How to Start a Blog

The Beginner's Guide to Successful Blogging

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Table of Content

About this guide

Have you been curious or interested in starting a blog? Many successful bloggers gain knowledge, friendships, support and confidence by hosting a blog. And some are able to turn blogging into a lucrative business.

Starting a blog is not as daunting as many people think. In fact, by following the step-by-step instructions in our Beginner's Guide to Successful Blogging, you will be able to create and grow your own blog, avoiding pitfalls and missteps that hinder some novices.

Contribution from expert bloggers

Top bloggers have contributed their knowledge to help make this guide a valuable source of information. Their contributions to this guide and our expertise will help you build an online presence and thriving brand.

Aaron Lee
Postplanner.com/blog

Adam Connell
Bloggingwizard.com

Alexis Grant
Alexisgrant.com

Ali Luke
Aliventures.com

Andrea Vahl
AndreaVahl.com

Angelique Toschi
Angeliquetoschi.com

Ann Smarty
www.myblogu.com

Barry Feldman
Feldmancreative.com/blog

Benny Hsu
Getbusylivingblog.com

C.C.Chapman
cc-chapman.com

Charles Hugh Smith
Oftwominds.com

Dan Miller
48Days.com

Daniel Lewis
TheAudacitytoPodcast.com

Dave Taylor
GoFatherhood.com

Dave Delaney
Davedelaney.com

David Jackson
Davidjackson.org

David Airey
Davidairey.com

Demian Farnworth
Thecopybot.com

Derek Sivers
Sivers.org

Dino Dogan
www.dinodogan.com

Greg Hickman
Mobilemixed.com

Henneke Duistermaat
Enchantingmarketing.com

Ian Cleary
Razorsocial.com

Jaime Tardy
www.eventualmillionaire.com

Jeff Bullas
www.jeffbullas.com

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Karen Lee
Drkarenslee.com

Laura Simms
Createasfolk.com

Liz Strauss
Successful-blog.com

Manda Aufochs Gillespie
Thegreenmama.com

Sophie Lizard
Beafreelanceblogger.com

Stephanie Gordon
Stephgordon.com

Susanne Lakin
Livewritethrive.com

Tyler Tervooren
Riskology.co

The steps to launch a successful blog:

- Select a comprehensive niche
- Choose a platform (self-hosted recommended)
- Decide on a domain name
- Get a hosting plan and install software
- Customize and design the blog
- Add content (text, photos and graphics)
- Promote a blog and its content

Welcome to The Blogger World

Summary: This section provides background information to help you understand the basics of blogging and shows you where to find sources of valuable reference material. We also describe a number of different blog types, how to choose your niche, and list some of the many reasons people like to blog.

What is a "blog" and "blogging"?

A blog (shortened from the phrase "weblog") is known as many things—a digital magazine, diary, newscast, collector's meeting place, a showcase for your art, information sharing, teaching hub, place to learn and... well, almost anything you want it to be. A typical blog combines text, images, videos and links to relevant pages and media on the Web. Blog readers can leave comments and communicate with the author. In fact, dialogue and interaction are a popular part of a blog's success.

In the blogging world, you have the word "blog" (an online journal), "blogger" (the person who owns and contributes to a blog) and "blogging" (the act of creating content for the blog). You can be a "blogger blogging on a blog," a "blog about a blogger blogging" or a "blogging blog about a blogger."

One of the great things about blogging is the impact it has made on communication throughout the world. Blogs can report news as it happens, hold mainstream media to higher standards and provide specific news and information to meet niche interests.

Darren Rowse, one of the earliest and best-known bloggers, defines it like this:
A blog is a type of website that is usually arranged in chronological order from the most recent 'post' (or entry) at the top of the main page to the older entries towards the bottom.

46
of people read blogs more than once a day

Source: HubSpot Science of Blogging

81%
of U.S. online consumers trust information and advice from blogs

Source: BlogHer

Small businesses that blog get
126%
more lead growth than ones that do not blog

Source: ThinkCreative

40%
Nearly of US companies use blogs for marketing purposes

Source: eMarketer

The most popular styles and types of blogs

Personal blogs Personal blogs share thoughts, original art, poems, writing or photography. Some sell custom crafts, art or products. If you just want to make a statement, <u>show your DIY (do it yourself) skills,</u> have fun or blog for therapy, a personal blog is perfect for your needs.

Business blogs are created in the voice of the company, as a crucial component of marketing. They can function as a direct-sales tool and are outstanding for both messaging and two-way communication as part of a company's public relations efforts. Blogs are effective and cost-efficient vehicles for small organizations that need to publish information for their customers or members.
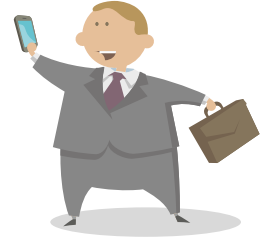
Niche/topical blogs focus on a particular interest. They can be about health, gardening, education, sports, fashion or <u>or lifestyle</u>. Name your special interest and you can blog about it. If you're a collector of antiques, a true-mystery fan, a travel addict or just love cooking, there may be a blog in your future. Niche blogs easily attract loyal followers, which contributes to the fun of blogging.

Media-type blogs are defined by their content. If you enjoy video blogging, then you're a vlogger. If you curate content from other websites, you have a linklog. If you post photos or art sketches on your blog, you're hosting a photoblog or artblog.
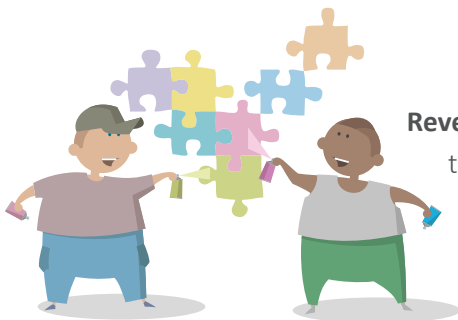
Reverse blogs are a unique but popular type of blog. Instead of the owner creating content, the content is supplied by the public. A reverse blog has a team who moderate posts, prevent unpleasant interactions and promote slow topics for greater interactivity.

While these are the most popular types of blogs, there are many more to discover. There are also community blogs, nonprofit blogs, live-webcam blogs, live-gaming screencast blogs, device-type blogs, podcast blogs, various video blogs and many, many others. But most important, you need to learn the difference between the <u>blog and a static website</u>. We always recommend to web newbies to <u>start a blog</u>, in order to learn the basics of the online presence but if someone is looking to promote his/her business online (or to start a new one) then it's better to learn how to make a <u>website</u> instead.

Why people blog?

Think about why are you starting a blog and why people should be interested in following you. Jeff Bullas created a poll and asked people, "Why do you blog?". The answers vary, but top answers were, "Writing about the passion" and "To share with others". If you want to learn more about phenomenon of blogging, read <u>Why do people blog?.</u>
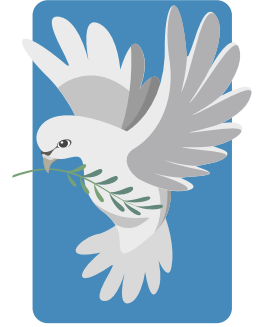
The biggest benefits of blogging
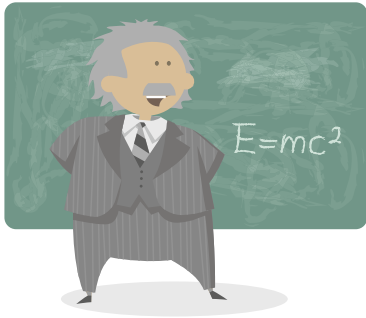
Become a better writer and thinker

Once you start blogging, you'll find yourself becoming a better writer and thinker. Mastering content takes creative thought. When you become immersed in creating great pieces of content for your blog, your writing, thinking and research skills improve in the process.

Establish yourself as an expert

Blogs are wonderful tools to help people establish themselves as experts in a field or niche. We all have some kind of interest and expertise to share with others. If you're able to produce great content on your blog and/or have a unique point of view on the topic, then be assured that your future audience will recognize it and reward you for it. Today, the Web has different experts and different opinions for almost every topic you can dream up. With a bit of effort, you too can become an authority in the area of your interest.

Increase your self-confidence

The more involved you become with blogging, the more your creative juices will flow. That's one reason why blogging is so popular. As you gain knowledge about your topic, the confidence you'll build in your followers and most importantly, in yourself, will soar. All of this leads to increased creativity. According to the New York Times, <u>81 percent of Americans believe they have a book inside of them</u> to share with the world. In essence, you will be writing a book, piece by piece, on your blog. Keep an open mind and enjoy your new-found confidence in your own abilities!

Make friends and have fun

With practice and a little effort, you can easily build your base of blog fans and followers. As you become known as an expert in your niche, you can inspire, encourage and help your followers make a difference in their own lives. Along your blogging journey, you will make new friends and connections throughout the world. If you like to travel, that means a lot of couches are available for you to snooze on while winging your way around the globe!
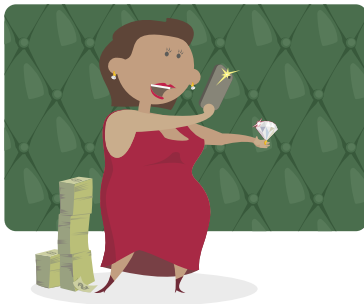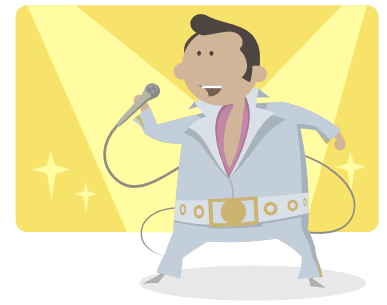
Make money from your blog

Blogging can also have financial benefits. You can place ads and receive affiliate commissions by promoting products of established online retailers. And you can sell your own digital products and merchandise. **We'll talk more about monetization in Chapter 6.**

Here is another great article that addresses additional personal and business benefits of blogging: <u>10 Secret Benefits of Blogging.</u>

How to choose a perfect niche

"The meaning of life is in attaining the highest form of knowledge, which is the idea of the good."

Ancient
Greek philosophers

Nathalie Lussier offers an interesting approach to selecting the best niche for your success as a top blogger. <u>Choosing the niche for your new blog.</u>

The same applies to blogging. You want to attain the highest form of knowledge in the niche/topic of your choice. So pick the one that appeals to you—the one you are passionate about and most interested in. Aspire for success, happiness, security and recognition. By <u>choosing your niche</u> of interest and having your own point of view you'll be able to position and differentiate your blog from the competition.

Brainstorm your topic

Following is a process that can help you determine which niche is best for you:

● Make a list of your interests or hobbies. Which topics fascinate you? List them all, for instance: golf, fishing, yoga, playing games or cooking.

● Next, list accomplishments you are proud of, such as musical talent, artistic talent or sports achievements.

● Now, list difficulties you have overcome or defeated, such as: losing a significant amount of weight, recovering from a financial setback or managing a disease.

During the course of this exercise, you will get a better feeling for the topics that resonate with you. The ones that you are most passionate about are the best candidates for your niche.
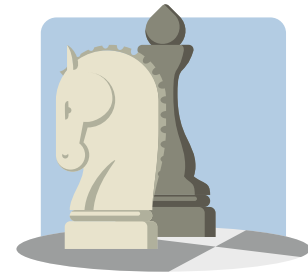
Blog success validation

Whether you want to blog for prestige, income, fun or connections, you'll want to research the niche you choose and make sure the topic is viable. The following "blog success validation" exercise will help you determine whether your blog has real potential. It will also help you understand why most blogs fail.
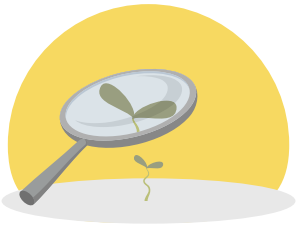
Potential niche size

Even if you believe you have a brilliant blog idea, you will likely struggle to succeed unless you find a niche market that attracts enough people or one with little competition. You don't want your niche to be too small or too big.

