



TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A BLOG?
2. HOW TO WRITE A BLOG POST
3. THE ART OF WRITING AWESOME BLOG TITLES
4. WHAT ARE TAGS & CATEGORIES?
5. BLOG POST FREQUENCY & LENGTH
6. ORIGINAL CONTENT VS. DUPLICATE CONTENT
7. USING SEO IN YOUR BLOG

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A BLOG?

A blog is a fantastic way for a business, individual or group to communicate with their readers quickly and easily. It also offers an opportunity for readers to provide instant feedback in a virtual venue — creating a two-way conversation.

Blogs were originally called “web logs,” and they’ve redefined how we communicate online. Blogs have also altered the very fabric of the marketing model, moving us away from a selling philosophy and into an era of building relationships.

In a nutshell, building relationships is the purpose of a blog.

HOW BLOGS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

A blog can go a long way in making you a trusted, relevant resource. It has the ability to improve engagement and overall reach — plus it’s a perfect medium to express oneself, be heard and help others.

Successfully accomplishing these goals hinges on a blogger’s ability to develop a relationship with his or her audience. And the best way to develop this relationship is to offer rich, relevant and insightful content while asking for nothing in return.

When you build a relationship, your readers will continue to come back to your blog — and they’ll tell their friends or associates about you. Once you’ve become their trusted source for what you do, you’ve gained a customer and a brand advocate.

Sure, a call to action at the end of a blog is totally fine, but an outright sales pitch is a sure-fire way to ruin your chances of developing a healthy, long-term relationship with your readers.

If you have a blog on your website, blogging consistently can also help you get found easier in search engine results. Blogging adds fresh content to your site, which in turn ups your website authority with Google, eventually helping you rank higher in natural search results. Just make sure your blog is a subpage of your main site, not a subdomain.

I hope this sheds some light on the purpose of a blog. Good luck building those relationships!

HOW TO WRITE A BLOG POST

I'm often asked how to write a blog post in the most effective way. And although content will vary depending on your industry, customer base and company personality — not to mention your writing style — there are certain contingencies you'll want to meet to make sure each of your posts is awesome.

How to Write a Blog in 6 Steps:

Pick Your Topic

This may sound obvious, but picking a topic in advance makes the process of writing a blog post more enjoyable, and less time consuming. I suggest creating a blog campaign for each month so you know all of your topics in advance. To do this, simply pick a topic for each post, create a working title and write an overview paragraph that summarizes the post's topic. Campaigns make blogging more efficient and less stressful.

Create a Good, Clear Title

An engaging title can entice a reader to spend a couple of minutes reading your blog. That being said, it needs to be clear, contain at least one keyword phrase and, if possible, a little romance. It also needs to honestly represent what the blog post is about.

Make Your Content Rich

OK, so we're not actually suggesting you open a bank account for your content. Rich content refers to the quality of the content (copy) you write in your blog. Writing copy that offers solutions, expert insight and relevant information is rich. In addition, writing about what we're passionate about tends to result in rich content, as well. The flip side of this is thin content, which doesn't say anything of importance. Both rich and thin content are recognized by the search engines. Rich content is rewarded, while thin content will move you closer to online obscurity.

Be the Expert

Being the expert in your niche makes it easier to write about what's trending in your industry. It will also help you offer relevant solutions to your customers' pain points. Your industry experience can make you an expert in your niche, but constant learning is also a key component. Whether it's from articles, blogs, a mastermind group, or some other medium, fresh input is critical to remaining a thought leader in your industry.

Use an Engaging Image

No blog post is complete without imagery. Make sure yours is interesting, relevant and large enough to make an impact. You don't have to spend a lot of money on your images, but you do have to spend some time to find or create a good one. Although it's always preferred to use original imagery or art, there are companies like iStock Photo that provide an immense amount of options. Just make sure it doesn't look like a stock photo!

Keep it Short

Say it in as few words as possible without compromising the message or the voice. Generally, somewhere around 500 words is the sweet spot for length. That being said, if your topic or your writing style calls for longer or shorter posts, be sure to honor that and adjust the blog length accordingly.

THE ART OF WRITING AWESOME BLOG TITLES

Let's dive deeper into the concept of writing good, clear blog titles — also known as headlines — for your blog.

Your title is a critical element in helping your blog get read. When someone searches for a particular topic, and you are among the list of search engine results, your headline is a deciding factor on whether or not someone clicks through to continue reading. Your headline is also what helps you get found by the search engines in the first place.

