

B2B BLOGGING eBOOK

Basics, Best Practices ... and Blunders



Why are we blogging?

If you're reading this eBook, you're probably working on a blog for your company, or perhaps considering one.

And it's very likely that at some point in this process you've asked yourself, "Hmm... tell me again why we're doing this!"

There are lots of good reasons – and you've probably heard them all – but we contend it all gets back to one thing...



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Making money.



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Money? Really?

Really.

Here are a couple of ways to do that through a blog.

Let's start with the ultimate marketing goal of any business. To stand out. To differentiate yourself by creating insanely great value for your customers.

If you understand how to execute a blog well, this is a chance for your voice to be heard above the din of those competitors. And more important, it gives your stakeholders a chance to talk back. To interact, to engage, to actually build an emotional connection with you and your brand. Wow. All that from a blog? You bet. And it gets better.



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How can it **get** **better?**

Somehow I knew you'd ask that question.

How about getting your company and product found on the Internet? No matter what product or service you're selling, if you're not online, you're invisible.

One of the under-appreciated benefits of having current content on your blog is the boost you get with the search engines. Google, Bing, Yahoo and the rest want to connect people with the freshest, most relevant content. And there's nothing fresher or more relevant than a blog.

Are you spending thousands of dollars on behind the scenes search engine tips and tricks? The search engine benefits of a blog can even exceed the results of an SEO alchemist.



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Go deep



Many B2B sales cycles are long and the stakes are high. Potential customers want to get to know you, trust you, maybe even fall in love with you.

The days of executive retreats and long days chatting on the golf course are over. How does a customer get to know you? *REALLY* know you?

You might not be able to see your prospects or even talk to them every day but a blog offers one more connection point – and perhaps a *UNIQUE* connection point – to make your case, tell your story, and demonstrate the values of your company.

Studies show visitors spend more than 50% more time on a B2B blog than on a consumer-oriented site. Your customers are hungry for information. This is a great way to deliver.



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Think about it.

Blogging just might be one of the greatest opportunities to nurture B2B sales relationships since the account manager!



Are you **built to blog?**

In our follow-up, to this e-book, “B2B Blogging *Beyond the Basics, Elevating Your Blog*,” we’ll get into dozens of practical ideas to make your blog great. But first let’s take a hard look at you, your company and your business goals to make sure you’re prepared and organized to do this well.

The biggest predictor of success may surprise you. It’s not having great ideas, or a big budget, or even a team of willing and capable writers. It’s your company culture.

Before you start a blog at your company... even if it’s strategically the right thing to do... even if your competitors are doing it... even if marketing is screaming for it... you have to ask yourself: “Can our company culture support and sustain this?”



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A matter of **culture**

If putting your company out there in an honest, engaging, content-rich platform goes against the natural grain of the company culture, short-term success may not be possible. And a blog is not going to change the culture.

The culture is the culture.

It's easy to come up with plans and ideas for a blog. But making those ideas really stick and make a difference depends on the inherent resistance within a company.

Warning signs

What are the signs of a highly-resistant culture?

- Hoping for a “grassroots” effort without executive sponsorship
- Top executives unwilling to be personally involved in content planning and reader engagement
- Influential executives actively lobbying against the effort
- All content must go through unwieldy approvals (Legal, HR, etc.)

Admitting failure before you even start seems negative and maybe even un-American, but it's not a forever kind of decision. Priorities change. People retire. Blogs get a second chance.

The key idea is to do a brutally honest assessment before expending political capital on an effort that demands long-term commitment and active executive involvement.

Moving Ahead

If you've done an honest assessment and don't think your company's culture will support and sustain a blog, that doesn't mean you can't be successful in other areas of the social web. And it may just be a matter of time and education before your management gets on board with blogging.

But if you think you have what it takes to blog, let's get moving and let's get organized!



Building Blocks of blogging

Here are some other organizational building blocks you should consider before posting your first blog:

- Determine the goals of the blog, how it relates to the company strategy, and how success will be measured and reported.
- What existing best practices can be adopted?
- How can our customers help create our blog?
- Who will be responsible for content and planning?
- What is the approval process?
- Who handles comments and engagement?
- How do we promote the blog?

Let's get **blogging**

Now that we've covered some of the fundamentals, let's put ideas into action. We'll cover some of the most common questions from beginner corporate bloggers.



What do I **write** **about?**

Always keep your target audience and business objectives in mind. If you're consistent and interesting, your audience will find you!

Try to have a mix of posts that includes:

- Customer “how-to’s”
- Industry observations
- Trends, issues and events
- Company news
- Commentary on market
- Customer features

Inspiration points

Re-purpose existing content, videos, whitepapers, PowerPoint presentations, and company speeches. Blogs are a great way to leverage the investment you put into content in other places!

The questions your customer ask through your blog, meetings and service requests are a great indication of their interests and needs!

Go to a relevant LinkedIn forum. What are people asking about? Write an answer. That's your post!

Comment on articles that appear in industry journals, blogs, and trade magazines. A great way to establish your voice of authority on an issue.