Example: The size of "golf" niche is, on average, more than 2.8 million monthly searches. This niche might be too big and broad. However if you pursue a niche that is very narrow, such as "plane golf swing drills" (average 4,000 searches monthly), the volume of searches would be too small. One way to drill down from "golf" would be "golf tips" (average 350,000 total monthly searches) or even deeper down "golf tips for beginners" (average 250,000 total monthly searches).

Check the size of your niche:

Check the top five keywords for your niche market. Look for at least 10 thousand monthly searches combined for the five keywords. You can use Google Keyword Planner (free), Market Samurai (paid) or WordTracker (partially free) to check for the volume of searches and get keywords ideas. You want to be certain there is a large enough audience looking for the kind of information you will provide, but not so large that you will get lost in the crowd.

Use the Google Keyword Planner tool to get top keyword ideas and search volume:

● Select the "Search for new keyword and group ideas" tab. Enter your main keyword (see examples in our "golf tips") and get ideas by looking at the list of suggested keywords.

● Select the top five keywords that fit the niche market you chose.

● Check the search volume for each keyword and add them together.

For example: Applying this search process to our five golf-tip keywords, yielded the following search results:

"golf tips"	9,900
"golf swing tips"	8,100
"golf putting tips"	1,000
"golf tips for beginners"	880
"golf tips driving"	480

With these five keywords, we have a little over 20,000 average monthly searches. This niche market ("golf tips") has enough volume and would be a good choice for a blog.

Potential competition
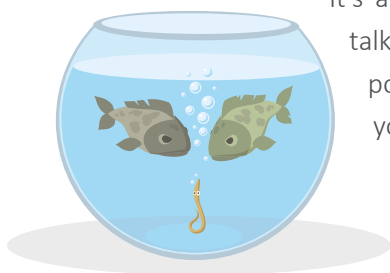
It's a good sign if you have competition. It means others are talking about your niche and actively pursuing it. It's also important to note that bloggers in your niche are not always your competition.

Following is a competition review process you can follow:

- Can you find blogs currently targeting your niche?

- Are there at least five popular blogs focused on your topic?

- Do a Google search for "[niche] blog" or "best [niche] blogs."

- Don't lose interest if you see large number of blogs in your niche. If they can do it, so can you!

- Go to Facebook and do a search for your niche. Are there active Facebook pages? Not all topics lend themselves to Facebook, but most do.

- Look for Facebook pages and see how many followers they have. Great niches will exhibit at least 1,000 fans.

- Are there active Twitter accounts? You should find many references to your niche on Twitter.

- Check Twitter accounts of people involved within your niche and see how many followers they have (should be at least 1,000).

- Go to Twitter and do a search for [your niche].

- Are there offline magazines? This is the gold standard for a niche. If someone is going to the trouble and expense of creating a hard-copy magazine centered on your niche, you can be sure there are online fans looking for information about the topic. You can check Amazon Magazines or just do google search for "[your niche] magazine or journal." In regards to our "golf tips" example, this was a no-brainer, we see all the golf-related magazines at the local grocery stores.

If just one or two of these points are positive, it's a good sign your niche has a potential.

Potential monetization

Do you want to earn money with your blog? There are many people who start blogging as a hobby without necessarily looking at monetizing their blog. However, others want to make extra cash or even dream of make a living by blogging. It doesn't matter which category you're in, it wouldn't hurt to know if your blog can produce the income you desire. If you found other blogs, active social profiles and offline magazines or journals in the previous sections, this indicates the niche is active and possibly monetizable. More about monetization techniques in Chapter 6.

To make sure your niche is monetizable, research the following:

- Is anyone selling information or products related to your niche? The easiest way to determine this is to see what your competitors are promoting.

- Are well-known advertisers in your niche? These could be the big brands or e-commerce sites.

- Are there affiliate offers in your niche? Here is how to find affiliate offers:

→ Check affiliate networks (Clickbank.com, CJ.com and ShareSale.com and Amazon Affiliate).

← Do a Google search for "[your keyword] affiliate" or "[your keyword] affiliate program."

These points can help you determine if you can establish a blog in the niche of your choice that helps you generate income.

What readers want from the blog

What content should you start creating? You can write about anything and everything, but you have to really understand what your readers want to see or read. While there may be other existing blogs dedicated to your area of expertise, they are not YOURS! If you have a unique perspective, people will want to read about it. There's never enough information for the voracious appetites of collectors and enthusiasts. They desire more and with practice, you can give them that.

Readers are looking for information

People who visit your blog want to be informed. They want to learn more or stay up to date on specific topics. You would be surprised what people are searching for online. For example, some people want news that doesn't appear in mainstream media. You can be the one to give it to them.

Readers are looking for solutions

Blogs solve a lot of problems in the world. Those problems might include dieting, health concerns or how to replace the bumper on a 1957 Chevy. The Internet has become the world's largest library. What can you add to the Internet? Your knowledge and insights can help others.

Readers are looking to be entertained

The Internet is not all work! People want to connect, laugh and share with others. Your blog can quickly become popular for your brand of humor combined with the subject you choose. There's always fun information you can share with others that will help attract visitors to your blog.

Important things to understand about blogging

As you continue to put time and energy into your blog, you will begin to see bigger returns on your investment. Depending on how you're planning to manage your blog, you'll need to consider the amount of time the work will require. Perhaps your blog is your online journal and you'll write a few paragraphs or articles a week. Or you might be gung-ho and update your content on a daily basis. But remember: It will take time to establish your Web presence. Be patient, keep up the good work and be consistent with your blogging.

Choosing a blogging platform

At this stage, you'll need to determine the blog-management platform/tool you want to use. We recommend that you set up your blog on one of the self-hosted platforms. But before you make the decision, let us describe each option below in more detail and talk about the pros and cons.

For in-depth reviews of different blogging platforms visit this page.

When it comes to starting your blog you have the following options: free, freemium and self-hosted platforms (recommended).

For many new bloggers, the availability of free blogging platforms such as Blogger or Tumblr is tempting. The benefits include being free and quick to start. But having a blog name in this form—yourname.tumblr.com or yourname.blogspot.com, is the sign of an inexperienced beginner who likely won't be taken seriously.

By keeping your blog on a free platform, you let the platform own your name. You'll be subject to their rules and restrictions, they may limit or prohibit ads on your blog, or they may even place their own ads on your blog. If you're serious about blogging, you'll want to move away from this option.

Freemium means you'll have a trial period before you have to start paying (costs vary from $5 to $30 per month). Several platforms are available. One of the most popular is TypePad. This platform focuses on ease of use for writing, but customization options are limited and it lacks certain features of value to bloggers.

By default, your TypePad blog name will look like this: yourname.typepad.com. It's not always the best option if you're trying to build the name and brand for your blog. However you could point your own domain (purchased through any domain registrar) to TypePad blog by applying domain mapping process.

Self-hosted platforms

Think ahead and own your blog!

Self-hosted platforms allow you to run a blog on your own domain. Aside from following your domain registrar and web hosting company's rules, you're fully in charge of your blog and its contents.

You have number of choices when it comes to a self-hosted blog system (also called Content Management System or CMS).

One of the best and most well-known self-hosted content management systems (CMS) is WordPress.org, also recommended by 90 percent of blogging experts we've surveyed.

The blog set up is called self-hosted because you will use your own web hosting space (we like WebHostingHub) and name for your blog. This normally costs $4 to $8 per month for the web space (hosting account), depending on the company you choose, and $12 to $15 per year for the name (domain). The actual CMS is usually open-source and free.

Throughout this guide, we'll be showing you how to start, manage, customize and work with the WordPress CMS. By using our guide, you will be able to create your blog quickly and learn how to manage it in short order. We'll show you how to set up and go live with your WordPress blog in Chapter 2.

Key take-aways

Whatever your involvement, you should follow a few simple rules for success:

1

Choose your niche wisely and validate it before you move forward.

2

Think about content you can create to differentiate your blog from others.

3

Select your blogging platform and get ready to launch your blog.

How to Set Up a Self-Hosted Wordpress Blog

Summary: In this chapter, you will learn the nuts and bolts of creating your blog, including tips for choosing a domain name and web hosting options. We also provide a handy definition of terms.

In Chapter 1, you learned that a self-hosted WordPress blog is the best choice for most bloggers. To get your new self-hosted blog started, you need to decide on two important things: a domain name and a web hosting provider.

Domain name. Your domain name represents you, your blog, your business and your brand. Make it recognizable, easy to remember and a proud representation of you and your blog. Examples of strong domain names are: amazon.com, apple.com and change.org.

Web hosting. After choosing a domain name, selecting reliable hosting services will be one of the most important decisions you make. To a great extent, the functionality and performance of your blog will depend on your hosting provider. The host makes sure your blog is available 24/7 to potential readers and it's where your files are stored online.
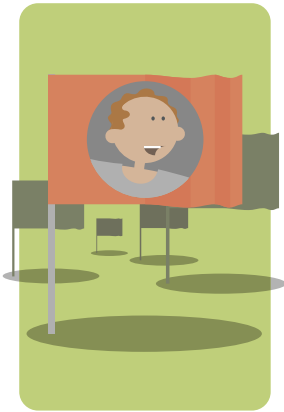
What is a domain name?

Your domain name will be the name by which you will be known online, no matter what niche you choose. It's the unique address of your blog on the Internet. Your domain will be yours as long as you continue paying the annual fee ($10 - $15 for .com domain).

Users who know your domain/URL (uniform resource locator) can simply type it in their browser's address bar. Others will be able to discover your blog through search engines such as Google and Bing, so you definitely need to find a unique moniker. Make sure you love your original domain name—you'll face a number of challenges if you decide to change it down the road.

Types of domain names

Just as you and your business have a physical address, your domain name needs one too. It may be the highly popular "dot com" or it may be country or niche specific. From .us (United Sates) to .co.uk (United Kingdom) and from .guru (yes, for life coaches) to .sport (for sports related domains), these top level domains (TLDs) are added to any domain name in order to point to their location. The general rule is to go for a "dot com" domain, but some of the other extensions can work. For example "dot net" or "dot me."

In the end, it's about being memorable, so if a different extension or country code helps you be memorable, then break the rules!

How to select a blog name

Remember the anxiety of naming your first pet? It's the same with naming your blog. It's a name directly tied to you. You'll be admired, teased or forgotten because of it, so choose wisely. The tips we've mentioned previously, as well as those listed below, will give you some great ideas on how to formulate the perfect domain name.

11 tips for choosing the right domain name

Start by brainstorming

Pick at least five main words or phrases that describe your blog topic. Write them down, then mix and match these words to invent domain names. Choose the one that sounds good and will be

memorable. There's a rule in advertising that says when launching a new product, you need to start by making a list of 10 names. The first three are easy. Maybe you can do five or six without breaking a sweat, but by the time you get to last one, you'll be stuck for more ideas. Using the outline described above, pick the best one from your list and you are on your way.

Choose a unique name

Using a search engine, like Google, search out your proposed blog name. Does your search show any sites with similar names? If it does, then make sure you try a different name. Giving your blog a name that's similar to other existing sites is the first step to failure. Also, don't choose names that are plural or misspelled versions of existing sites.

Make it easy to type

If you have to spell the name out more than once, it won't work. Keep the name as easy to remember and type in a search field or address bar as possible. You don't want your future visitors to incorrectly type in your name and be directed to a totally different site. For example: Popular social site, Flickr.com, was started in 2005. Four years later, the company had to acquire Flicker.com for a large amount of money in order to redirect visitors who misspelled their name. If you're determined to have that oddly spelled name, then make sure the domain names for common misspellings are available as well, so you can register them and redirect visitors to the main domain.

