail end.

Over a period of time, you should compute the period for which the core remains static. This will help you compute the Customer Lifetime Value of the membership. Whether it is six months or a year, you will then know how much revenue a customer provides to your business.

This is a very important metric, and it allows you to work out the services to be offered and the price to charge each member.

Membership models require sophisticated membership software and also a high level of integration.

DAP, S2member and WishList members are tools that "manage" memberships. They control the content provided to members and also the grouping of members. This software also integrates well with WordPress on the back-end as well as with mailing list managers such as AWeber and Infusionsoft.

1d. AUTHORITY SITE:

Have you noticed how some sites get quoted as an authority and their statistics, information or data simply get accepted without question?

Examples are McKinsey reports, Gartner Data, U.S. government BLS (Bureau of Labor Statistics) reports, and other similar authority reports.

As your site grows in stature, maturity and value, people will slowly start recognizing you and your site as an authority in the topic that your site covers.

You can boost your authority presence by doing the following:

A. Undertake speaking engagements. As your customer reach grows and you make your desire known to take on speaking engagements, you will get opportunities to speak. In addition to gaining publicity and generating revenue, such engagements afford opportunities to interact with prospective and current customers in person.

B. Chris Guillebeau conducts the World Domination Summit every year in Portland, Oregon drawing hundreds of attendees. As your site is recognized more and more as an authority, you can organize seminars inviting other celebrities and then publish insights.

C. Pick a date each year, or each month and start publishing insights. Be transparent in how the data is collected and the conclusions that are drawn. Make this valuable and provide real statistics that people can use. Technorati, WordPress, etc. publish statistics related to blogs and you can publish similar statistics on the topic of your blog.

D. You can set up a show on your site where you can feature interesting personalities from your blog topic. Interviewing them in person, publishing transcripts and videos of such interviews and allowing people to pose questions to these candidates helps further establish your authority on the topic.

VALUING A BUSINESS:

The simplest and quickest way to arrive at a "floor price" of any business is to determine the liquidation value of all assets.

This number does not take into account any future potential or intrinsic value of the business. It is simply the sum total of the proceeds that can be expected upon an immediate (usually distress) sale of the assets.

For a brick and mortar business, with tangible (physical) products, valuation is relatively easier.

For web businesses with informational products, you need to be creative with valuing the business.

When you are valuing your business for sale, you want to value it on the higher side.

To accomplish this, ensure that all future potential is accounted for. The best place to document these is in the financial projections.

To arrive at a good estimate of a site's value, you need to consider about four to five different types of valuations, lay them all one over the other, and then come up with the best price that you think the site is worth.

There are other factors that also influence the final transaction price such as:

A. How badly the buyer or acquirer wants to go ahead with the purchase

B. Presence of other buyers

C. Financial vs. strategic buyer—strategic buyer can afford a higher price

The following section explains how to value a site while undergoing the acquisition process. Understand that you want to value the target acquisition site lower, since you are the purchaser.

Compute valuation based on at least five different methods as follows:

A. Current listings—what the market expects to pay for similar businesses. Flippa and AppBusinessBrokers.com provide such listings.

B. Current completed transactions—recent completed transactions indicating actual dollars that buyers have paid for recent purchases. These comparables can be sourced from sites such as AppBusinessBrokers.com.

C. Net income multiple for the current business. Usually this number is anywhere between 12x and 36x, depending on future potential of the business.

D. Third-party valuation sites and what they value the business you are about to acquire. Sites such as Webuka, SiteWorthIt, Websitestatschecker and SiteWorthChecker provide such information.

E. DCF (discounted cash flow), based on historical financials and future projections.

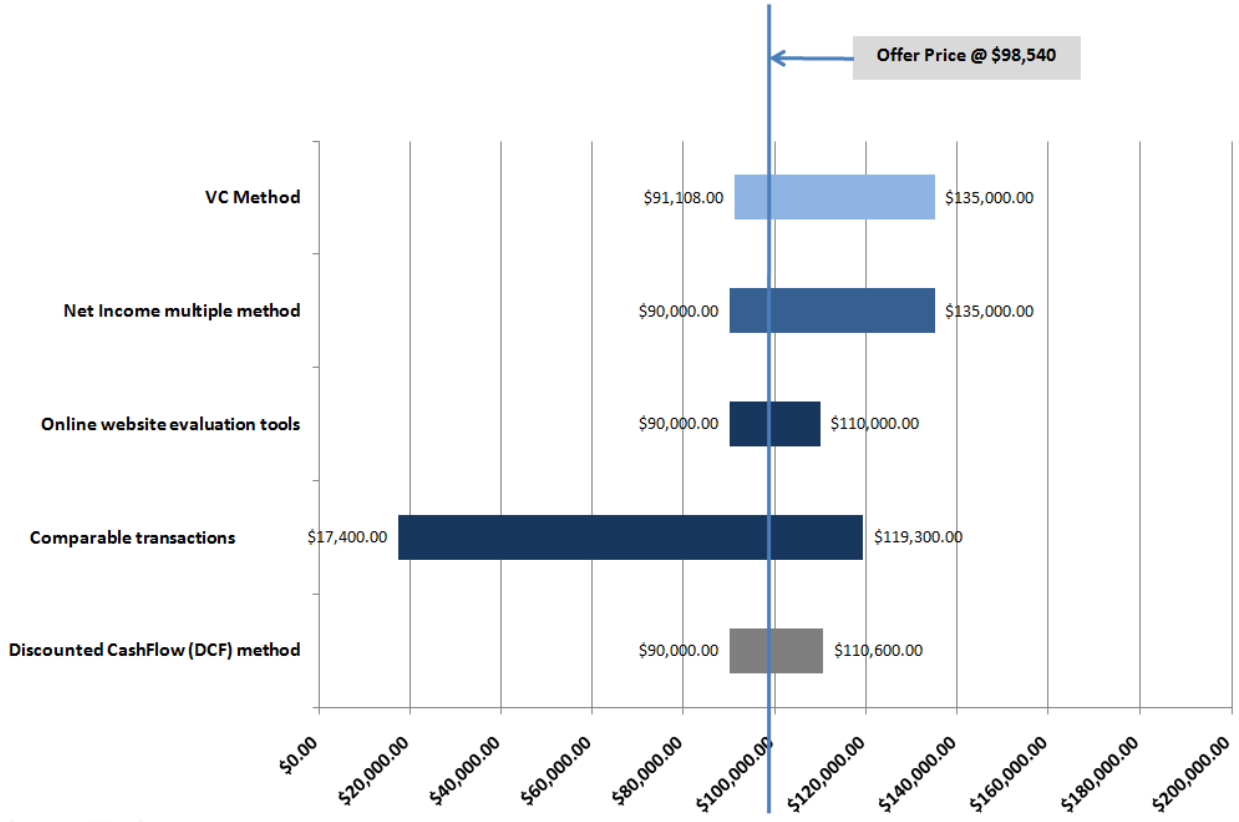
For (c) and (e) above, ensure you have the base case, best and worst case estimates. For the others, pick at least three appropriate values.