Look at possibly including news from internal communication activities on your blog.

Quality or quantity?

Many blogging advisors suggest a focus on quality over quantity of blog posts.

We think you need BOTH to attract and retain an audience.

For example, posting one excellent article every year, or even every quarter, won't condition your readers to expect content from your company.

To optimize both your ability to build an audience and your search engine capabilities, we recommend a fresh, interesting post at least once a month and preferably once a week.



And for **good** **measure**

... make it “entertaining.”

Corporate blogging is becoming a crowded space and there are a lot messages out there vying for your customer’s attention. To stand out, you probably need to add a little spice, a little creativity, a little fun to your posts.

This example from GE combines science, art, music, video and customer contributions all in one fantastic post. Something like this can really grab attention!

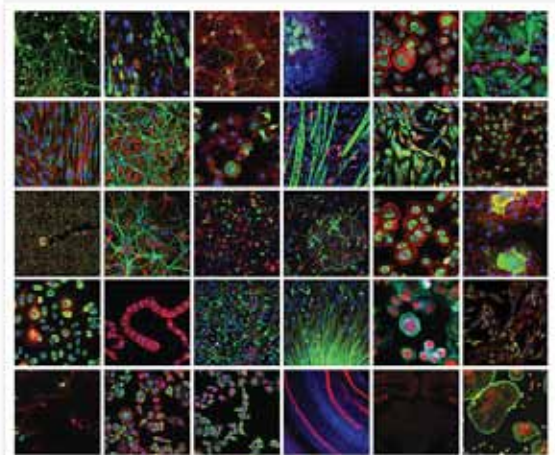
GE reports.

Your source for what’s happening at GE.

Search Results

Broadway boogie: Cell art winners light Times Square

Glistening Broadway marquee and flashing neon are the norm in New York City’s Times Square. But each year, three scientists get to join the dazzling display when their winning entries from GE Healthcare’s IN Cell Image Competition are broadcast on NBC’s giant high-definition TV screen. This year’s competition featured over 80 intricate shots generated by scientists from more than 10 countries using the IN Cell Analyzer system — which combines a microscope, camera and powerful software to take images of fluorescently stained cells and then analyze them. The goal is to better understand diseases and evaluate new drug compounds for treating them. As we described in our recent story about the competition’s kick-off, the images produced are so vivid and stunning that they could easily be taken for gallery works. In the first two videos below, this year’s winners are seen in New York last week — with their works of art flashing above — and some of GE’s customers describe how critical the technology is to their research.



Night at the museum: Click on the wall of images from the contest to start a slideshow. The images were shortlisted by a scientific panel and the winners were determined through a public vote. The three winning images were featured in Times Square from March 5-7.



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Where do I **find** **the time?**



It's important for your company to devote appropriate resources to your blog.

At a minimum, you should aim for one 300-500 word post per week. That doesn't sound too bad does it?

For many companies, blogging is a strategic imperative. That means it should probably take priority over some other marketing initiative, not just be an add-on, right?

Blogging is a new way to connect and communicate with your stakeholders. So this activity cannot simply be an afterthought.

Commitment and consistency are essential to a successful blog! Be realistic about what you can accomplish. Remember to work within the framework of the company culture.

Always allow enough time for necessary corporate approvals.

Who should blog?

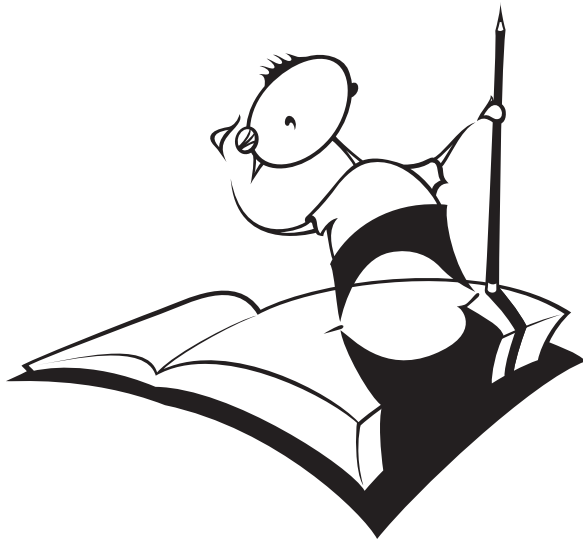
The answer to this question varies from company to company. It might be an executive, a staff marketing/PR person, or a team of people.

Your blogger(s) should:

- Enjoy writing and be able to do it in a personal and entertaining manner
- Know the company and its customers inside and out
- Have the time to do the job properly

It's best to have one lead person assigned to coordinate the content plan, edit posts and manage the community.

Should our **blogger** be a team, or a person?



Unless your company has a celebrity-level personality ready to commit to the company blog, it's almost always better to have a team approach if resources permit.

Some of the benefits include:

- More diverse perspectives
- Spread out the workload
- Attract larger, more diverse group of potential readers
- Success not dependent on one resource
- Continuity in the case of attrition

In either case, it's ideal to associate a smiling face with the blog authorship. It's easier for readers to identify and connect with a real person than an anonymous team.