Choose "dot com" first

52 percent of all websites are "dot.com" domains. It's still the preferred extension and the easiest to remember. If your top name choice isn't available, then try your second choice before accepting another TLD. Remember that some browsers accept address-only entries in their address bar. If you type just the domain name (and who knows how many of your users will just do that?) they will return, by default, to the .com site.

Make it brandable

Your domain name represents your brand. Some names speak for themselves—when you hear the name, you know what the blog is about.

Shorter is always better

As we've said before, shorter is better. If you can't get your domain name down to one memorable word (almost impossible to come by these days), then consider adding one, or at maximum, two more words. Combinations of two words work great for the memorable names like LifeHacker.com or GeekSquad.com. Also, don't use an acronym. People rarely remember the letters unless it's an exceptionally catchy name.

Avoid trademark problems

Once you've chosen your top choices for your blog name, you have to make sure you're not violating anyone's trademarks. To check within United States, visit uspto.gov/trademarks and do the search before you register the name. This problem is not that common for bloggers, but it's always good to check now, because this could kill a great blog and business down the road. Also, if you are going to create a blog about a big-name product, such as WordPress or Facebook, review their terms and conditions. Most will not allow you to use their name in any part of your domain (sorry—no wordpresshacker.com site allowed).

No numbers and hyphens

Numbers and hyphens (especially hyphens) cause confusion. Avoid them at all cost. Even something as clever as the number1blogger. com will cause confusion. Make the name speak for itself.

It's not always good to follow new trends

It's not always good to follow new trends. Anything that deals with something trendy will, like the trend, fade away. Stick with a classic name that will span the decades and not be tied down to a trend or fad.

Marry your domain name

You have to be 100-percent certain that you love your domain name. Once it's set, you'll be wedded to it for years to come. If you decide later to rename it, then you will lose time, money, brand equity and rankings. We do not recommend changing your domain once your blog has been live long enough to have gained a following.

Check social networks

Before you register your desired domain name, it's always a good idea to check social networks to see if the same name is being used. To keep your blog name constant and to build your brand, you want a name that is readily available. For example: check facebook.com/yourdomain, twitter.com/yourdomain and secure them as well. KnowEm is a great tool to use to see if certain names are already branded on social platforms.

Premium domain names

You might find a domain name that's already taken, but not necessarily in use. These are usually referred to as premium domain names. They are domains registered by someone else and offered for sale.

There's no way of telling how much a domain is worth on the market, especially if you're after a niche domain. To buy a registered domain, check one of the auction sites: Godaddy Auction, Sedo, NameJet or SnapNames. If it's not for sale through auctions, you can contact the domain owner to see if you can make an offer to buy it. You can use Whois Tool to find the domain owner's contact information. Even if

the owner's name is protected or private, you can send an email to the provided email address and ultimately reach the domain owner.

What is web hosting?
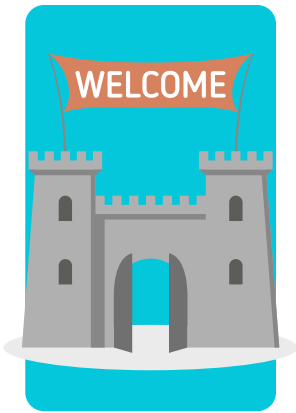
Next, you will need to choose a web hosting company to register the domain name with and sign up for the hosting account to host your new blog online.

A web hosting company provides you with space on a server to store your blog files. It's similar to your personal computer files at home, except your blog files are available online where visitors can access them at all times by entering your domain name or by discovering your blog in a search engine. You can use free blogging platforms (as described in Chapter 1) and live with the restrictions, or take the leap and launch your own self-hosted blog, which 90 percent of top bloggers recommend.

How to choose a web hosting provider

The wrong web host can cause many problems with your blog. Just imagine choosing a mobile company that has no reception. Your web host is a major piece of the puzzle to maintaining a successful blog, therefore, it's crucial that you choose a reliable provider.

Often, when people are asked what services most important to look for in a good web host, they cite things like 24/7 phone and chat support, reliability and reputation. Good hosting providers offer additional features such as database support, back ups and free email. Most hosting companies offer similar options and features and as a beginning blogger, you won't have to go deeply into technical details to use them.

A 11-point checklist for better web host selection

Good reputation - The rule of thumb is to check the website of the service provider for signs that indicate credibility such as a physical address, phone number, general company information and testimonials. Ask yourself the question "Would I trust and give this company my personal information?". Also check if the company is listed with Better Business Bureau (for North America); if they're listed, what's their rating?

Support - If you are new to the Internet, you might need to lean a little more on your web host's tech support. Look for a company that offers 24/7 support. (If you have a problem with your blog at 2 a.m., do you really want to wait for help?)

Some companies offer real-time phone and chat support, others don't. In lieu of on-call support, a number of web hosting services only offer online ticket-based support. This means you submit a ticket via email requesting support and wait for a response. Many people are specifically looking for U.S.-based support, since some providers use outsourced support. Our recommendation? Your best bet is to find a hosting company that offers 24/7 phone support in addition to online chats and support tickets.

Uptime - As mentioned previously, it's important for your blog to be available online with no break in service. But when you're dealing with hardware and people, things can still go wrong. Most reliable companies have technology in place to make sure your site is up and running all the time. The industry standard for the good companies is "99 percent network uptime." Do your own online search "[company name] uptime" and check for a provider's uptime listing.

Money-back guarantee - Most companies offer full money-back guarantees for a limited period of time (usually 30, 45 or 90 days). You might see "anytime money-back guarantee" claims from some companies. That usually means that you'll get a prorated amount back after the limited-time period passes. Make sure you read their "Terms of Service."

Features list - Are you thinking of a specific CMS (content management system), such as our much-championed Wordpress? Does your prospective provider offer it? The list of features can be long, but the more options the better. You might not need some of the listed features now, but once your blog grows there could be a need for additional items.

Email accounts - Most providers will give you the option of having unlimited email accounts for your blog. Having several email addresses can help you manage communication with your blog visitors. For example, you might have personal addresses (john@yourdomain. com), sales addresses (sales@yourdomain.com) and webmaster addresses (webmaster@yourdomain.com or admin@yourdomain. com). At the very least, double check to make sure at least one email account is available for your domain.

Price - First-time customer fees for hosting services normally are very reasonable—as low as a few dollars per month for the first year of service. But you need to understand that next year's renewal price will be different. Before choosing your provider, double check the renewal price information on the web host's website.

Site backup* - Web host servers are not bulletproof. Data loss is possible, just as it is on your own computer. After all, servers are big computers that everyone can read files from. You'll want to backup both your site files and your databases. If they don't offer backup, you will be left with having to figure out how to do it manually. So make sure your host provider features an automated-backup option (a small monthly fee might be applied).

Scalability/room to grow - So what happens when your blog becomes bigger? It's good to know your host can provide you with different hosting plan options. When your blog starts to grow and gets a lot more visitors, you might need more power and speed. Think ahead and plan on a bright future for your blog!

Security* - Your blog can hold a lot of information. The threat of site hackers reminds us of the need for top security. Most of the time it will be your responsibility to ensure you set up have secure passwords. But even then, malware and hackers can still strike, which can lead to downtime for your blog. Some hosting providers offer security monitoring services for an extra charge.

Third-party security - Third-party providers, such as VaultPress and Sucuri, can also provide these backup and security services for you. You'll need to compare these costs, combined with your hosting company's monthly fee, to see if it makes sense to go with a cheaper hosting solution and third-party security or a more expensive hosting solution that has these services built in to their fees.

Complete instructions for setting up a blog

Now it's time to get your domain name, web hosting account and set up your new blog. Below you will find action steps you need to take and easy-to-follow videos to get your blog set up with trusted hosting providers (we like WebHostingHub). If you choose to go with a different hosting company, the setup process might be slightly different but the action steps will be the same.

Action steps

1. Get a domain & hosting

Sign up for a reliable hosting account to get started.

2. Install Wordpress CMS

Follow the easy 1-click install process shown in the video.

3. Your own blog is live

Welcome to the Web! You can start blogging instantly.

Tested web hosting companies

Preferred
choice

Visit WebHostingHub   Visit BlueHost   Visit InMotion

Watch set up instructions   Watch set up instructions   Watch set up instructions

* Disclosure: Our website receives compensation from some of the companies whose products we recommend. This enables us to provide free help with setting up your blog. We've tested and used all web hosting sites recommended in this guide.

Final words of wisdom before you start your blogging journey

We talked about some of these points already in Chapter 1, but let's do a recap since they're worth repeating.

When you create a blog, you need to future-proof it in order to ensure there will not be any big roadblocks in your way. Your vision needs to be long term. Decisions you make today will impact your online presence in the future.

The following information will help you avoid these mistakes, saving you time and money.

Make sure your blog topic is viable

While there is an audience for every niche, there may be fewer than 20 people looking for the specific topic you want to cover within your niche. Check the existing competition. If you see other blogs covering that topic, it means there is a demand for that information. There are great ideas that were ahead of their time and ones that wait to be discovered. Make sure you differentiate your idea and make it appealing to others.

Don't be afraid of technology

We understand some of this technical talk is a bit daunting. You may be nervous and think you'll never get it, but you're wrong. We had a 73-year-old client who didn't know anything about blogs, publishing her own in no time. She went from not being able to program a VCR to becoming a blogging expert in her field. If you follow the steps we provide for you, you'll see it's as easy as clicking a button or two—because that's all it really is.

You don't have to be a coder or designer

In this guide, we'll show you how to set up your blog without any knowledge of coding and how you can make it a great-looking blog without Web design skills.

Be patient and give it time

It will take time to establish your Web presence. Be prepared to wait and be consistent. Set a few pieces of content on a scheduled publishing date so you can step away for a long weekend without blogging. But get right back to it when you return home. Good things come to those who wait. You will get to the top gradually so be patient.

Owning your blog

Although we mentioned some free blog-hosting options, the best course of action is to own your blog, especially if you will be using your own copyrighted material (articles, drawings, photos, etc.). Pay a small amount of money every month, about the same as a Starbucks coffee, and you will build your own equity. Dealing with a host provider is a professional move. If you plan to sell products, services, music or anything else via your blog, then paid hosting is the best way to go. Many hosting providers can help you maintain an ecommerce blog.

Conclusion

Congratulations! Now you have your own domain name, hosting space and your blog is set up. It's time to get familiar with the Wordpress dashboard and learn how to make desired changes to your blog.

Chapter 3

Learn How to Use Wordpress

Summary: In this section, we will take a closer look at managing your WordPress blog. You will learn how to customize your blog, make design and layout changes, create your first post or page and much more.

The Wordpress front and back ends

The WordPress platform consists of two areas: your blog's front end and back end.

The front end is what your visitors will see when they come to your blog. Many of the tasks performed in the back end will be visible on the front end, such as theme customizations, plugin functionality enhancements and content publication. There are also actions that can be performed by you and your visitors directly from the front end of the blog, including commenting and social sharing.

The back end, known as the WordPress dashboard, allows you to fully manage your blog's content, community, functionality and design. It is accessible only by users who you designate and assign an account on your blog. In order to access your WordPress dashboard, you need to type: example.com/wp-admin in the address bar of your browser and log in using your WordPress username and password.
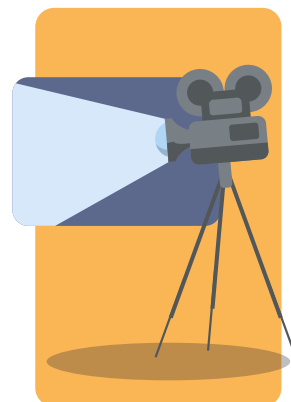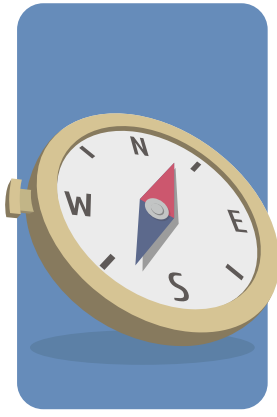
Navigating the dashboard

The Dashboard is the center of blog administration. It consists of three main parts: left side menu, top toolbar and middle section. In the setup process video in Chapter 2, we already visited the Dashboard. But there is a lot more to it!