Then you must build a "football-field" presentation of the valuation and arrive at the price that you are willing to pay for the business.

FACT: Don't rely on the sellers' valuation estimate. Sellers will always look for higher valuation.

TIP: During the negotiations, it's not recommended to "nickel and dime" the seller. A desperate seller may sell to you for less, but you will find unwillingness when it comes to knowledge transfer and post-sale support. In our experience, you will need the seller's assistance at least for up to six months or so.

A typical football field and the offer price, looks like the following:



Tips for a successful acquisition:

A. Build acquisition into your business plan/strategy—acquisition should neither be a spontaneous decision nor an afterthought

B. Know exactly what kind of businesses/websites would make sense to acquire. Lay down well-thought-out, specific parameters for acquisitions

C. Give adequate time and attention to the due diligence process. Be prepared to walk away if any of your "must-have" parameters are not met by the proposed deal

D. Understand exactly what you are getting from the acquisition and how that will be integrated into your operations—e.g. new product, synergistic list of customers, new/additional capabilities, etc.

E. Perform your own valuation of the business, but also secure an unbiased, third-party valuation

F. Focus on the present condition and past financials of the target. Your objective is to lower the purchase price, so do NOT lay emphasis on the seller's future

projections

G. Negotiate the deal terms and ensure you have good legal representation

H. Complete the acquisition as quickly as possible. Utilize a third-party with proven service to ensure transfer of ownership such as escrow.com

I Integrate the acquired assets into your operations as quickly and seamlessly as possible

TIP: Most acquisitions fail in the integration phase. Long drawn-out integration dissipates expected acquisition values.

PRIMING YOUR BUSINESS FOR SALE:

When you are planning to exit your business through selling it off, you want to value the business on the higher side, since you are the seller.

Of course, the acquirer will come up with their own value for your site. But you can influence their estimate by (a) anchoring the price higher based on solid valuation from your side, (b) proper planning and well-organized assets, business operations and realizable future projects, and (c) bringing in multiple interested buyers to compete for your business.

Build your exit strategy into your business plan. Exit strategy must neither be an afterthought, nor a spontaneous decision.

Ensure that all documentation is in place and is gradually and systematically developed. At a minimum, have all of the following in one place, secure and easily accessible:

A. Logins for all services and subscriptions
B. All registrations, dates due for renewal and one-time purchases
C. All product listings, including prices and discounts offered
D. List of all campaigns and their performances
E. All customer segmentations
F. List of affiliates categorized by their performance and value to the company
G. All native (editable) versions of landing pages, informational products, surveys, customer emails, etc.
H. All existing contracts
I. List of your top customers, testimonials and evangelists

Additionally, you must also have the following prepared:

1. Ensure that a steady net income is shown for at least six to nine months before listing the business for sale. This ensures that at least one major valuation—the net income multiple method—is taken care of.

2. Lay out future strategies to enable the buyer to see additional value in acquiring the business. Highlight the potential that the buyer is purchasing.
3. If possible, line up a new product to launch once the business is acquired, with benefits accruing to the purchaser.
4. Showcase the after-sale value that you will continue to provide to the new buyer, at least for six months, to enable them to realize their synergies after integration.

To accomplish (4) above, you need to "know" the buyer.

First of all, ask questions to understand the buyer's objective for acquiring the business. After all, you have invested your sweat, emotions and time in your business. You want to ensure that it goes to good hands that will take care of the business and realize its potential.

If the buyer is a financial buyer, then they are looking to acquire the business and then flip it for sale in a short period. Look at their track record and see if they are interested in combining it with other businesses for synergy.

You ideally want a strategic buyer. A strategic buyer is one who is in a similar, synergistic business and for whom your business/assets will add greater value.

Strategic buyers will buy your business or assets to add to their portfolio, or augment their customer base (by acquiring your list) or other synergistic reasons.

In extreme cases, they may fear your business' competition and acquire just to eliminate an upcoming player in the market.

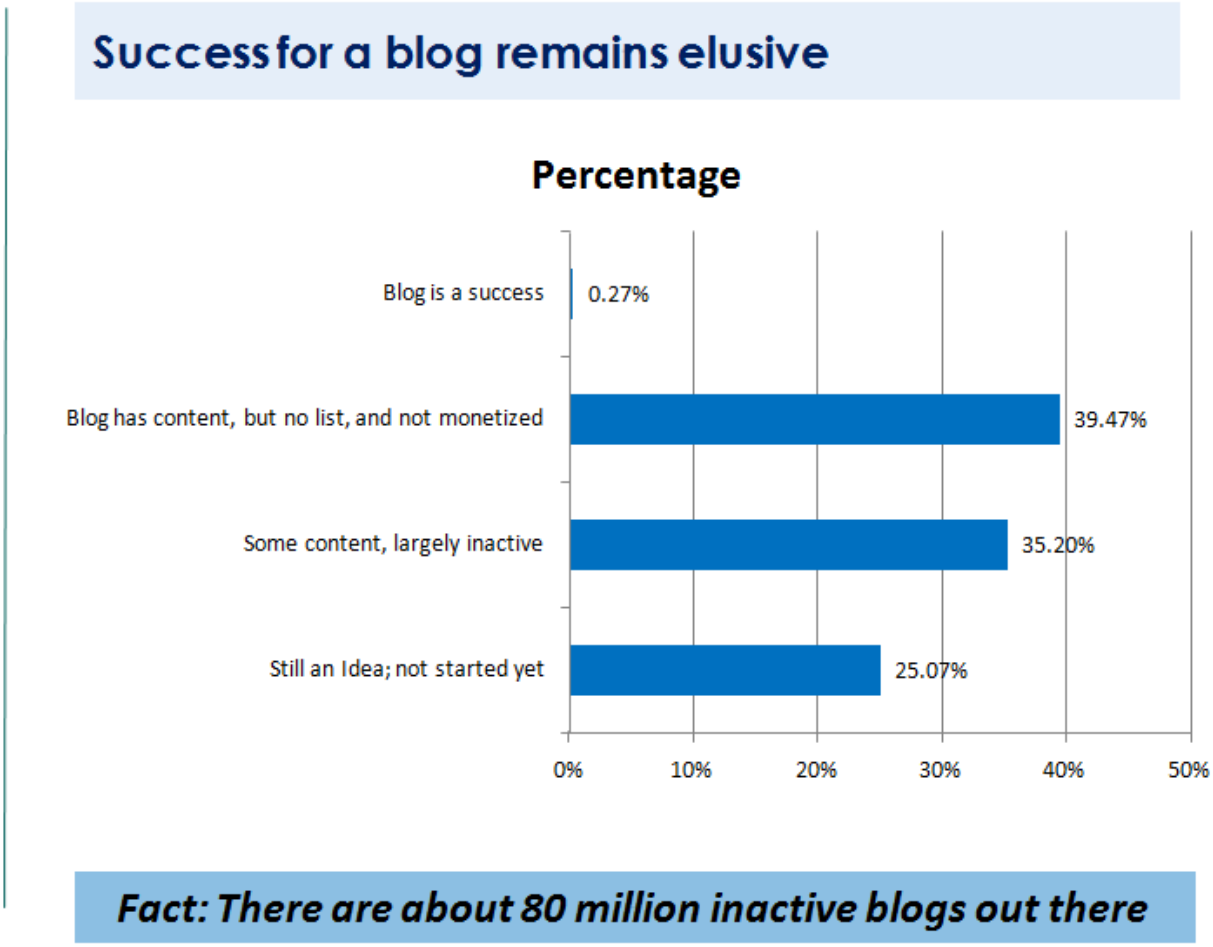
Exploit the following three strategies to increase the perceived value of your blog-business:

1. Present your blog's features and assets in such a way that you address the buyer's motives. Along with well-structured and well-documented operations, you want to showcase your business as one that is very smooth to operate.
2. Look for a strategic buyer.
3. Introduce another buyer into the mix. You really want them to fight for your business and thus raise the acquisition price.

12. BLOG SURVEY RESULTS

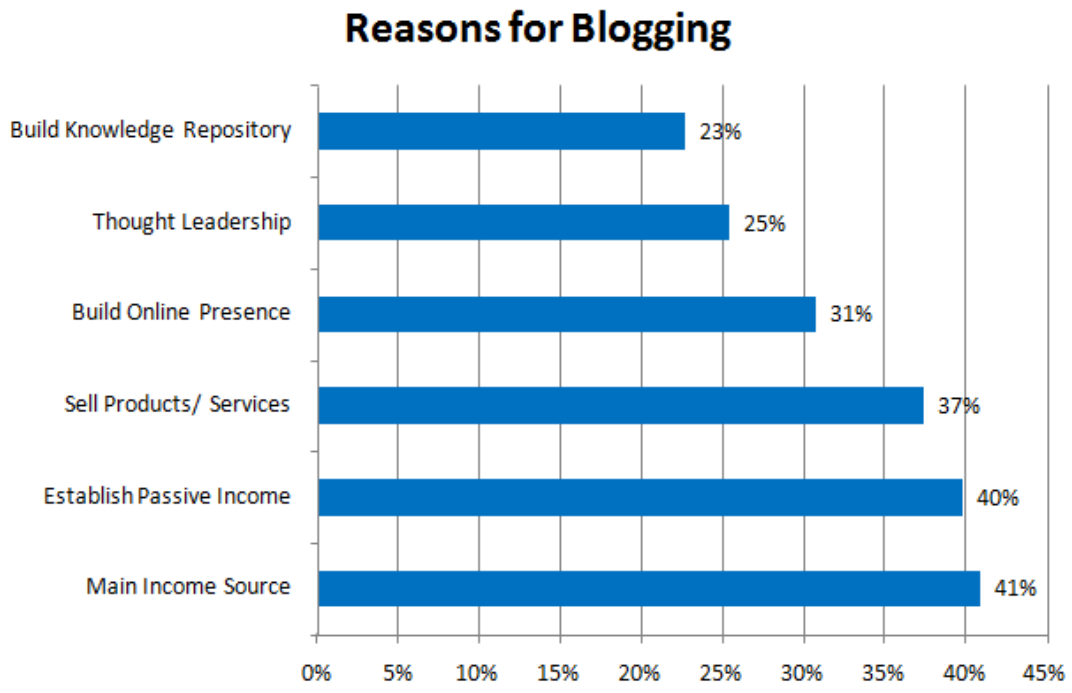
A May 2014 survey with more than 370 respondents indicated some very key insights.

The biggest insight was that less than 1% of blogs are successful. All others were facing one challenge or another.



There are myriad reasons for blogging, but for the most part a blog is (ultimately) expected to generate some kind of revenue:

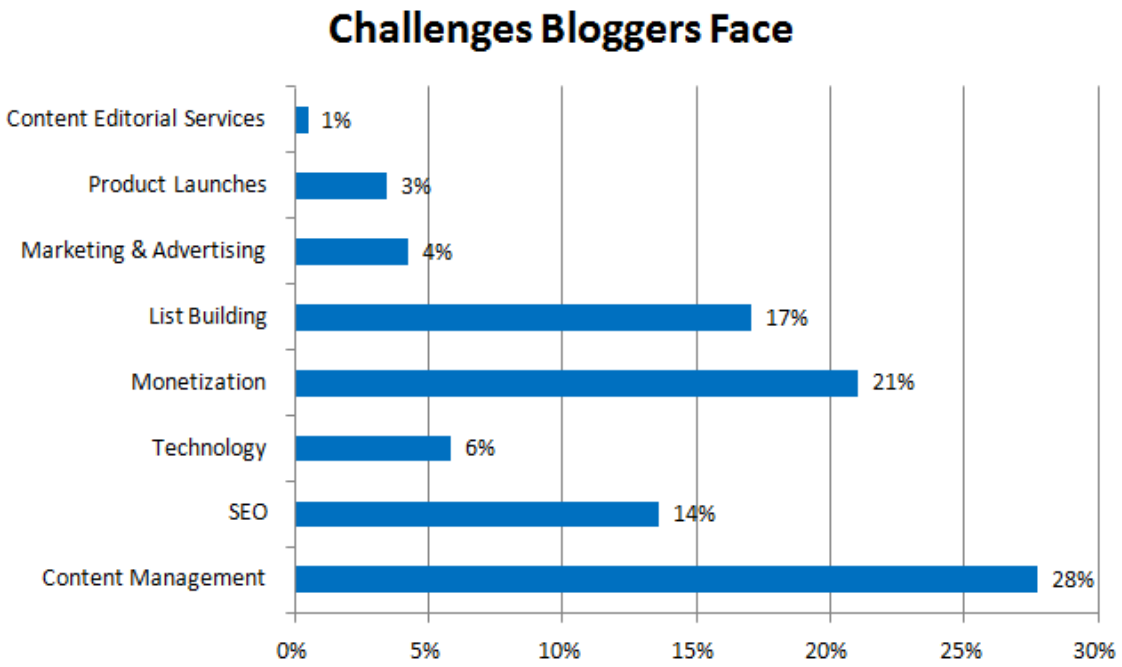
89% responders want to generate some kind of income from their blog



Blogs are expected to generate revenue

The main challenges faced by bloggers were distributed as shown in the following image:

Content remains a blogger's biggest challenge!