Can I **outsource** blogging?

Outsourced blogging can be a viable, effective option when a company can't staff a blog properly. However, there are some blog activities that should always be managed internally:

- 1** Content aimed at a personalized connection – such as responses in a blog comment section – should be authored by a company executive, not a ghost writer.
- 2** Content plan should be supervised and approved by the company.
- 3** If ghost-writing for an executive, the executive should provide general ideas for the topic and ideally a few bullet points. Obviously the executive should approve every blog post before publishing under their name.
- 4** Ghost bloggers should be provided with access to company executives and relevant customer information.

Attribution to contributing writers should be provided somewhere on the blog.

How do I **build** a **community**?

Communities are generally built two ways:

Around a personality – A good example of this is Bill Marriott's personal blog for his hotel brand or Randy Tinseth at Boeing →

Around information sharing – Such as support for technical problems. A great example of this is Caterpillar's technical support center. People form community by helping each other.

So community is not necessarily achievable for every business situation.



So why is **nobody** commenting?

While comments can easily exceed the length of a blog post on political, entertainment and news sites, commenting is usually not a good measure of engagement on B2B company blogs for a number of reasons.

Statistics show that more than 80 percent of blog traffic is represented by new visitors every day. This indicates that most people are coming for specific information, not necessarily to be part of a “community.”

Research also demonstrates that many people feel “engaged” but never actively comment. In fact, you can only expect about 2 percent or less of your readers to comment.

The commenting could be taking place on professional sites, Twitter and email beyond the orbit of the blog.

Many companies limit participation in social media sites.

Competitive considerations may also inhibit public conversation.

How do I measure success?



The good news is that compared to traditional media, there are so many opportunities for measurement!

If you started blogging to support an overall marketing strategy (and you DO have one, don't you?) then you should be able to answer this question:

What behavior am I trying to influence?

Perhaps you want your audience to perceive you as a market leader, or you want them to buy (or sell), register, enroll, download, upload, place a call, donate, comment, recommend, or any other behavior that is important to your organization.

Start there. Then match the metric to the behavioral change you're trying to elicit.

Can I **measure ROI?**

We feel strongly that any marketing activity should be tied to measurable goals that contribute to shareholder value.

You can absolutely track new sales or sales leads from blogging and other social media activities with the right inbound marketing tools.*

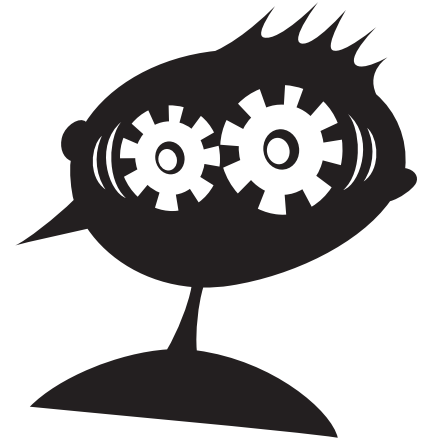
Without these tools, it can be difficult calculate absolute return numbers you can attribute exclusively to your blog.

If you set specific goals for leads and sales for a period of time, you can directly measure your return on blogging results against those goals. According to a recent [HubSpot](#) study, companies that blog have far better marketing results. Data showed that blogging regularly yielded 55% more website visitors, 97% more inbound links and 434% more indexed pages, which further enhance SEO results.

Steady, relevant blogging can lead to increased visitors to your site creating more opportunities for lead conversion, which directly results in increased ROI.

*MLT Creative uses HubSpot.

A few **takeaways**



We hope you've enjoyed this overview. Here's a summary of key points:

There are many important benefits of blogging that can tie directly to your sales efforts. Maintaining both quality and quantity is important.

Before you begin a blogging initiative, honestly assess your organization's capabilities and set realistic expectations.

Important building blocks of your blog include a content plan, clear accountabilities, and alignment with strategy.

A blog should be adequately resourced and prioritized. There are many ways to staff a blog. An internal team approach is a popular alternative.

There are many options to measure the success of your blog, depending on your goals. Community building can be difficult in a B2B environment.

But **don't stop now!**

You can't ever learn enough when it comes to blogging and the social web. So let's keep it going! Here are resources to help you continue your journey.



Some blogs that we adore: **B2B Bloggers:** www.b2bbloggers.com
– *Jeremy Victor assembles info on all things B2B*

BtoB Marketing Magazine: www.btobonline.com
– *The industry standard for news in the field*

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B2B Marketing Zone: www.b2bmarketingzone.com
– *Dr. Ben Hanna often provides original research*

{grow}: www.businessesgrow.com/blog/
– *Mark Schaefer applies practical B2B experience to the social web*

B2B Ideas@Work Blog: www.mltcreative.com/blog/
– *B2B marketing musings from our award-winning creative firm*

Savvy B2B Marketing: www.savvyb2bmarketing.com
– *A consortium of writers focus on social applications to B2B marketing and selling*



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