The left-hand column of your WordPress dashboard is where you'll find all of your admin options and where most of your creative effort will be focused. This column includes menu options for each of the following functional areas:

Updates — Find updates to the WordPress platform along with plugins and themes you have installed.

Posts — View all posts (blog content), add a new post, view and create categories, view and create tags.

Media — View your media library (images, documents and other file uploads) and upload new files.

Pages — View and add new static pages to your blog.

Comments — Comment manager where you will approve or delete new comments on blog posts and pages.

Appearance — Manage themes, customize your blog design (dependent upon theme), manage widgets, manage menu items and edit your blog's header (dependent upon theme).

Plugins — Manage and add new plugins to enhance WordPress functionality.

Users — Manage users, add new users and update your WordPress profile (name, password, and details).

Tools — Tools to import and export content to and from your WordPress blog.

Settings — Edit general blog settings, writing settings, reading settings, discussion (comment) settings, media settings and permalinks (URL formatting for your blog).

In addition to the general menu items in the left hand column mentioned above, you'll also find menu options for plugins you have installed. Depending on the plugin's purpose and coding, it's settings can be added to any standard menu (posts, pages, comments, appearance, plugins, users, tools or settings) or as a new menu item anywhere in the left-hand column.

A closer look at each area of a dashboard

Updates
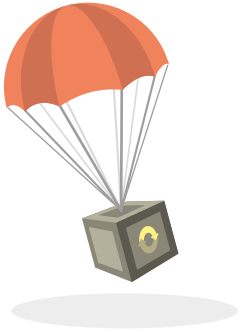
WordPress, like any popular CMS, releases both minor and major updates to their platform in order to introduce new features, fix bugs and increase security. In the past, you would be given the choice to update to the latest version of WordPress through your Dashboard using a one-click install process or by downloading the latest version and installing it yourself.

For anyone who has WordPress 3.7 or above, updates to the core WordPress platform are automatically installed on your website. You are still responsible for updating your plugins and themes when updates become available. If you don't want WordPress to automatically update the core of their platform, you can find directions on how to configure automatic updates in the WordPress Codex.

Posts

The Posts menu allows you to control the new content you add to your blog. Blog posts are published on your blog in descending order (newest first). In the Posts menu, you will find the following options.

All Posts.........A list all of your posts in the dashboard. You can use the listing to quickly edit single or multiple post categories, tags, status, author and ability to comment.

Add New........This is where you go to add a new post to your blog.

Categories .....View all of the categories your posts are listed under, edit them and add new categories.

Tags ....View all of the keywords your posts are tagged with, edit them and add new tags.

Media

Your WordPress installation comes with a unique media manager. With it, you can upload rich media content and assign it to posts, pages, sidebars and headers—anything from photos and videos to audio files. Media can be previewed, added, edited or deleted. In the Media menu, you will find the following options.

Library ....View all of the media uploaded to your WordPress blog.

Add New......Add new media to your WordPress blog.

Pages

Pages provide static content or information to the readers. Standard pages that WordPress bloggers use include: About, Contact, Advertise, Products, Services and Resources. The following options are available on the Pages menu, you will find the following options.

All Pages ....A list of all pages in the dashboard. You can use the listing to quickly edit single or multiple pages' status, author, parent, template and ability to comment.

Add New........Add new pages to your blog.

Posts vs. pages

Your blog content will be displayed in pages and posts. While they have similarities, they serve different purposes and have different behaviors.

They both have the following in common:

- A title/headline and specific content
- Meta information (author, date of publishing, etc.)
- They can be added, deleted, updated or edited.
- They will be available for everyone or only a limited number of users based on your choice of settings.
- They can contain anything from plain text to media-rich content (video, audio, photo, links, etc.).
- They can be altered or extended via plugins.

- What sets posts and pages apart:

- Pages are generally not a part of your main blog's content. For example, if you have a travel blog, you would write posts about your latest travels. You would reserve pages for things that relate to you and the blog, such as a page with information about you or a page with a contact form to contact you.

- Posts are part of your main blog's content. They will show up as new entries within your blog and your RSS feed (Rich Site Summary is a web feed used to distribute information from your blog to subscribers.) Pages will only be displayed when you link to them directly and never within your RSS feed.

Comments

    The Comments feature is the best way to manage reader interaction. It allows readers to add comments on the topic, ask questions and provide feedback. It allows you and your readers to stay engaged with the community and interact around your specific niche market. Both blog posts and pages can accept comments. Most WordPress themes come equipped with comment layout functionality. However, it is up to you to engage with your readers and encourage them to leave comments on your blog. Check for new comments regularly. Approve them promptly and reply to them as needed.

    In the Comments section, you will have the ability to moderate comments, including approving them, marking them as spam or deleting them entirely.

Appearance

   This menu is where most of the activity of changing the design and layout of your blog will take place. Here you can search for and install new themes and make additional customizations to your blog's header image, colors and background.

   In the Appearance menu, you will find the following options: (We're presenting options that are commonly available. Keep in mind that options will vary, depending on the theme you choose.)

▶ Watch a quick demo (2:20)

In the Appearance menu, you will find the following options:

Themes - Search for themes on the WordPress network or install themes you have downloaded from elsewhere. We will talk about theme selection shortly.

▶ Watch a quick demo (2:05)

Customize - Use the Customize section to make changes to the theme's design in a visual editor. Items that can be customized include: Title and Tagline, Color, Background Image, Static Front Page and Featured Content.

▶ Watch a quick demo (1:51)

Widgets - Widgets are boxes you can add to various areas of your WordPress blog. Depending on the theme you've chosen, this can include the homepage, header, sidebar and footer. Adding widgets is a simple task via a drag & drop process. Widgets can showcase social media links, a search bar, subscription links, "About" text for the blog, most recent posts, most recent comments and links to other blogs that complement yours.

▶ Watch a quick demo (2:09)

Menus - Create one or more menus that will appear horizontally in your header.

▶ Watch a quick demo (2:40)
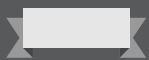
Header - Upload a graphic at a specific size (determined by your theme) which will be displayed at the top of your blog.

▶ Watch a quick demo (1:18)

Background - Change background colors or upload your own background image.

▶ Watch a quick demo (1:12)

Editor - The editor is for advanced users and involves code knowledge. It gives you the option of editing theme code for specific functionality and design changes. Because visitors will be able to immediately see any changes that you save in your theme's code, it's usually safer to edit copies of your files offline, test, and upload your changes when they are verified. If you are going to use the Editor, always make sure you back up a current version of your blog before editing your files. If there is a problem, you can always upload a previous version of the code to fix it.

▶ Watch a quick demo (1:16)

More on themes
(blog design and layout)

The first thing your blog's front end needs is a face (design and layout). You want to create an environment that is both eye-catching and practical. In the long run, you want your visitors to easily find information on your blog. You don't want visitors to be discouraged by the colors you choose or the non-intuitive and unpractical way in which information is displayed. Your design can cause instant distrust of your blog or instant acceptance.

Start your search for a theme as soon as your WordPress platform is installed. The look and feel of your blog relies on the theme you choose. Your readers will first notice the overall appearance of the blog, before even taking a look at the content. Choose a theme that looks great, but also works for your unique content needs. The default theme that comes with your WordPress blog installed is Twenty Fourteen—while it's a good starter theme, you'll want to choose a theme that is more unique to your blog and compatible with your niche.

Here's a quick checklist for choosing your theme by searching within blog dashboard:

Read the description - Most themes come with a short description of features and functionality. By reading it, you should have a rough idea if the theme matches your needs and how customizable it is.

Check the ratings - Popular themes will have star ratings that are visible in the preview and under theme details. They should give you a clear idea how good the theme is.

Preview the theme - Preview the theme to get an idea of the overall look and layout.

Check for responsiveness - Aim for a responsive design that will work on desktop browsers and mobile devices. This is recommended by Google.

If you find a theme that takes your breath away, cool down. Once you install a theme you like, don't be surprised if it doesn't look quite right. Your theme is just a skeleton of your blog.To make it appealing, you'll have to fill in content (text, photos, videos, etc.). Earlier, we showed you how to add content to your blog.

Free, premium, and custom themes

For many visionary novice bloggers, the world is not enough. The stash of free themes (more than two thousand themes are available on wordpress.org) does not satisfy their particular desire for look and feel. There are two other options you can take a look at, premium and custom themes. But they incur a cost, sometimes a tiny one, at other times a huge amount.

For the most part, it's hard to choose the right theme from such a wide variety. At FirstSiteGuide, we're doing our best to make that process easier for you.

Premium themes are created by both single developers and dedicated showcase websites. Top sources for premium themes that are worth checking include StudioPress, Elegant Themes, Themefuse, Thesis, WooThemes, Cssigniter Themes and ThemeForest. The price range for a single-use license ranges from $30 to $500, depending on which premium theme you choose.

Custom themes are created by an individual developer (coder and designer, or agency) who will either customize an existing theme or create a brand new theme for you. While coming with clear-cut advantages, they are not the ideal choice for beginner bloggers due to their high cost. Prices to customize a theme range from $500 to $2,000, depending on the features you want.

Examples of good themes

Based on our experience, we recommend the following free and premium themes for new bloggers.

Free themes

Decode is a top choice for bloggers who are after a minimal look. Customizations include different colors and sidebar items accessible from the menu.

Supernova, despite its classical blog look and feel, is a true gem. With color palettes, full-width sliders and custom headers, it has been designed to meet the needs of bloggers.

Clean Retina is a simple, clean and responsive theme that adapts automatically to any browser size. Along with the elegant design, the theme is easily customizable.

Premium themes

You can find different premium themes online from the resources mentioned earlier. We recommend you to check the themes series from StudioPress. Their services and support are top notch and all of

their themes are highly customizable. Here are three themes that are suited for the blog.

Wintersong is a theme that carries an air of the bare essentials. Calm, minimal, and outstanding, it's versatile enough to work for all types of sites.

Beautiful is a theme that shows a lot of attention to details—details you can customize to give your website a unique look.

Modern Blogger theme is bold, sleek and colorful. With a contemporary look than meets the needs of the passionate blogger.
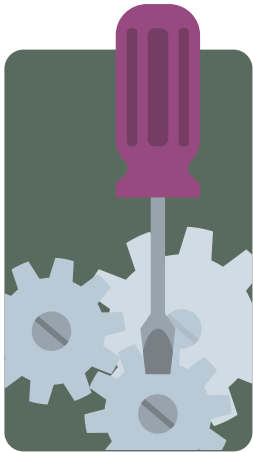
Advanced customizations

Now, let's look at the areas in your WordPress dashboard where you can do most of your customizations.

Plugins

Plugins are bundled pieces of code that affect the way your blog looks or feels. They can add new functionality to your blog, extend your theme's capabilities and customize your blog as a whole or in part.

While a majority of plugins are free, there are plenty that are offered for a fee based on their unique functionality.

▶ Watch a quick demo (2:15)
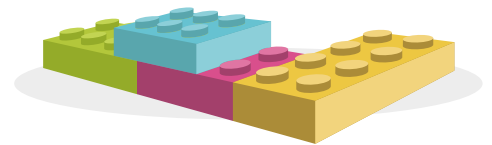
List of recommended plugins for new bloggers

To save you time, we've selected some important plugins for your immediate blogging needs. They cover many aspects of your blogging experience, enhance the functionality of your blog and make it more professional and attractive to your readers.