A blogger is a business-owner

From the survey results and the qualitative responses, the survey concluded that the following two reasons are responsible for the large number of inactive/unsuccessful blogs:

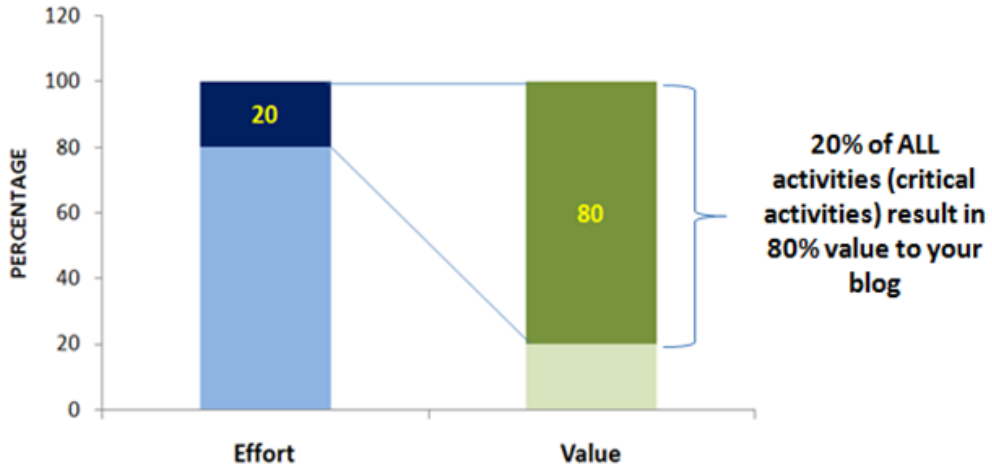
1. People largely believe that a blog involves only writing, and
2. Bloggers tend to do ALL activities on their own

In this book we have covered all that it takes for a blog to be successful, and you will have seen by now that a blog involves much more than writing.

Secondly, bloggers must prioritize their work. They should deploy the well-established 80/20 principle. The following picture depicts the 80/20 principle for a blog:

Bloggers need to outsource non-critical work

- 12.5% bloggers feel that only 30% of the tasks they perform are critical to the success of their blog
- Another 24% feel that only 50% of the tasks they perform are critical to their blog's success



Work smarter, not harder

Just as one does not do ALL the work that is required to build a house, or a business, so also for a blog, you (the blogger) must prioritize your time. It is critical that you perform 20% of the activities for your blog that influence 80% of the result. Know these activities. Find someone competent to delegate the remaining 80% activities. That will UNLOCK significant time to you to focus on the 20% critical activities.

As we have seen throughout the book, these critical activities are the following:

A. Generating and tailoring content for your target audience

B. Engaging your members/customers and building value-added products

C. Setting strategy, building marketing plans and establishing authority for yourself and your site

D. Building affiliate relationships, finding affiliate products for your membership and helping them reach their goals through your knowledge, experience and insights

E. Marketing, publicizing and enhancing the presence of your blog on the Internet

The following table shows the CRITICAL activities that MUST be performed by the blogger. For each such activity, the other column indicates which portions can be delegated to an expert.

AREA	Activity that must be performed by the blogger	Activity that can (or must) be delegated to an expert
Blog topic	Idea, target customer, expertise, and key message delivered by the blog	Friends can contribute to your idea, but there is nothing to delegate in this activity
Content Build: Blog-posts	Blog posts – idea, sequencing of posts, final review and approval before publishing. The basic message of the post should be your input	Editorial services, on-page SEO, expanding a post from a bullet list, and some fact-checking
Content Build: Site pages	The message and content on the home, products, about us and blog pages must come from you	These pages can be built, designed, edited by experts (to help save you time). The navigation menu around these pages and other setup must also be delegated
Content Build: Images on your site	The use of images on your site and post and the compliance or violation of the intellectual property on such images is solely the blogger's responsibility	Your page/post editor can look for and supply images that are appropriate to the blog post. They can also provide attribution back to the original author in compliance with the terms of use of the image
Product Development	Writing books, building videos, courses, consulting services – main idea, messaging and content are activities that must be performed by the blogger	Copy-editing, proof-reading, video construction, listing on various sites, connectivity to payment systems, etc.
Marketing	Tailoring messages on landing pages, advertisements to the appropriate audience; final review and approval of content are CORE activities	Building landing pages, advertisements connecting to product page, building campaigns, and placing advertisements
Mailing List Manager	Understanding subscribe/ unsubscribe rate, building emails to send out to your list, working out	Setting up mailing list manager, building sign-up forms, lists, tags and segments and displaying sign-

AREA	Activity that must be performed by the blogger	Activity that can (or must) be delegated to an expert
	customer segmentation and identifying lists and tags Note: AWeber and MailChimp use lists; InfusionSoft uses tags	up forms on your WordPress site and social media
ALL Setup activities	Selection (and registration) of domain name, mailing list manager, and signing up to various services. Identifying social media sites to have a presence on	Actual set up of hosting, WordPress, plugins, theme, building web-forms in mailing list manager, and build and connection of social media sites to your blog
Branding	Selection of colors, font and style of your blog	Set up of your site, connectivity between sites and ensuring consistent brand presentation
Awareness	Attending webinars, reading, self-training, general updates	
Distribution	Writing out the press release and timing it for release, ensuring final copy contains the right message that you want to convey	Distribute your site to various aggregation and content listing directories. Issuing press release, including edits
Engagement	With affiliates, members, readers, other sites, service providers. Through their sites, your social media, mailing to your list, putting up blog posts, attending seminars or events	
Administration	Financial, legal, privacy, terms of use, banking, contracts, project mgmt, taxes, subscriptions	These activities can be delegated to free up time as desired
Data Analytics	Understanding data, insights, reports and then formulating strategy for appropriate customer engagement – mainly drawing qualitative insights	Downloading data, connecting information from various sites and building reports – mainly of a quantitative nature

13. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

In this chapter I list some key factors which will help you set a goal for your blog and achieve it. These are:

A. Getting organized
B. Continuous education and self-improvement
C. Understanding what makes your blog unique
D. Know your competitive advantage
E. Testimonials and your initial readers
F. Staying the course
G. Measure, control and then improve

A. Getting Organized:

I can assure you of one thing: As your blog grows, you will collect a large amount of information. It is very useful to know this upfront and to organize this information methodically. It saves a ton of time and frustration later on.

The following are some of the information you will gather as your blog grows:

* Sites/technologies/functionalities
* Memberships, passwords
* Contacts
* Important links
* Blog Posts/content/books/surveys/interviews/pictures
* Strategy/plans
* Training material/books

I use a combination of Microsoft Excel, Windows Explorer, Internet browser favorites, a moleskin diary and a small notepad/pen for this purpose.

As you pick up on new functionalities such as your blogging platform, theme, mailing list manager, hosting provider, etc. you will need to access those accounts at a moment's notice. I mark these sites in my Internet browser favorites. For the ones I use most often, I prefix them with an "a" or even an "aa."

You will have to acquire membership or create accounts for a number of services that you will sign up for. Getting a domain name, accessing your hosting account, your recruiter software and your list manager all require you to set up an account and even link your bank information or credit card number for payments.

TIP: Have at least three to four "difficult" passwords—you may need to occasionally share your password with support personnel.

For maintaining membership and login information, I retain the information in three places. As soon as I register, I record this information in my personal moleskin diary. User name, password (don't write the password out completely) and secret question/answer are recorded. Sometimes I also write in some "key" and other information that is necessary to access the account.