Here are three factors that go into awesome titles, which will help you become more visible and attractive to the search engines, and the human eye ...

Make Sure Your Blog Titles Contain at Least One Relevant Keyword Phrase

In my title above, that would be “Blog Titles,” which is searched for 1,000 times per month across the United States. It also has low competition, which means there aren't that many other websites using this particular phrase. Using [Google's Keyword Planner](#), a free app you can access online, can help you determine which keyword phrases are good to use. All you need to use the app is a [Google account](#), which is pretty easy to sign up for. Understanding how to use the Keyword Planner will take time, research and patience.

The reason a keyword phrase is so important is that it's one of the top factors that gets you found by the search engines. Your headline is one of the first places a search engine will look to see what your content is about, making a relevant keyword phrase a must have.

Make Sure Your Blog Titles are Clear

In 5 seconds or less, your blog title needs to express what your post is about. It needs to be clear, accurate and honest. In other words, no promising the winning lottery numbers unless you actually know them. Like a good blog post, a good blog title needs to be clear to your audience, not just to you.

Make Sure Your Blog Titles are Interesting

This is often the piece of the puzzle that is most perplexing to bloggers. The reason is because they feel pressure to be witty, or metaphorical. Now, if you have that talent as a writer, and your brand's voice is in line with this type of communication — go for it. If not, there's a very simple contingency you'll want to meet to ensure your blog title is interesting: reveal the value you are presenting in the post — whether it's solving a specific problem, opening up a hot topic for discussion, or simply reviewing a movie you saw over the weekend, the title needs to clearly express the value offered within the post.

WHAT ARE TAGS & CATEGORIES?

Tags and categories have been known to confound new bloggers. The good news is that they appear a lot more confusing than they actually are. Let's take a look at each, and how to use them in your blog posts.

Since tags and categories aren't part of the actual writing of a blog post, they can easily be overlooked. But if you want to write a successful blog, you'll want to make sure you include them correctly in every post.

Blog Tags

Tags are keywords or keyword phrases that are placed in the tags region in the WordPress editor of your blog. Here's what the input box looks like in WordPress:

A screenshot of the 'Post Tags' section in the WordPress editor. It features a light blue header with the text 'Post Tags'. Below the header is a text input field containing the placeholder text 'Add New Tag'. To the right of the input field is a rounded 'Add' button. Below the input field, there is a line of italicized text that reads 'Separate tags with commas' and a blue underlined link that reads 'Choose from the most used tags'.

The format of this box will vary depending on your WordPress theme, but the information should be the same.

Tags are for search engines, and they let Google, Bing, and others know what keywords you'd like them to look for in your post. In essence, you're reminding the search engines to pay attention to these few keywords because they're important.

Make sure you list no more than 5 keyword phrases in your tags area. And, make sure that these words all appear, at least a few times, in the blog post itself — otherwise you won't really get any traction with them.

Blog Categories

Categories are for the human eye. That's it. Google doesn't pay attention to them in any valuable ways, but they're critical to your readers. When you place a phrase into your categories section on your blog, you're actually bucketing blog posts into particular ... you guessed it ... category. The next page contains an image of what the categories box looks like, again in WordPress:



What you enter here typically shows up in the right side navigation of your blog. It may be a vertical list of topics, or it may be a “cloud like” listing.

Search engines don't care about your categories, but if they're well constructed, they'll help readers find what they're looking for — and in turn more of your posts will be read! Try to limit your total of Categories to 12 or less. This means that you'll have to make sure each category, or bucket, is broad enough to contain a variance of topics that you write about (while still being specific enough to understand at a glance).

On a final note, there may be times when you use the same keyword phrase for a tag and a category. That's totally OK, they can be the same when it's appropriate. Just make sure you populate both sections on your blog.

Just remember, Tags are for search engines, and Categories are for readers.

I hope this helps clear up the differences between categories and tags on your blog.

BLOG POST FREQUENCY & LENGTH

Next, we're going to cover optimal blog post frequency and length. These are two more pieces of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) pie that need to be understood so they can be used effectively to reach more readers.

Blog Post Frequency

So, you've decided to start blogging and you're wondering how many posts you should produce each week. And while one is better than none, and two is twice as good as that, the sweet spot for most businesses is three times per week.

Why? Because it provides your blog with a good amount of fresh content each week, without producing too much, which the search engines really like. And as you roll out three blog posts per week — week after week — your authority with Google and other search engines will rise, as will your search ranking.

Just make sure you follow the guidelines set out in the How to Write a Blog Post section above to ensure what you're publishing is appealing to the human eye, as well as the search engines.