Google Analytics - The top choice when it comes to monitoring and analyzing your website traffic.

Contact Form 7 - A contact form with flexible email options.

Digg Digg - A floating or static palette of social media and sharing options.

Disqus Commenting System - An alternative to the basic WordPress comment system with advanced administrative and comment capabilities.

Yoast SEO - A comprehensive SEO plugin for your blog. The best free SEO plugin.

WP Super Cache - Speeds up the load time of your WordPress blog.

Akismet - Protection from comment spam (you won't need this if you go with Disqus for comments).

YARPP - Automatically creates a "related posts" list at the end of each of your posts, to encourage people to continue browsing your site.

Authors Widget - A great way to display multiple authors and their activity on-site.

Additional menu options

Users   ▶

This section allows you to add new users to your WordPress blog, customize your own user profile and edit users you have added to your WordPress blog. You can assign each user one of the following roles.
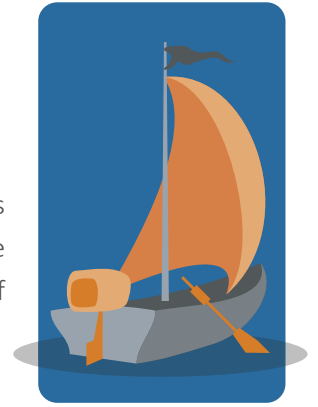
Administrator.... Able to perform all actions on the blog. This should be reserved for you as the site owner and only those you trust highly with your blog. Administrators have the ability to perform all the actions you can. They can even lock you out of your own site!

Editor .... Access and edit all posts, pages, comments, categories, tags and links.

Author................ Publish and edit articles, posts and upload media.

Contributor........ Write and edit own posts, but is not able to publish without your consent.

Subscriber.......... Can only read and comment on posts or pages.

Tools   ▶

With Tools you are able to execute some extended tasks on your WordPress blog.

Available tools .. This section comes with pre-installed option called "Press This" that provides a quick and easy way to clip text, images and videos from any site and share them on your blog. Under "Press This," there is also a categories-to-tags converter.

Import tool .... Enables you to import data from other blogging platforms into WordPress.

Export tool .... Enables you to export blog content which can later be imported into a new WordPress installation. It is a very useful way to back up your blog content.
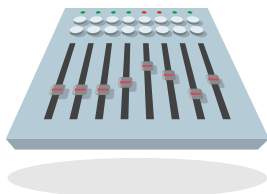
Settings   ▶

This menu contains all of the settings options for your WordPress site.

General .... Configure basic options for your WordPress site, including the site name, description, URL,

timezone, date format and main administrator email.

Writing .... Set default categories and post formats for your content. WordPress will automatically assign a category and format if you don't.

Reading .... Set the home page for your site (either a static page or the latest blog posts), the number of blog posts on your homepage and archives, the number of items in your RSS feed, and whether you want to show your full post or a summary in your RSS feed.

Discussion .... Control how comments are received on your blog. The optimum setting is to moderate all new-comment authors and automatically approve comments by previously approved comment authors. Also hold in moderation comments with multiple links as this is a sign of a spammer.

Media .... Customize the default sizes for images uploaded to your blog.

Permalinks .... Customize the URL structure for your blog. The best option is to have a structure that allows keywords from your post/page titles to be implemented into your URL, also known as the post name structure.

Conclusion

Remember you will need to learn about each section of your Dashboard and get comfortable with the management options. Doing so will allow you to improve your blog's design, functionality and personality. Once you know how to customize your blog, make the necessary tweaks to make it stand out and please your readers.

How to Write and Create Great Blog Content

Summary: Now that you have your blog set up, your next goal is to create content. The content of your blog will be the bait that attracts your readers. In this chapter, we will cover what the content your blog consists of, types of content you can create and blogging practices you should follow.

Without great content, even the most well-designed, tightly-structured blogs will ultimately fail. There are three types of content you need to create for your blog.

Pages content

Static page content, such as "About" and "Contact."

Sidebar content

Static content that appears on the sidebar of your blog.

Blog posts

Regular posts about your niche.

Before you start writing your day-to-day "Blog posts" you will want to make sure the static "Pages" and "Sidebar" content of your blog is created and uploaded to your blog.

Let's explore each of these content areas.

Pages content

First, you will need to create static content pages for the following types of information.

About - The most traditional page on any blog is the About page. This page simply tells new visitors to your blog what it is about, who you are and why you have a blog about your specific topic. Depending on your niche and your style, the information you provide can be "all business" or personal and fun.

Contact - This page enables visitors to your blog to contact you at any time. It can be a simple page with your email address plus social network links or you can use plugins like Contact Form 7 to have a contact form visitors can use to contact you without leaving your website.

Products/services - If you created your blog to promote your business, you'll want to make sure there's a page that details the products or services you sell. Alternatively, if you already have a website for your busi-

ness, you can provide a link to it in your menu.

Disclaimer/policy - To give yourself a little liability protection, you might want to consider a disclaimers or policy page. For example, if you are writing a health blog, but you're not a medical professional, you may want to create a disclaimer to say that you are not a physician or other healthcare professional and recommend that readers see their doctors for their personal medical information and evaluation.

You may also want to inform visitors to your website that you use analytics tracking, Google AdSense, affiliate marketing links and other types of content. A great example of a disclaimer page can be found here.

As you continue to grow your blog, you will also want to consider adding the following pages.

Pillar pages - As you add new content to your blog, you will want to consider creating pillar pages. These are pages that direct visitors to your blog to specific posts on specific topics. Derek Halpern's List Building 101 page is a great example of a pillar page.

Archives - This page simply guides people to your most recent posts, main categories, top tags and content you have created that's not located on your blog, such as guest posts, interviews, podcasts and videos.

Advertising page - If you want to sell advertising on your blog and you have enough traffic to make it worthwhile for advertisers, create an advertising page that shows off your latest stats (number of website visitors, pageviews, email subscribers, RSS subscribers, etc.).

Be sure to visit other blogs in your niche—preferably larger ones—to see what pages they provide links for in their main navigation bar, sidebar and footer. Chances are, your visitors will be looking for the same types of pages on your blog.

Sidebar content

Your sidebar is the smaller column to the left or right (depending on the theme you selected) of your blog's main content. You will want to add the following content in sidebar widgets for your visitors.

Subscribe - Encourage visitors to your blog to subscribe via email or RSS. Email, of course, is best, especially if you would like to monetize your blog in the future. MailChimp is a great service and it's free for the first 2,000 subscribers.

About - This is a simple sentence or two about you and your blog for new visitors who may not take the time to read your About page. Having your photo in this blurb of text helps visitors put a face to the blog, whether you are the owner and editor managing other writers, or the main content author.

Follow - Beneath your About widget, you will want to display links to your social profiles so people can follow you. Generally, this will be your Facebook page, Twitter profile and Google+ profile/page. You can use icons to represent each network, or use official boxes, buttons and badges from these networks. The latter help you build your social media audience by allowing people to connect with you without leaving your website.

Popular Posts - A Popular Posts widget will help direct visitors to your top content. The WordPress Popular Posts plugin will help you create this easily, displaying posts based on comments and view count.

Advertisers - If you plan to add advertising banners to your blog, then add them from the start so regular visitors will not be surprised when you do start gaining advertisers. The banners you use until then can link to products for which you are an affiliate marketer or to products you simply like.

Blog post content basics

Before we get into the technical elements of blog posts, there is one fundamental that every blogger in every niche needs to adhere to.

Create content with readers in mind.

You'll read a lot about optimizing your content for search engines, and while that it is important, if you don't optimize your content for humans, then you'll never gain the exposure that it takes to ultimately get links and rank well in search engines. If you write content that people love to read, then you will get traffic, social shares and links as your readership grows.

Basic components of a blog post:

Following are the basic elements of a great blog post. We'll talk about how to optimize each for both readers and search engines.

Headline

The headline, or title, of your blog post must be crafted to capture the attention of potential readers who may see it in their social media newsfeeds or in search results. Make sure you've found a great keyword phrase that people searching will use to find blog posts on your topic—and include it in your headline.

Introduction

The first paragraph of your blog post will either keep people reading or make people leave. Make sure that it compels people to read the rest of your content. You should use your targeted keyword phrase for search at least once in this paragraph.

Main content

This is the main portion of your blog post content. Think of the headline as the promise and the main content as the fulfillment of that promise. Your main content should fully satisfy anyone who visits your post based on the headline. If you create content that does not satisfy the promises of your headline, people will start to identify your blog as unfulfilling and thus, stop visiting. The length of your blog posts can range from 300 to 3,000 or more words. It's best to alternate the length of your posts as you gain insight about what works best for your audience.

Subheads (Sub-headlines)

Many people will scan your blog content as opposed to reading it word for word. Write subheads that break your content into digestible sections, and make sure those subheads represent the content within them.

Bold text - Use bold text in a few areas of your main content to help highlight important points. Use it selectively, otherwise your entire article will seem bolded, thus taking away the ability to highlight key portions of content.

Bulleted/numbered lists - While you don't want your entire post to be bulleted or numbered lists, these lists do help separate out steps and lists with useful content.

Media - Supplement the text portion of your content with media, such as relevant images and video. This will help break up your content and illustrate your points better. Images can also be used as part of the search optimization of your post—include your post's main keyword phrase in the filename of the image as well as the ALT tag.

Conclusion

The conclusion should be a paragraph or two at the end of your post to summarize what the reader should have gotten out of it. If they didn't, chances are, they will go back to see what they might have missed.

Call to action

The last line of your blog post should be some form of a call to action. It can be as simple as asking readers to share their thoughts in the comments or to share the post on social media if they enjoyed it. If your post was written to promote a particular product or service, the call to action should encourage the reader to learn more about it.

You don't have to include all of the elements from this list in every post, but make sure you always have engaging introduction, quality content and a solid conclusion.

Types of content

As a blogger, you don't have to be limited to standard blog posts to share your expertise. Here are various content types you can use to supplement your blog content.

Podcasts

If you like to speak or interview others, then podcasts should be part of your content. They allow you to gain new readers from those who love podcasts, and you can transcribe or summarize your podcasts in blog posts.

Infographics

For those with design talent, infographics can be a great way to get more exposure for your ideas. With precision design and backed-up facts, you can get your content featured on sites like Mashable and others that regularly post infographics.

Ebooks

Ebooks are also great freebies for building your email list or, alternatively, something you can sell on your website and Amazon Kindle. You can create them from scratch or repackage several blog posts that cover a specific theme.
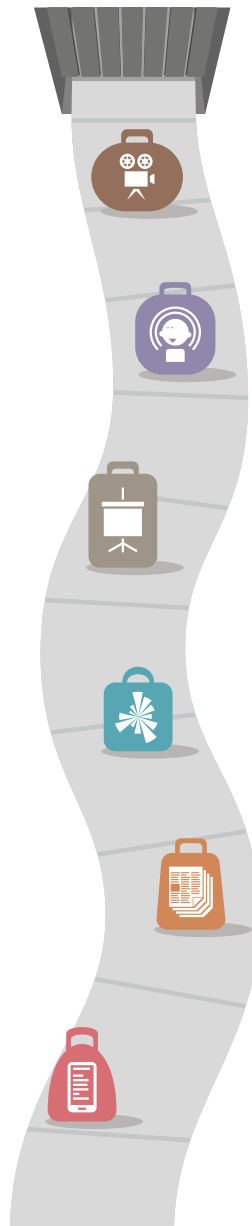
Videos

If you want to gain new visitors from You-Tube, or simply feel it's easier to record a video than write a blog post, then video content should be in your plans. All you need is an HD camera (if you want to be on video), a microphone and/or a good screen capture program like Screenflow if you want to record tutorials from your computer. You can also create videos from webinars, Goo-gle+ hangouts and other platforms.