TIP: Use a paper diary. This is very useful when online information is not accessible.

Second, I maintain this information in an Excel sheet. This Excel sheet is protected by a single core password that I use very sparingly. Note that this password is not subject to password change rules. I apply this password to not only modify my Excel sheet, but to also open the spreadsheet. This password is different from my banking password, which is different from my administrator password.

TIP: Use LastPass—a great time-saver.

Third, I use a free online tool called LastPass to remember the site, user name and password and log me right in with two clicks. RoboForm is another such tool. I highly recommend you get one of these right at the outset. This is a tool you will use every day and is a tremendous timesaver.

The contact list will become very useful to you as your blog grows. I have various "types" of contact information in there. Joint venture partners, content review resources, subject-matter experts (such as testers, technology gurus), vendors of products and services and basically anyone with whom you are building a relationship should have an entry in this Excel sheet. This should be different from your account information Excel sheet.

I cannot tell you how much time I spend scouring the web for an article that I had read some time ago, but forgot to bookmark it.

TIP: Here is an advanced tip. Build an Excel sheet where you record the author's name, the site name, the URL (the link that appears in the address bar in your Internet browser), date of the article and a short description.

Time and time again you will feel the urge to provide this link as you write your blog. One of my favorite URLs is the experiment on overestimating the competition by Tim Ferris. I almost always use this link whenever I send something out to my mailing list, such as a survey.

Here is the link: http://fourhourworkweek.com/2008/06/19/why-bigger-goals-less-competition-plus-eco-bounty-winners/

A list of important links can be another tab on your contact Excel sheet.

Strategy, business plan, marketing plan, financials and other core documents should be separated and kept in their own folders. Do build a business plan at the beginning. Also try to write out a strategy document. Among other things, it should contain what you are trying to achieve and how you plan to get there. Trust me, after a few months when you go back and re-visit this document, it will reveal a lot of things and serve as a huge motivator.

The strategy and business plan documents are for you and will serve as a roadmap. Writing them out will give you clarity on your goals and the path to get to your goals.

Books and Training Material is another folder in my Windows Explorer. As the name suggests, this is my "to read" section. Sometimes I carry printouts to read while traveling or when I expect to wait somewhere for more than fifteen minutes. Any interesting information in these must be consciously carried over to the links tab in the contact Excel sheet.

"To-do" checklist is an important tool. More often than not, I pick up items to add to this list in email. So I have a folder in my inbox called "To-Do List" and I simply drag and drop the email into this folder. It could be a small thing such as answering a customer's query or following up on a request or simply to check out a new site that you came across in email. The task still has to be done.

TIP: Always work off a checklist. It is invaluable!

The objective of describing my methods was (a) to alert you to the various things that you should look out for and (b) some methods that work for me.

For notes, to-do lists and remembering information that you collect over time you can also use One Note (Microsoft) or Evernote.

I would still keep the diary and the protected spreadsheet for account information and passwords.

There are several ways to get organized and you have to find what works for you. I can assure you that staying well-organized will save you at least one or two hours a week and you will easily translate that time into a new post!

B. Continuous education and self-improvement

In the bestseller, "7 Habits of Highly Effective People", Steven Covey talks about "sharpening the saw." If you keep using the same saw for years and years, no matter how good a wood-cutter you are, your productivity will diminish.

Every once in a while you have to take time off and sharpen your saw.

Getting an advanced degree, learning a new skill or language, venturing into an entrepreneurship, are all examples of continuous education, or more specifically, continuous self-improvement.

Blogging is no exception.

You can build continuous self-improvement in two ways:

A. Consciously - Reading, attending events, speaking to other experts, signing up for training programs, and getting certified, are some of the ways in which you can consciously improve yourself and get further education on your subject

B. Unconsciously - The more you write, the better your writing will become. However, this has to be constantly examined and you should go back and review your older posts every once in a while. You will improve your style, your language and the manner in which you tackle every little sub-topic in your post.

You may not consider yourself an expert (**yet**) in the topic that interests you. And that is fine. As long as you have great passion for the topic, there are a few key things you can do to build expertise on the topic such as:

* Subscribe to a few (not more than five) of the top blogs on that topic
* Read as much as you can: blogs, books, online videos and newsletters on the topic
* Consider connecting the dots. i.e. find links between the topic and another one in which you are already an expert (this is how your blog will become unique)
* Attend a few events on the topic and meet with the speakers
* Build a questionnaire which you can use to interview some experts. Glean insights and convert those interviews into your blog posts

C. How and why your blog becomes unique

More than expertise, a blog usually becomes a success because of its uniqueness in the blogosphere. Find out what makes your blog unique and continuously shine the light on the uniqueness.

Example 1:

One of my friends is an accomplished tabla player. Tabla is an Indian percussion instrument made famous by Zakir Hussain in recent years. My friend is highly talented and an expert in the tabla having played for more than 20 years at a very high level. He paid off all his student loans by offering tabla lessons to the Indian community in the US, mostly in New Jersey—that's how good he was.

Now the tabla is a difficult instrument to play with a dropout rate of more than 90%. Young students find it very difficult to overcome the initial finger movements and understand the basic nuances of the instrument.

With a Master's in Computer Science, my friend also had a great understanding of software

applications, sound engineering, and technology in general.

Currently, he is building a software synthesizer for Indian percussion domain. This will help understand notes and finger movements and overcome basic difficulties while playing the tabla and other popular Indian musical instruments.

When asked about the competition for his software, my friend laughed it away. He said that to be an effective competitor for his software, one had to have played the tabla at a very high level and also have a great understanding of technology. This combination, he reckoned, is not commonplace.

Now you can understand that when my friend publishes his blog, he will be able to provide unique insights connecting the dots between music and technology.

His knowledge, education and most of all, his experiences will make his blog truly unique.

You can follow Jaywant Utpat's progress online at:

http://www.youtube.com/user/jaywantutpat

Example 2:

If you look at my blog, you will find it very hard to miss the analogy on cricket. Having played cricket for more than 25 years, I have a cricket example for every situation. It's very easy for me to relate a story or cite a quote from cricket which applies to a particular instance. Cricket is a game where the on-field captain is very hard to miss. The captain has a very big role to play and the result of the game depends quite a lot on the captain. Other games can be run by coaches on the sideline, and in soccer, the captain has to wear an arm-band to show their status.

Having built three startups, and acquired a business degree, I find great similarities between leadership in general, in sport (cricket) and in business. When you throw into this mix my technology experience you get a set of writings, information and insights that can only come from me, thus making my blog unique.

The message is to not be afraid of connecting the dots and making a post, interesting, complete and relevant to your topic. When you connect the dots, you will veer off-topic. Make sure that the "detour" serves a purpose and provides and insight. As long as what you write is highly interesting, your audience will forgive you for straying off-topic. They are more likely to enjoy the post and share it.