Blog Post Length

This may sound odd coming from a professional writer, but when writing a blog post you'll want to keep it as short as possible *without* compromising your message or voice.

Let's face it — we live in a digital age where tweets and texts have altered how we communicate. Plus, busy schedules don't really allow for time to read long blog posts. A bloggers challenge is being succinct and informational, while at the same time being able to actually tell an engaging story, or at least add some personality to each post.

Of course there are exceptions, and some readers expect long-form content from certain industries. So there is a place for long-form copy, and some bloggers thrive on content that is 1,000+ words. But for most, short and relevant blog posts — with a dash of "spice" — will keep readers coming back for more.

A good rule of thumb is to keep your posts at around 500 words. But like my grammar school English teacher use to say, "anything is better than a zero." So if you only have time for a 150 word post, write it and publish it. It will do you more good than publishing nothing, or publishing sporadically every once-in-a-while.

If you're consistent, you'll see your blog traffic increase, and along with it your reputation for being an expert.

ORIGINAL CONTENT VS. DUPLICATE CONTENT

We've already talked about content length and quality, and now it's time to take a look at original content vs. duplicate content.

Original Content

So, this one's pretty straightforward. Original content is exactly what it sounds like: made from scratch, unique — one of a kind. It's content that you've written yourself, even if that means you've researched other material (which you can cite in your blog post) for the information. Google likes this type of content, and so do readers.

Duplicate Content

Remember when we used to make carbon copies? Whatever we wrote or typed on the top page of a document was transferred, by a piece of carbon paper, to the page behind it? This is a good way to think of duplicate content, which is something you'll want to avoid using on your blog.

Many bloggers I know like to highlight other bloggers. They'll find a fantastic article, decide to share it, and post it verbatim on their own blog with a link to the original bloggers site.

Although ethically this is completely fine, search engines might interpret this "carbon-copy repost" as duplicate content. This could negatively affect one's search engine ranking. Why? Because just as a teacher doesn't want students copying homework from each other, Google doesn't want to see you copying content from someone else's site.

So, what do you do if you want to highlight someone else's blog post?

Summarize what it's about in one or two paragraphs. Then add your authentic opinion to the mix. Finally, place a backlink in your blog post that leads readers to the full post you're highlighting.

Now you've effectively highlighted the information AND shown your expertise by chiming in with your opinion. You've created a back link, which helps boost the authority of the blog you're linking to — and all the while you've avoided creating duplicate content.

Happy blogging!

USING SEO IN YOUR BLOG

Are you using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) on your blog?

Whether you know it or not, you definitely are. The real question is, do you understand what SEO is, and are you using it effectively?

Many of the topics we've already covered in this series contribute to successful SEO on your blog. Now we're going to take a closer look at one more element that needs to be discussed: the use of keyword phrases.

But first let's take a step back and answer the question ...

What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimization is a multi-step process designed to help increase traffic to your website or blog through the use of optimal keyword phrases, relevant content and solid use of social media. When done well, SEO can improve you website and/or blog's ranking in search results — which means you'll be closer to the top of Google's natural results list. This can lead to increased sales and broader overall reach.

Keywords, and keyword phrases, are an important component to successful SEO. Here's a basic how-to overview on how to identify the best keywords for your business, so you can use them effectively on your blog (and your website, too!).

- 1) Sit with your team and identify keywords that you use in your industry to describe your business, products and/or services. Then identify what you believe customers are searching for on Google or Bing when they're looking for what you do.
- 2) Look at your blog's Site Stats, either in your Wordpress editor, or in Google Analytics. Take stock of which web or blog pages are getting the most traffic and write down the primary keywords you used in the content. Before Google began using "not provided" in their keyword analytics, we were able to see exactly what keyword phrases people used in order to find us. Now that's gone, which makes the process more complex and frustrating. If you're using WordPress, and don't have Site Stats installed, you can always [install Jetpack](#) if you need to.
- 3) Sign up for a Google Analytics account. There's a free tool within Google Analytics called Adwords that contains a [Keyword Planner](#) that you can access online. Adwords Keyword Planner helps you determine which keyword phrases are optimal, and which ones you might want to avoid. All you need to use the Keyword Planner tool is a [Google account](#), which is pretty easy to sign up for. Once you sign up, the next step is learning [how to use the Google Keyword Tool](#). Learning to use it well will take time, testing and patience.

Thank you for taking the time to read Cuppa SEO's Blogging 101 E-Book.

Happy Blogging!

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