Presentations

Enjoy creating PowerPoint presentations or Prezis? Then create slideshow content that you can use on sites like Slideshare or to supplement your blog content.

Whitepapers & Case Studies

If you prefer to write in-depth, researched content, then consider whitepapers and case studies. These can be summarized on a blog post, then offered as a free download to build your email list or in exchange for so-cial shares.

The best part about these types of content is that you don't have to create unique content if you want to explore different formats. For example, you can take a blog post tutorial and record it as a video. You can take a podcast transcription and turn it into a blog post. You can take several blog posts and combine them into an ebook. The possibilities are endless.

Best blogging practices

To become a successful blogger in any niche, you will want to follow these best practices.

Set your blogging goals

You'll never know if you are getting the most out of blogging if you haven't set goals for your blog. Is your goal to make money? Get a new job? Find people to connect with about a specific topic? Define your blogging goals and periodically ask yourself if your blog is helping you meet them. If not, ask yourself how you can improve your blog in order to meet the goals.

Commit to becoming an expert

No matter what your blogging goals are, if you strive to be an expert in your niche, the fulfillment of your goals is sure to follow. People who are known as experts in their niche tend to receive more recognition and income for their content. They also tend to have larger audiences and the option to turn their readers into customers by offering related products and services.

Engage with your audience

The best way to stay in tune with your readers is to engage with them. Some ways to do this include replying to comments, responding to queries from your contact form, joining in conversations with readers on social networks, and visiting your readers' blogs to see what they are interested in and join discussions. As you do this, you will build stronger relationships with your readers and learn more about what they want, something that can help inspire your future content.

Be consistent and realistic

Creating a consistent schedule of posting on your blog helps your readers know when they can expect to hear from you again, whether it's daily, weekly, monthly or even quarterly. The key to maintaining consistency is to be realistic. Individual bloggers will find it difficult to create high-quality content on a daily basis. Start with weekly or bi-weekly posts and work your way up to daily posts, if that is your ultimate goal. Just don't sacrifice quantity for quality.

Use an editorial calendar

To help maintain your consistency, be sure to use some form of editorial calendar. You can use Google Calendar, Outlook Calendar, or even a simple spreadsheet. Use it to manage your ideas and plan

your content themes for each month so that blogging is something you focus on, not something you do in your spare time.

Proofread and edit your work—or hire someone to do it for you

For many people, it's hard to create content—then proofread and edit it. As a matter of fact, editing while you write can hinder your creative flow. Proofreading is not optional. A blog post full of misspelled words and typos reflects poorly on you. If you're not able to do these tasks on your own, consider hiring a virtual assistant to do it for you. This is especially important if you're not writing in your native language. Having a native speaker of the language used in your blog edit your work can boost your credibility. While blog content does not need to be perfect, it does need to be easy to read and consume.

Analyze the data

Be sure to install Google Analytics when you begin blogging and regularly check your data. In particular, you want to make sure your traffic is growing and see what websites, social networks and other types of sources drive the most visitors to your blog. You'll also want to watch for significant drops in traffic, as these drops may indicate a bigger problem, such as downtime for your website or loss of traffic due to Google algorithm changes.

Conclusion

If you want your blog to thrive and grow, then creating quality content that's compelling to your readers is the answer. Focus on quality over quantity, even if you have to sacrifice frequency and consistency. Your readers will value content that's relevant, factual and timely.

Chapter 5

How to Promote Your Blog and Its Content

Summary: In the previous chapter, you learned that your blog content is the defining factor that will make or break your blog. You learned what it takes to create amazing content, as well as the types of content you can create for your audience. But your content will never help you succeed in blogging if no one ever sees it.
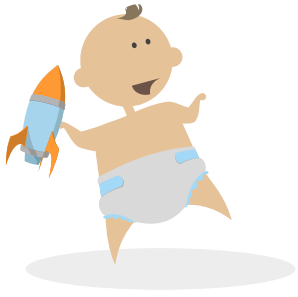
This is why you need to learn online marketing strategies to help you market your blog as a whole, as well as each piece of content you create. This is called content marketing. Your content marketing skills will determine how much traffic comes to your website, how many social shares you receive, how many comments are made on your posts and how many subscribers you gain.

Ultimately, the goal is to have as many visitors as possible when you start to monetize your blog. Visitors who you can convert into advertising clicks, affiliate referrals and product/service buyers—depending on your monetization strategy, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Until then, let's look at the many ways you can promote your blog and your content.

Preparing for promotion

Before you start promoting your blog, you will want to make sure it's ready.

This step is checking everything you have done from previous chapters, from setting up your blog to creating your pages and posts.
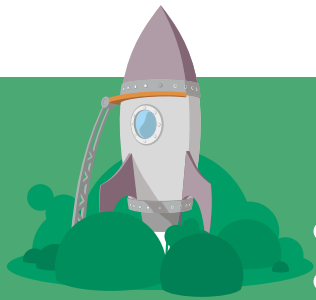
- Make sure your core content is live and ready for promotion.
- Test your menu bar and sidebar links to make sure pages, posts and archives open properly.
- Test your blog on the top browsers (Chrome, Firefox, Safari and Internet Explorer) and see if everything looks right.
- Check your contact info and test your contact form to see that it works well. Test your blog comment form to make sure people can easily leave comments.
- Test your social sharing buttons so people can share your posts on the top social networks.
- Give your visitors one or more ways to connect with you and subscribe to your blog including an option to subscribe by email.
- Set up Google Analytics to track your visitors, where they come from and top content pages on your website.
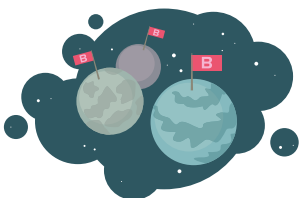
Promotion goals

As you begin blogging, you will have three main goals for promoting your blog.

You need to get the word out about your new blog so that those interested in your niche can find your blog, consume your content and spread the word.

Focus on becoming an authority and gaining trust from your readers and from other influencers within your niche. Build relationships with top bloggers in complementary topic areas and strive to enhance your name and credibility.

Engagement with your niche market happens every time anyone mentions your blog. When people start discussing your content, be sure to join into the discussion wherever it may be, including on your blog, social networks, forums, etc.

Ways to promote your blog

Now, let's look at the ways you can promote your blog as a whole. These are especially important steps when you are just starting out.

Let your connections know about your new blog

Everyone who comes in contact with you should know that you have a blog. Some good ways to ensure this include the following.

- Add your blog URL to your email signature so your email contacts can check it out. WiseStamp is a great app to try for anyone using Gmail or other browser-based email systems. It will even pull in your latest blog post into your signature.

- Add your blog URL to the social profiles you use the most, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and Pinterest. This way, whenever people find you on social media, they can discover your blog as well.

- Add your blog URL to forum profiles and signatures where you participate in discussions, preferably related to your new blog's niche.

- Add your blog URL to author bios of any sites you are already contributing to, including other blogs you own. Maybe you already have a blog about photography and you're starting a blog about marketing. Your author bio and about page should link to your new marketing blog.
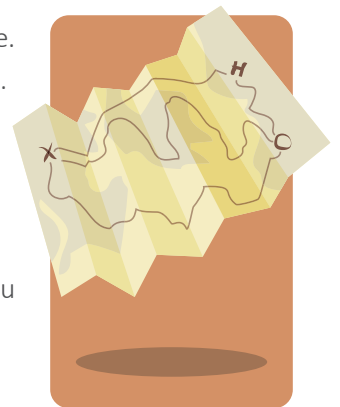
Network with others at every opportunity

Attend networking events? Be sure to have a quick elevator pitch about your blog when people ask you what you do. If you're at a blogging conference in particular, it's highly acceptable to let people know that you founded yourdomain.com, a blog that helps people learn more about your subject matter. Even if you have a day job that you need to promote, your elevator pitch is that you are a [your job title], and you also run yourdomain.com, a blog that helps people learn more about your subject matter.

Submit your blog to search engines

In Chapter 3, we suggested a plugin called Yoast SEO. One of the features of this plugin allows you to create a custom sitemap for your blog. You can use this sitemap to submit your blog to search engines through Google Webmaster Tools (for Google) and Bing Webmaster Tools (for Bing and Yahoo).

Submit your blog to directories
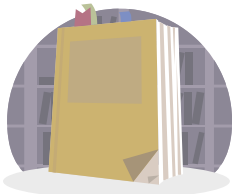
While there are hundreds of directories that will list your blog for a specific yearly fee or a permanent fee, only a handful should be considered in terms of quality. These include DMOZ (free, but hard to get into), Best of the Web Blogs ($150 for a submission), EatonWeb Blog Directory ($35 per submission) and Yahoo Directory ($299 for 7-day listing guarantee). Some of these directories offer free listings as well, but you will wait a very, very long time to see yours added, assuming they add it at all.

Comment on other blogs

Commenting on other relevant blogs is a great way to build relationships with top bloggers within your niche. Research the Web to find top blogs in your niche and start commenting on their newest posts. This will help you make blog hosts and their readers aware of your existence and help you establish your own authority within the niche.

Contribute to other blogs in your niche
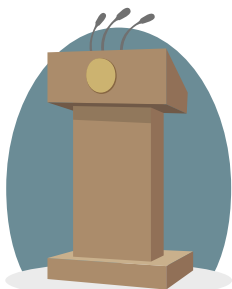
Matt Cutts, Google's head of webspam, has denounced guest blogging as a tactic for SEO. That said, it's still a great way to get exposure within your niche so long as you are submitting quality content to quality blogs. Find blogs that have strong social shares and community engagement as judged by the number of comments per post and social followers. Get to know the blog owners and/or editors, establish a relationship with them, then approach them to see if they are accepting new contributors on their website.

The key is to say new contributors as opposed to guest bloggers. "Contributors" tells the blog owner/editor that you are committed to creating high-quality content for them as opposed to just slapping something together to promote yourself.

Create a Feedburner account

Feedburner is a service owned by Google that allows you to track the number of subscribers to your RSS feed. Use it to offer your blog visitors a way to subscribe to your blog in their favorite RSS reader such as Feedly.

Optimize your blog for search

Regularly creating valuable content on your blog is one way to get search engines to index your content. If you want your blog and posts to rank for particular keywords, you'll want to always strive to optimize both for search. This can be as simple as using the fields provided by Yoast SEO to add a keyword optimized SEO title and meta description to your blog's homepage, main static pages and each one of your posts.

To stay on Google's good side, avoid overstuffing your blog with keywords. Choose one keyword phrase to optimize on each page and post. Include it in your SEO title, meta description and inside the Alt text (alternative text) of the image on the page.

Start building your mailing list

Don't wait until you begin getting a substantial amount of traffic to build a mailing list—start from the very beginning. If on your first day of launching your blog you get two people who love it, you want those two people to be able to give you their email address so you can keep them up to date with what is happening on your blog. Later, you'll use this list to promote your monetization strategy.

Operating a mailing list is generally not expensive in the beginning. Services like MailChimp allow you to have up to 2,000 subscribers with up to 12,000 emails for free, while services like Aweber allow you to have up to 500 subscribers with unlimited emails for $19 per month.

Look at what your competitors are doing

You don't have to reinvent the wheel when it comes to promoting your blog. Just look at what your competitors are doing in terms of marketing strategy. You can use SEO backlink tools to show you the links your competitors are getting, which will shed light into their strategies for social networks, directories, guest posting opportunities and other online marketing tactics. CognitiveSEO has a free Backlink Explorer you can use for this purpose.

Look at paid advertising options

If you have a budget, you can boost your initial traffic through paid advertising. Google AdWords allows you to pay to promote your blog on Google Search and their display networks. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and StumbleUpon have their own advertising platforms to help you drive traffic to your blog and blog posts. You can also look at advertising options on other blogs in your niche that receive a lot of traffic. This will generally be in the form of banner advertisements or sponsored reviews.