Never chain yourself to rigid tracks all the time. Use freedom of expression. Strive to be interesting, be yourself and provide meaningful insights.

D. Know your competitive advantage

Talk to a few friends to find out your strengths.

Better still, conduct a 360 degree feedback exercise to understand your strengths or competitive advantage.

I did this exercise as part of my business school project. But you can very well use an online survey to accomplish this. Sit down with a close friend and formulate a set of questions. Then build a survey to gather responses to these questions. A scale of 1 to 5 is sufficient to get the job done. Ensure that most qualities you know you have, or you feel you are not good with

are all listed. For good measure, throw in an "Other" and leave it blank for the responders to fill in.

Identify about 25 people who know you quite well. These could be family, friends, neighbors, and people who know you from other activities such as clubs, church and even at work.

Now be prepared to be surprised at the results. At least one or two responses will be contradictory to your generally accepted perception.

The results of my survey clearly surprised me. What I thought was my biggest weakness was not such a big deal to the people who knew me quite well.

This happens all the time.

TIP: DO NOT undervalue your strengths. There are tons of people out there who can be better off with your insights on the topic that you are an expert on.

What this exercise does is it removes self-bias and any unsubstantiated perception that you may have.

A business can improve its profitability in two ways. It can increase revenues. It can decrease costs.

On a personal level, think of your strengths as revenues and your weaknesses as costs. Your capabilities, expertise and general growth can be vastly improved by improving your strengths (increasing revenues) and reducing your weaknesses (reducing costs).

When you pick a topic, line it up with your strengths and put out that kind of content. It is far better to play in a field where you have significant strengths and competitive advantage.

If you are good at teaching, use your blog to teach concepts on your favorite topic to your readers.

If you are good at sketching or drawing, make sure you include those tips and your unique visual styles in your blog.

If you are a great story-teller, by all means weave stories into your blogs. Or even into your books. I once bought a book by Oren Klaff called *Pitch Anything* and read it three times, even as I was in the middle of my business school exams.

When I look back, while the book is very well-written, there are seven or eight stories in the book that really caught my attention. Go read the stories in that book, especially the one where the French waiter Benoit converts a routine group dinner outing into a gripping mind-game.

Brian DeChesare ("Breaking Into Wall Street)," has a default style of interview posts on his blog. Sometime in 2012 he veered off his default style and published four extra-length posts on the story of how he started the site, built his first product, went off on his travels to Asia, basically covering the whole story of his transition from a steady investment banking job into entrepreneurship.

In those four posts, Brian broke most blog-writing customs and simply became "himself."

The posts were full of facts, humor, and were so vivid that the reader could deeply connect with Brian. Those four posts really showcased his story-writing skills.

As the typical reader of Brian's posts, I was pleasantly surprised. These posts gave me an insight into his personality, an appreciation of his struggles, gratitude for the excellent tips and insights and sheer admiration for the man himself.

The four posts were too few - I wanted more.

TIP: Play where you have a distinct competitive advantage

D. Testimonials and your initial readers:

From the day you finalized the topic that your blog will be about, start looking everywhere for proof of your expertise on the topic. These could be videos, statements, photographs, certificates, etc. Talk to your friends and see if you can get them to write a paragraph about your expertise in the topic. Have them make it specific, result-oriented and even bring out the value they got from being associated with you.

Pull out images of any magazines where you have been featured, any awards you received or any publications that you have been a part of.

Readers are powerfully attracted to a compelling testimonial page.

Your initial readers:

Just as you start with the testimonials early, it is also advisable to build a list of your close friends, co-workers and family who will provide the initial impetus and audience for your blog.

Make a list of these people, preferably in Excel, and get their email addresses. Mark these folks as early readers and VIPs (very important persons).

You can leverage them for various activities relating to your blog, such as testimonials, site reviews, content/blog post reviews, website design review, maybe even testing and bouncing off any other question or thought you may have.

These people are priceless and they will encourage you and help your blog gain that precious initial momentum.

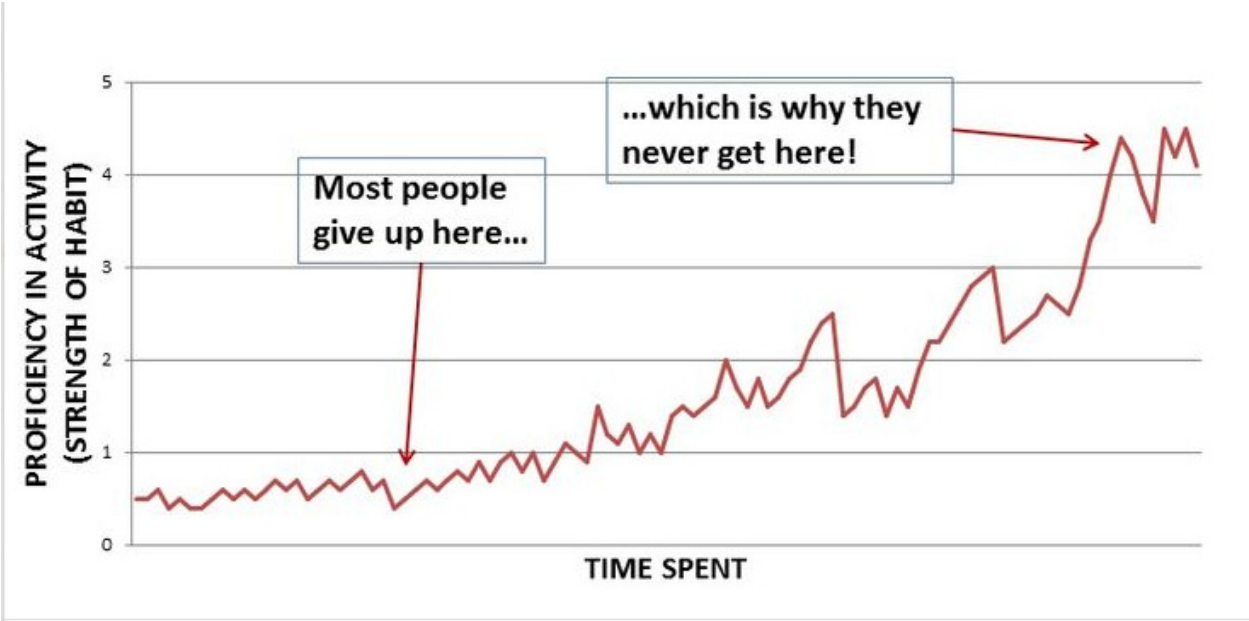
E. Staying the course:

As many gurus have noted, blogging is a marathon—not a sprint.

Once you embark on a journey, you must stay the course. Think as much as possible when you are formulating the strategy. But once done, have complete faith in your strategy and your ability to execute. Then go ahead and patiently chip away at the tasks bit by bit.

Seth Godin says, "Halfway up Everest, it makes no sense to have a discussion about climbing K2 instead".

Darren Rowse (of ProBlogger) has spent more than 10 years to become the success that he is today. Patience is the name of the game.



