

Blogging for Business

What is blogging?

At its most basic, it is an on-line diary where you can record information, opinions, pictures and anything else to inform the world what you are about.

The word 'Blog' is derived from 'web log' which indicates that it is a log of events that are posted onto the web. Many people use it just as an on-line diary or journal, but for a business it can be incorporated as part of a marketing strategy, working with your website.

Modern blog software is easy to use - **you do not need a web designer nor any technical knowledge to get started.** It incorporates many facilities such as: i) allowing others to post comments on a blog and ii) keeping and archiving previous blogs. Most blogging systems have all the facilities to create the blogs within their own 'website' although many allow you to post to your own website. Links can be placed on the blog to your (or any other) website.

There are many companies providing blogging facilities – **often for free.** These blogs can be held on your own web site or hosted on the blog company's own servers. Alternatively, you can use blogging software so that you can take control and integrate it within your website.

What can Blogging do for my business?

A blog gives a simple method of providing a regular update of information for your clients. This can be done on a regular basis by people without any particular web skills: if you can use a browser and a word processor, you can blog!

See <http://smecomputing.blogspot.com> - Paul's "Computing blog for small businesses" for an example of a business blog.

A blog can be used to announce new products or services, discounts and special offers or trade shows attended. It can be used as a method for product specialists to distribute information about your products, such as how to make better use of the product or specification changes. Food suppliers can use it to inform the customers about the producers and farmers, discuss organic issues – anything that would interest the end consumer.

Don't make it overtly an advertisement, but mention your main web site within the context of what you are writing about – nobody wants to read a page of advertising text.

Clients, if allowed, can also use the blog to make comments, suggest improvements or request new products for development.

The scope for a blog can be quite wide. It can replace a 'latest news' page and is often easier to maintain. In addition, when updating most 'latest news' pages, old news get deleted. A blog can keep an archive of previous items. Your web developer can advise on how to incorporate a blog into your web page as a 'latest news' (or similar) item. To see an example, go to <http://ict.pmstudios.co.uk/blog1.php> .

You should, ideally, **update the blog quite frequently** – I would suggest a minimum of **once a week**, but daily blogs are often maintained. It does not take long to create a posting, the most difficult part is thinking up the content and writing it!

Blogs can be submitted to 'syndication sites' where people can find and read the blogs. If the postings are made interesting enough, then the news will gradually get around and links be made to it. This can then become an important source of traffic for your main site.

Many blog providers allow you to set up more than one blog with more than one person posting to a blog. This would allow several people from one company to post to the same blog. Alternatively, if you are a small business or a sole trader, you can create different personas for posting ('Sales', 'Product development').

To generate a flow of topics, you can even pose as a customer posting questions that you then answer on the blog. This helps get it going by establishing a theme for the blog.

Note though, blogs do require a commitment on your part. You do need to put the effort in on a regular basis otherwise you are wasting your time.

How do I set up a blog?

There are three main methods:

- 1) Use an on-line blogging service that **publishes to their web site.**
- 2) Use an on-line blogging service that **publishes to your web site.**
- 3) Use blogging software that sits on your web site or PC to publish to your web site

For the first two options, the same publisher often gives the choice of how to publish. There are some companies providing a free blog service, others chargeable. These include:

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|--|---|
| www.blogger.com | – Free |
| www.livejournal.com | – basic is free and pay to upgrade for extra features |
| www.typepad.com | – 30 day free trial, then from \$50 year |
| www.blogit.com/Blogs/ | – you need to subscribe to both read and write |

One of the most popular blog sites is www.blogger.com which publishes to blogspot.com – the author has experience of this (see <http://ict.pmstudios.co.uk/blog1.php> and <http://dogcam.blogspot.com>). This service is now owned by Google and who provide it as a free service. With this service, it is possible to incorporate the blog within your own web pages, or publish the blog to your own site instead of blogspot.com.

Packages

These include:

- www.nucleuscms.org/
- www.sixapart.com/movabletype/

and others including bBlog, WordPress, Drupal, b2evolution.

In general, these give more flexibility and enable a closer integration with your website. One example that the author has been a contributor to (but not involved in the set up) is <http://iseriesnetwork.com/isnblogs/ispeak/> This is a technical site using 'Moveable type' which has been set up so that it fits quite well into the website.

How do I get visitors to the blog?

As with websites it is content. Your blog must be **written to attract people** so that they want to visit it on a regular basis. It must have a purpose.

Therefore your content must be **short and snappy, written in a friendly approachable style**. No one wants to read a formal paper on a blog. But the content must be of interest and value.

To get the blog known, it helps to '**ping**' **blog directory sites** – this informs them of your blog's existence so that it can be added to their directory. A second method is that many blogs offer a news feed to the blog which can be syndicated. Examples of directory and news feed syndication sites include:

- Technorati www.technorati.com/ping
This can be done automatically by Blogger if you set it up to do so.
- Syndic8.com <http://www.syndic8.com>
A directory of nearly all available XML and RSS driven weblogs and syndicated news feeds.
- News Is Free <http://www.newsisfree.com/>
A news portal site that offers tools to publish news items to weblogs using the Blogger API.

How long does it take to get started?

Google will index Blogger within a day or two, possibly within hours. If this links to your website, the chances are that this will start to be indexed soon – Often quicker than it would be using the normal site submission facility.

However, do not expect overnight results. It will take time to get noticed, then to get people linking to it. But if the content is good, links will appear and popularity will grow.

References

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog> Wikipedia (the on-line encyclopaedia)
- http://directory.google.com/Top/Computers/Internet/On_the_Web/Weblogs/blogsearch.google.com/
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- www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15000
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Legal Guide for Bloggers by the Electronic Frontier Foundation

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