Ways to promote your blog content

In addition to promoting your blog as a whole, you will also want to promote your blog content, i.e., each, individual blog post. As you promote your content, your entire blog will gain more traffic, social shares and engagement. Following are some ways to promote your content.

Submit your blog posts to bookmarking and voting sites

Similar to directories, there are hundreds of social bookmarking and voting sites. And similar to directories, not all of them are worthwhile. Your goal is to look for social bookmarking and voting sites that have engaged users. These include Delicious, StumbleUpon, Reddit, BizSugar and Inbound. Note that many of these sites are not fond of people constantly promoting their own content. You may want to consider establishing friendships on those networks and occasionally sharing content with them. Often, they will submit your content to the networks, particularly if you do the same for them.

Try blog promotion networks

Several networks exist solely for the purpose of gathering people who love to help each other promote their blog posts. These networks include Triberr, Social Buzz Club and Viral Content Buzz. You can also build your own blog post promotional network as you network with others in your niche. Just have everyone connect in a Facebook group or in an email list where they can share their latest posts.

Establish yourself on social media

By this point, you should have already claimed your preferred name on each social

channel. Depending on your niche, certain social media channels can be invaluable. Never forget, though, that social media (aside from paid advertising) is a place to connect with others, be helpful to them and display your expertise. Don't hop in with a megaphone and act like a barker at a circus. Rather, treat social media like a huge cocktail party—a place where you can meet others, trade ideas and network to form alliances. Treat everyone you meet with respect. Your aim is to be of value and engage with your current or future blog readers.

The main social networks you should work towards building connections upon are listed below. Each social media platform should be utilized and approached differently. Chose the one (or ones) that best fit your needs and become an expert at leveraging them to help reach your goals.

Facebook
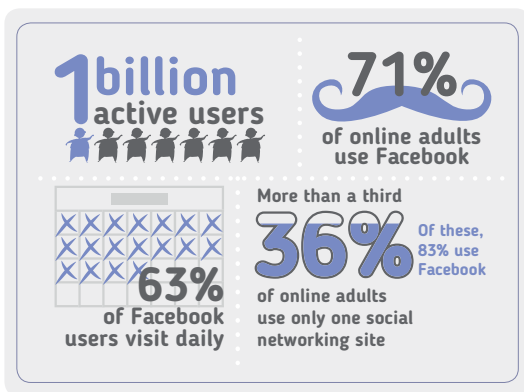
With over one billion active monthly users, Facebook is the number-one social media network. Chances are, many of your potential readers and future customers already have an account there.

One thing to remember is that Facebook tends to be reserved for true "social" interaction. You can launch your blog's Facebook page and start interacting with the community that is already established, but be careful about mixing business with pleasure on this platform. Facebook rewards the engagement with your followers, thus the goal is not the quantity but quality of relevant posts and updates that engage your fans, which can be measured by the number of likes, comments and shares you receive.

For an overview of how to use Facebook for business, check out the Facebook for Business guide. Social Media Examiner also offers excellent advice on social media. Find out how to use your personal Facebook page for business by reading this article.

Also remember that Facebook is a great place to promote your posts. You can start by using their paid advertising platform as you grow your own organic audience and reach.

LinkedIn
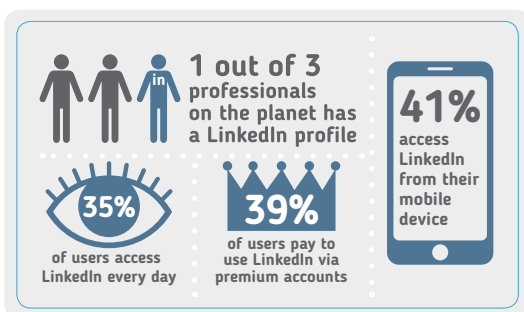
LinkedIn is the leading social network for professionals. With more than 100 million users, it's a great place to connect with other bloggers and business owners in your niche. The network has a lot to offer when it comes to business-related information. The downside to this network is that unlike Twitter, you have to know a person already (or know their email address) to connect with them. Social Media Examiner's excellent 10 Tips series can help get you going with this platform. Read their post on 10 LinkedIn Tips for Building Your Business for more information.

Pinterest
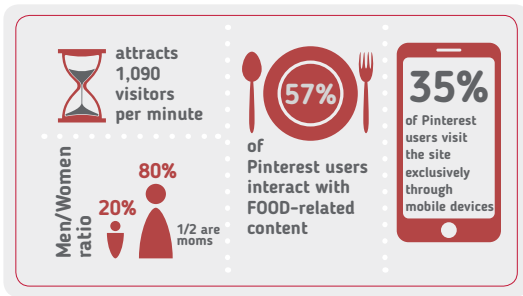
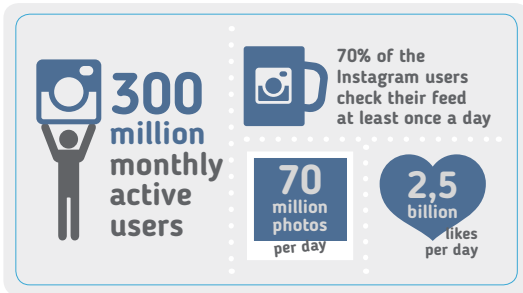While it is still predominantly used by women, the number of men on Pinterest is increasing. With more than two million active users daily, the statistics on Pinterest are impressive. See the Pinterest Tips for Business page for additional information.

Instagram

This site allows you to share photographs via your mobile device. It's similar to Pinterest, in that you can create boards that focus on specific topics.

Here again, remember how important it is to stay centered. Make sure your photographs are what your audience wants to see. This is not to say you shouldn't post items of general interest, but your profile as a whole should draw your desired audience and provide value to them.

Instagram's Getting Started page is a great place to learn about the platform. The Social Media Examiner's article on using Instagram for business is an excellent primer for finding out more about this very visual social media channel.

Twitter
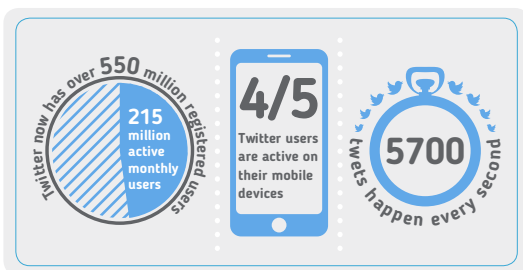
There are more than 200 million users on Twitter. Some say it is a one-way conversation, with 140-character (maximum) messages getting fired out constantly. They claim there are a lot of people talking, but not a lot of people listening. But others have managed to build a strong, engaged following to promote their content.

To learn more about Twitter, start with the Twitter 101 guide to Business as a quick-start resource. Also check out this article by Social Media Examiner about Twitter to help you get the foundations in place. There are also plenty of Twitter experts, such as Deborah Anderson. Her Social Web Cafe website has helped many bloggers learn to use Twitter chats to expand their reach.

Google+
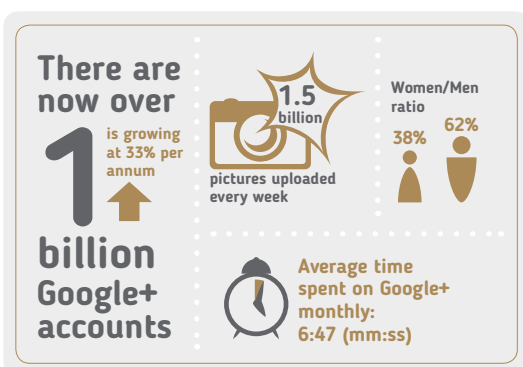
More than a social media platform, Google is using Google+ as a hubspot for identifying online movers and shakers. The Internet giant has moved business listings from Google Places to Google+ and is rewarding those who tie their personal Google+ profile to their other online activities (via author attribution and publisher markup) with special recognition in search results. This is the one social media platform you should definitely not ignore. Mark Traphagen stays tuned in to all things concerning Google+, so be sure to Follow Mark to stay updated.

YouTube

1 billion people across the world use YouTube every month

1 hour of video is uploaded to YouTube **EVERY SECOND!**

YouTube is localized in **61 countries** and across **61 languages**

We watch **6 Billion** hours of video on YouTube every month

Now owned by Google, the videos you launch on YouTube are quickly indexed on the world's largest search engine. Don't forget to apply search engine optimization (SEO) strategies on your YouTube channel and launches—most especially by optimizing your titles and video descriptions with a target keyword phrase. ProBlogger nails the basics in this excellent article.

It is not wise to host your videos on your own blog because of the time it takes to load large video files. YouTube is an excellent solution. You can host videos there for free, gain the SEO advantage, then embed them in your own blog. Check out this Udemy Blog article about using YouTube for business for more information.

Other social networks

There are other social media possibilities and new ones appear regularly. For most of us, though, one of the already-popular channels will serve our needs well and deliver maximum promotional benefit. Of course, your business is unique, and you should make use of the social media avenues that best fit your own niche and style. If there is a lesser-known channel where your audience tends to gather, you should be there with them. Whatever you do, don't overextend yourself. Everything you do online is a reflection of your capabilities.

Context is important

"Content is the king but context is the God" - Gary Vaynerchuck

Context is the circumstances that form and surround an event or idea so it can be fully understood. When it comes to blog content, context is the way you're publishing, distributing and promoting your content. If you're trying to connect with your audience in the wrong context, it doesn't matter how good your content is. Your content will not be read, shared or discussed.

Conclusion

Beyond the tips listed, you can come up with other creative ways to promote your blog. Your best bet is to start small and make adjustments to your promotional strategies along the way. Always remember to focus on key fundamentals:

1 Maintain a clean and properly functioning blog.

2 Create focused and helpful content.

3 Engage in conversation and build your authority.

How to Make Money From Your Blog

Summary: In this chapter you will learn how to prepare your blog for monetization and monetization strategies for blogs with small (new blogs), medium and large audiences.

If one of the driving factors for starting a blog was to make money online, then this is the chapter you have been waiting for. For those who work full-time jobs, earning money from your blog is a great way to generate side income. For those who plan to dedicate themselves to the monetization strategies, it's possible to use it as regular source of income.

Now that you've learned how to set up your blog, create great content and promote your blog, you are ready to start with monetization.

## Monetization misconceptions

First, let's clear up a few misconceptions you may have heard about blog monetization.

Passive income is the way to go so you can earn money while you sleep

This isn't entirely false, but it's not as simple as it sounds either. Bloggers who are well known for their passive income generation did not start their blog one day and earn piles of money in their sleep the
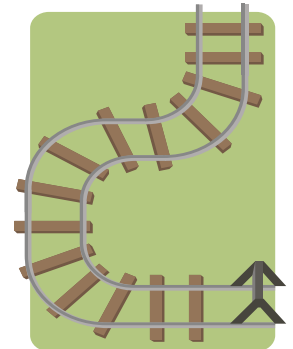
next. Like any other income source, passive income requires a good bit of hard work in the beginning to set up. But if you do it right (and we'll teach you how), you can start earning money, even while away from the computer.

Income reports can show you the path to earning top revenue

Income reports are monthly blog posts written by bloggers who make money online, showing exactly how much they earned throughout the month and how they did it. You can see some great examples of income reports from Pat Flynn and Matthew Woodward to get an idea of how bloggers are generating revenue.

Be on the lookout for misleading income reports—those that show how much a blogger makes, but not how much they spend. Many bloggers invest a lot of money on their blog every month in order to earn revenue, but some conveniently leave that fact out in their income reports, making it look like they are earning tons of free money.