Don't' give up halfway. You would never know how close you were to the tipping point.

Have you ever embarked on a personal development initiative, only to give it up soon after? Think of a New Year resolution and how difficult it is for the average person to keep it.

It is said that the month of January is responsible for 20% to 25% of the entire year's sales for most fitness clubs. And why not? Everyone makes New Year resolutions and most of the resolutions are geared towards fitness. February is not mentioned, indicating that sales drop off in February from the highs of January. This means that a lot of people cannot keep up with their resolutions.

I did this for three straight years, i.e. enroll in January and quit in February. The fourth year I realized that I was building a different habit and one that I was in danger of staying with (that of enrolling and quitting).

Most of my friends do not know that I started a blog in 2011. I never told anyone. Just like my fitness club enrollment, this blog endeavor lasted exactly a month and contained six posts. I was able to give up and quit the initiative as quickly as I had started it. No one knew I quit because **no one knew I had started one** in the first place. I had made it very easy for myself to quit. I had set myself up for failure.

With my leadership blog in 2013, I ensured it was different. By letting three very close friends know that I was getting into blogging, I enlisted their support. I was out in the open and quite answerable. The support system was set up and it did not allow me to quit easily.

Every conversation I had with these folk would start invariably with a mention of the blog. And I would converse with one or more of these three on a regular basis, multiple times a week.

When I knew I was slacking, I would dread those phone calls. In a strange way, that motivated me to write out more draft posts and then I would happily engage in conversation!

So, you must identify at least three persons close enough to you and who have your best interests at heart. Let these people know because they will keep encouraging you as you progress in your initiative. They will also tap your knuckles if you are slacking.

Let them know of your plans for the blog and what you'd like to do after the blog is a success. Help them build your elevator pitch for your blog. Use this as a starting point to publicize your blog activity. Marketing is one of most important activities for any business, including your blog.

This three-person support system will position you for success—unlike my blog effort in 2011.

F. Always Keep Measuring

Only when you measure you can compare the actual against what was expected. Only then will you realize the shortfall. And only then will you realize where to improve.

One evening as the sun was setting and the workers had left for the day, Andrew Carnegie was walking past the finished steel storage area in the steel manufacturing facility in Pennsylvania.

He found nine bars lying in the area, which had been manufactured that day.

Without much thought, Carnegie grabbed a piece of coal and wrote the number nine on the wall, next to the bars.

Next evening, as he was walking by the same area, Carnegie noticed that the number nine was struck out and the number 11 appeared next to it. A few evenings later, the number of steel bars produced had gone up to 20 and then some more.

The simple act of counting the finished bars led to a competitive surge and production increased.

This story in very simple terms goes to show that it is human tendency to compete and "raise the bar."

Measurement is simply setting a benchmark that should be improved. In the story above, Carnegie set the benchmark at nine.

Put measurements in place:

As a blogger and business owner, you must look for ways to quantify and measure things such as traffic growth (from various sources), customer performance and engagement with your emails and then the results of your advertisements and efforts (which are costs to you).

You must get into the habit of building tracking codes for each source so that you can see the results in the backend (Google Analytics, Mailing List Manager reports, etc.).

Then you can continue to do what is working well or make improvements to what is not working well, or even eliminate those.

Measure, then control and then improve:

Once you begin measuring the results over a period of time, you will find great insights within the data so collected. Patterns in the data will indicate whether things are improving or deteriorating. You will be able to determine factors that affect the results, and institute controls. Once you bring a process or performance under control, you can then begin to improve.

TIP: What can be measured can be controlled. And only what can be controlled, can be improved.

14. APPENDIXES

A. PLUGINS

In this section I have listed details of the free WordPress plugins which I have found quite useful. You can search for these plugins from your WordPress administrator's account.

The WordPress repository only hosts FREE plugins.

To install a plugin, simply go to Plugins, and click on Add New.

Then put in a search term to identify the correct plugin and click on install.

All plugins must be activated by clicking on the Activate button, before you can use them.

Most plugins have additional settings. You will see the plugin on the left column, and clicking that will (usually) take you to the configuration menu for that plugin. When in doubt you can visit the plugin page to get more information.

NOTE: For premium plugins, you have to purchase the file externally, then install it from within WordPress.

The following are some of the free plugins that you should install on your WordPress site right at the outset:

1. Akismet—prevents comment spam from entering your site
2. Contact form DB—puts up a contact form on your site
3. DISQUS comments—to managed comments on your posts
4. Feedburner email subscription—provide RSS feed to your subscribers
5. Google xml sitemaps—to set up sitemaps on your site
6. Microkid's related posts—to display related posts on your blog
7. Pretty Link—shortening/customizing your links and tracking downloads
8. Shareaholic—social media share buttons
9. WordPress SEO by Yoast—SEO plug-in for WordPress
10. Redirects—helps redirect old URLs to a new one

B. DISTRIBUTION/AGGREGATION SITES

Consider distributing your site to the following aggregation sites to widen your net for attracting traffic to your site:

* Technorati.com
* Alltop.com

* Pingomatic.com
* Globeofblogs.com
* BlogTopList.com
* Outbrain.com
* Blogarama.com
* Bloghub.com
* NYCBloggers.com
* bestbritishBloggers.co.uk
* Mbaleague.blogspot.com

C. WHERE TO LIST YOUR INFORMATIONAL PRODUCTS

In the following table, I have listed the major sites where you can list your informational product, i.e. e-Books, audiobooks, videos and software. Some sites can list multiple forms. While this is not an exhaustive list, it is sufficient enough to get you going.

Site	Acceptable product forms for listing	Notes
Amazon	ALL	The first place to list your product
ACX.com		Helps convert your e-book into an audiobook and lists it on Amazon, itunes and Audible (owned by Amazon)
ClickBank	ALL	More than 100,000 affiliate marketers
iTunes	Books, audiobooks, videos	
Bookbaby	eBook	Lists on multiple eBook stores globally
Warrior Forum	ALL	Sizeable affiliate marketers available
JVZoo	ALL	Sizeable affiliate marketers available
Barnes & Noble	eBooks and audiobooks	Discontinued support for mp3 books
LearnOutLoud	Audiobooks, videos, mp3 downloads and podcasts	
Smashwords	ebooks	Global distribution, contains more than 300,000 titles. Also distributes to libraries through OverDrive and Baker & Taylor
Lulu	Ebooks	
Kobo	Ebooks	
Audible	Audiobooks	Owned by Amazon
Skillshare	Video courses	
Scribd	Ebooks	
Your own website	ALL	

D. CRITICAL ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR BLOG

As you take up each activity for your blog (you will know these when you lay out your weekly schedule of activities), consider whether it is critical or not. By critical we mean that it is

critical that you perform these activities and do not delegate these.

The following are critical activities that only you must perform for your blog:

1. Narrowing down on the topic of your blog, and identifying very succinctly what your blog is about

2. Designing your website, including photographs (if needed), placement of web-parts such as sign-up forms, testimonials, etc.