When you craft your own monetization plan, you'll need to keep some expenses in mind. These include your web hosting, email marketing software, search and social media tools, mastermind memberships and online advertising.
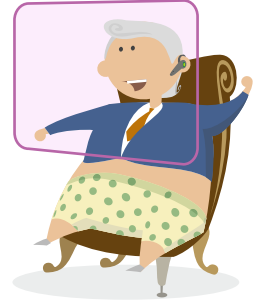
Wait to monetize until after you grow an audience

This is false. Although you can only utilize certain monetization strategies with a budding audience, you shouldn't get your readers used to an advertisement-free blog, then spring into monetization mode as soon as you hit a certain number of visitors. This might surprise and put off your original readership.

By putting some monetization strategies in place at the very beginning, you will have the chance to earn a little money from the beginning while letting your audience know exactly what they are going to get. Sure, you can add or subtract monetization methods as an ongoing process to test which ones earn the most revenue, but don't feel like you have to wait to start.

Now that we've debunked a few misconceptions about making money through blogging, let's look at how you can make money blogging.
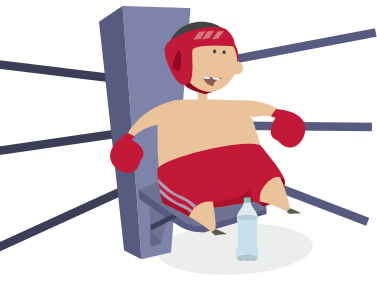
Preparing to monetize

Before you start monetizing, there's one basic thing you need to do to ensure your current and future monetization success: start building an email list.

We've mentioned this before, but it is absolutely essential if you want to earn money in the blogging world. This is why:

- If you start to capture email addresses at the start of your blog, you will have the chance to retain your first visitors as lifelong readers. No one has to know if initially there's only one subscriber on your mailing list.

- Before you have monetization strategies that need email promotion, you can use your email list to drive traffic to your blog by promoting your content.

- Your email list subscribers are yours. You can't save contact information about fans of your page or followers on your Twitter account. Your email list, on the other hand, is exportable. So if your email marketing provider decides to shut down, you take your list and move it elsewhere as opposed to losing it completely.

- Your email list subscribers are more likely to see your email messages than social media updates. Facebook reach is slim, as are other networks, since most people are following hundreds of other people and businesses. Getting in someone's inbox means that they will at least see your name on a regular basis, regardless of whether they open that email. And when they do open that email, you have their undivided attention.

- When you start utilizing monetization methods such as email list sponsorships, affiliate marketing or selling your own products, you'll already have a loyal audience that is used to receiving and consuming your emails. This is much better than starting a list and selling to your subscribers right away.

Fortunately, email marketing does not have to cost an arm and a leg before you start generating revenue. MailChimp allows you to have 2,000 subscribers and send six mass emails per month (a total of 12,000 emails) for free. It's a great option for those who need to start a list, but don't have the budget until they start earning revenue.

Now that that's out of the way, let's start with some specific monetization strategies.

Monetization strategies for new blogs

If you have a relatively new blog, or one that doesn't receive a lot of traffic, then the following are monetization strategies you can put into place to start the revenue-generation process.

Affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing allows you to generate income by promoting other people's products for a small commission. This is probably the easiest monetization method to get into at the start because you can apply to most programs with little to no audience. All you need is your blog.
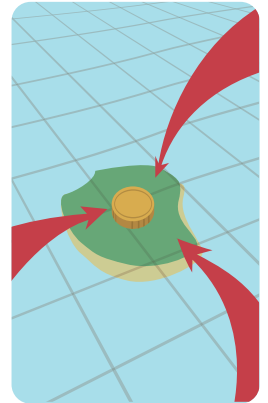
Here are a two examples:

● If you have a blog all about reviewing WordPress themes, then you should apply to affiliate programs for any WordPress theme you want to write about and promote. Visitors to your blog would likely be interested in WordPress themes, and therefore would be likely to buy a WordPress theme after clicking on a link to it from your site. Popular affiliate programs for WordPress themes include StudioPress, DIYthemes, and ElegantThemes.

● If you have a blog about gardening, then you should apply to affiliate programs for gardening books and products. Amazon Associates is a great affiliate program to join for any niche as they sell books and products related to just about everything.

Another approach is to be an affiliate for anything you have paid for and use on your blog. So, if you use a StudioPress WordPress theme, MailChimp email marketing software, Hostgator hosting or any other product with an affiliate program, be sure to create a page on your blog with resources aimed at other bloggers in the niche. As your blog grows in popularity, other bloggers will want to follow in your footsteps and may sign up for the same services you use for their own blog, thus generating some revenue for you. To find other affiliate programs by doing a search for paid products and services use the search term + affiliate program.

You can also go to affiliate networks (sites that connect publishers like you and merchants who want publishers to promote their products) and look at the products they have available to promote. Networks like Shareasale, Ejunkie

and Clickbank allow you to preview programs before you join, whereas networks like CJ require you to sign up before you see their programs.

Following are best practices for promoting affiliate products :

● Write reviews about the product or service and include an affiliate link within your review post. Don't just regurgitate information found on the product or service sales page, but write about your experience with it. People can distinguish a thorough, honest review from one that's done purely to generate revenue.

● Create a resource page on your blog of the top products and services you recommend, including an affiliate link for each, plus a link to your in-depth review, if applicable.

● Get banners for the top products and services you know will appeal to your audience and put them in your blog's header, sidebar and at the end of posts. Affiliate product banners are also great placeholders for future advertising spots you may want to sell when you start getting a substantial amount of traffic.

● Email your list whenever you write a great review or a particular affiliate program has a great special going on that your subscribers would be interested in.

● Be prepared to do special promotions on your blog and email list around Black Friday and Cyber Monday—it's the hottest time to share affiliate product sales and earn some great income.

Important reminder: Whenever you promote an affiliate product, be sure to include a disclaimer in your review, at the top of your resource page or in your emails that you are an affiliate of the product. It's a good way to build trust with your audience and it's also required in certain countries like the United States.

Google AdSense

Once you have created a certain amount of content for your blog, let's say 10 to 15 blog posts, you can apply for Google AdSense. Google AdSense allows publishers to generate income from advertisers who want to place ads on the Google Network. Once you sign up and get approved, you will be able to customize ad slots for links, banners, images and video, and place the Google AdSense code for each of these ad slots onto your website. After an hour or two, Google will begin to match the best ads to your website.

The key to Google AdSense is to follow the guidelines and know where to place your ads for the best results. You can experiment with ad placement in your blog's sidebar, below the title of individual blog posts, in your blog's header and other areas. Google even offers some example site layouts that will help you get the most clicks for your ads.

One thing to keep in mind about Google AdSense: If you are making good money through affiliate marketing or selling your own products and services, the last thing you want is to encourage someone to leave your website by clicking on an ad. Once you begin making good money through other monetization strategies, you may want to consider removing Google AdSense. It's better to get a $20 sale than a $0.05 click.

Monetization for blogs with small size audiences

Once you start building a loyal readership and a good flow of traffic, you can start looking into additional monetization strategies such as the following.

Selling ads

Depending on your niche, you can generally start selling ad space directly to advertisers once you get a certain traffic volume. You can manually manage ads on your blog or use platforms like BuySellAds that can help you sell and manage ads through their platform. It's an easy process, you simply place a snippet of code on your website where you want particular ad sizes and types to be displayed. It's also a great platform to use in researching your traffic volume versus how much you can charge for ads.

For example:

- An automotive site with 20,000 monthly impressions charges $50 per month for their 728x90 leaderboard ad space.
- A site about mythology with 35,000 monthly impressions charged $3 per 1,000 impressions per month for their 300x250 top sidebar ad space.
- A site on investing with 50,000 monthly impressions charged $8.75 per 1,000 impressions per month for their 728x90 leaderboard ad space.

This is a monetization strategy that has the potential to generate continually increasing amounts of revenue based on your ability to drive more traffic to your blog. Be sure to create an advertising page on your blog and update your metrics (traffic, social audience, email list subscribers, etc.) regularly so you can increase your ad pricing on a monthly basis.

Sponsored reviews

In addition to selling ad space, you can also offer sponsored reviews. This is where someone pays you to write about their product or service on your blog. If you choose only the products your audience will most likely be interested in, you can earn money while creating great content—a win-win situation. If you choose any product just because someone is paying you however, you could lose your hard-earned audience as they will not be interested in the content.

When you do sponsored reviews, you should always remember Google guidelines about using the rel=nofollow attribute for paid links, or links within a paid review. People will likely offer you more to have a dofollow link - .Use your own discretion as to whether the price advertisers offer for a sponsored review is worth risking the wrath of Google.

In order to write a great sponsored review, insist that you want to use the product or service for a trial period to really get some insight into it. That way, you can write an honest, compelling review.

Selling your own products or services

If you have a loyal following, then you don't need a large audience to start selling products or services. All you need is to be able to answer the following questions.

● Do people ask me for advice or help?
● What do people ask me for advice or help for?

The first question will help you determine if there's a paying market for a product or service you can provide. The second question will help you determine what that product or service is.

Here are a few quick examples:

● People regularly ask you how you customized your WordPress theme's functionality or design, and want you to do the same for their blog. You can take this as a sign that you need to create an information product (such as a video tutorial series) on ways to customize WordPress themes or offer a service where you will customize WordPress themes.

● People flood you with requests for prints of your photography. This is an opportunity to open an online store to sell your photography.

● People regularly ask you to write content for their business. You can take this as a sign that you need to offer freelance writing/copywriting services.

● People want to know how you market your blog and want to "pick your brain" about it on a quick phone call. This as a sign that you need to offer consulting services.

If you pay attention to what people ask you for most often, you'll likely discover a great product or service you can offer. Because for every person who asks you about something, there are probably a dozen others who would ask the same thing.
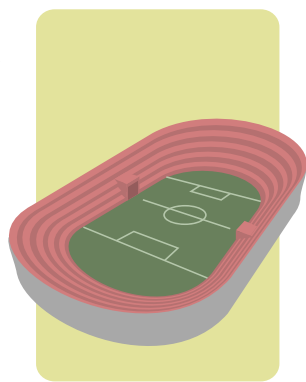
Monetization for blogs with large audiences

This is a monetization strategy that has the potential to generate continually increasing amounts of revenue based on your ability to drive more traffic to your blog. Be sure to create an advertising page on your blog and update your metrics (traffic, social audience, email list subscribers, etc.) regularly so you can increase your ad pricing on a monthly basis.

Syndicating content

You've likely seen those blocks of links on sites like CNN, Time magazine and other media outlets that say "Around the Web" or "You Might Also Enjoy." These are generally created by code from content syndication networks (Outbrain, Taboola, etc.), many of which want you to have a large base of traffic before you are considered to apply as a publisher to their networks.

By including blocks of related content like this on your blog, you'll be earning revenue each time someone clicks on an article that looks interesting to them. It's a good situation for both the publisher and the reader—the publisher (you, the blogger) gets money for sharing related, valuable links. The reader gets the opportunity to explore new content and will likely think of your blog as a great source of content to check out.

Selling your blog

This may be the last thing on your mind at this point, but if you have a blog that isn't directly tied in to your own name, products or services, and mostly depends on ad revenue, you may want to consider selling your blog later down the road. Some blogs—like the 20 listed in this article— have earned over $1 million dollars, thanks to how much traffic received, the quality of content they house and the advertising dollars they rake in on a monthly basis. The more traffic, quality content and advertising dollars you earn with your blog, the more you can sell it for, if you so choose.
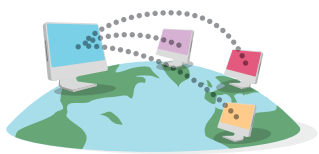
Conclusion

We hope you've enjoyed this guide to creating a successful blog—from setup to monetization. There are many other monetization strategies you can try with your own blog. These are just the most popular ones that tend to generate a lot of income for a lot of bloggers!