3. Designing your social media sites and paying attention to branding your blog

4. Writing out your Home, About Us, Product and Blog pages

5. Building strategic plans for content generation, marketing, customer engagement and product development

6. Scouring other blogs related to your topic and keeping abreast of development in the blogging industry

7. Generating content—blog posts, info-graphics, customer emails, surveys, marketing material, video scripts and such other

8. Conceptualizing products, both giveaway and priced products

9. Drawing insights from data generated by Google Analytics, hosting service, mailing list provider, etc.

10. Engaging your customers, affiliates, and service providers

11. All things related to financial, legal, taxes and subscriptions

For any other activity, or a part of activity related to any of the above (such as editing your draft blog post or managing your QuickBooks), consider whether you can delegate the activity to someone else.

As you think of delegation, you must consider it from two angles: (a) will the other person have the ownership and accountability to deliver on time? And (b) will the other person bring a higher quality to the final output.

Only if the answer to the above two questions is in the affirmative, should you go ahead and delegate.

E. WHAT YOUR BLOG CAN COST YOU

There are costs to setting up and maintaining a successful blog. In the preceding chapters we have seen various ways in which you can generate revenue from your blog. This section carries out a simplistic quantification exercise to estimate the dollars, time and effort that your blog can cost.

At the outset, recall that your blog can become your business, your career or an outlet to help you sell your products and services better. All these are full-time vocations with the general full-time equivalent being 40 work hours a week. Therefore, you can count on spending some real time on your blog. Against that background, let us look at the various costs that a blog involves.

Assumptions:

A. For the purpose of quantification, we take a conservative average rate of $30 per hour

B. We will also assume that ongoing costs are for one full year. This period allows for systematic accumulation of content and subscribers, build and launch of at least one product and generation of some revenue (either from product, affiliate sale or advertisement) to build a successful blog

C. Where available, we are assuming only freely available tools.

D. We will account for only those costs from when you begin the blog, and ignore the time spent in the "idea" phase

1. Get domain name. This is a one-time cost of $10 per domain name. NameCheap or GoDaddy provide domain names and we recommend at least two. One for your product or site and the other with your own name.

Cost: $20—annual

2. Hosting—GoDaddy or HostGator are the better ones. They get the job done and charge a monthly fee of $15 per domain name. If you have two domain names, you can have one as a sub-domain of the other, and stay at $15.

Cost: $180—annual

3. Mailing List provider—AWeber, MailChimp or InfusionSoft. AWeber charges $19 per month for upto 500 subscriber emails. InfusionSoft bases its charges on number of emails sent per month.

Cost: $240—annual

4. WordPress setup, includes themes and plugins—This involves researching themes and then filling out all information in WordPress related to themes, plugins and WordPress setup. The bigger part is in spending time understanding what is to be accomplished, i.e. going through various tutorials.

For WordPress it should take about 4 hours,

For the recommended plugins it should take 6 hours

Mailing list manager, including lists, sign-up forms and thank you emails, will take about 10 hours

This is a total 20 hours, one time at the beginning.

Cost:$600—one time

5. Site setup, using the selected free theme

Theme set up (including correct photograph sizes on home page, experimenting with colors and design, look/feel, etc.)—10 hours

Building content for Home, About Us, Testimonial and Blog pages—20 hours

Building the Blog page template (with sidebar content, web-form, etc.)—20 hours

Cost: $1,500—one time

6. Social media setup—consider 3 sites—building accounts, designing the look/feel, putting up the web-form and connecting to WordPress or your mailing list manager—15 hours

Cost: $450—one time

7. Content generation—at least one post per week at about 5 hours per post (includes draft, edits, on-page SEO, getting the right image, sending the mail to your list, following up on comments, etc.) —15 hours per month

Cost: $7,000—annual

8. Distribution of your site to about 10 aggregation sites and issuing one press release—10 hours

Cost: $300—one time

9. Data Analytics—includes poring over Google Analytics, hosting provider statistics and monitoring broadcasts sent through your mailing list manager—at least 4 hours a month

Cost: $1,500—annual

10. First giveaway product, including 3 auto-responder emails—20 hours

Cost: $600—one time

11. One priced product (assume e-book) listed on at least 5 sites (includes setting up of payment gateway, product delivery, link to mailing list manager and at least one auto-responder email)—30 hours

Cost: $900—one time

Without considering other expenses such as advertisements, hiring professional services and opportunity costs, the above estimates come to about **$14,000 annually**, or about $1000 per month (mostly comprised of your own labor).

15. CONCLUSION

I hope you've gained some knowledge about blogging by reading this book.

There are multiple blogging platforms, several search engines and many hosting providers. I have endeavored to bring to you the concept by covering the biggest and most popular platform, WordPress. Others are similar, so you can utilize the concepts from this book.

In the book I have deliberately stayed with one thing—the thing I know works because I have used it - such as WordPress, such as Google, such as Hostgator.

I also wanted to impress upon you the importance of delegation. If you perform all activities on your own, you will burn out pretty fast and your blog will suffer.

If you accomplish those activities that are critical for you to perform for your blog clinically, you will be able to steer your blog to success.

More importantly, I hope you have picked at least one thing that you can apply to your blog and feel confident of the results.

I want to hear about it.

I want to bring two resources to your attention.

1. I have collected all the tables, images and charts listed in this book and provided them online, for you to re-use. Please be mindful of any copyright issues—I have ensured that each object contains its legitimate source.

For images that do not have a source indicated, you are free to share and modify those. Those are Blog Success resources and I have provided you full freedom of use.

The resources are available here:

http://blogsuccess.com/blog-success-ebook-resources/

2. The trouble with writing any book is knowing when to stop. I had heard, but only now experiencing, that when you write a book, you get ideas for the next few! In line with that thought, I felt the urge to provide deeper and exhaustive information on the various topics touched upon this book. I feel I should write and elaborate more on topics such as SEO, data analytics, building digital informational products, acquiring a blog, etc.

Therefore I have started to publish "Blog Success—Deep Insight Papers" on such topics. The idea is to provide complete understanding, a very practical way to deploy these concepts for your blog, and business application. Without business application, the result would be missing.

You can check out these papers at: http://blogsuccess.com/deep-insight-papers/

Please write to me at raj@blogsuccess.com and tell me about your experiences, the thing(s) that worked for your blog, your questions, your complaints, anything.

Or just write to say hello.

Thank you!

About the Author

Raj Subramanyam is a freelance writer and chief blogger at BlogSuccess, CurationSoft and KayLeadershipAcademy.com

Raj writes on leadership, self-development, business strategy and blogging. Raj's books, 25 must-have skills in the age of the internet and BlogSuccess—Authority Black Book were published in 2014. Raj has also authored Blog Success Deep Insight papers, which in addition to in-depth research and practical usage, carry insights for business excellence.

Raj's latest e-book *How to Build a Blog That Counts* is due to be released in October 2014 and is being quoted as the "comprehensive guide to blogging."

Raj has an MBA from Columbia Business School, New York.