

Craft your own success story

The developer's
guide to

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL BLOG

Free preview



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FREE PREVIEW

This is a free preview of the book “THE DEVELOPER'S GUIDE TO CREATING A SUCCESSFUL BLOG”.

It contains 2 of 14 chapters: chapter 1 and chapter 3

Read more about the book on <https://flaviocopes.com/book/blog/>

CHAPTER 1: FRAMING YOUR BLOG FOR SUCCESS

The internet is how people communicate and share information. We look for help. Maybe we try to find the perfect recipe for dinner or the best book we should read this month.

A blog is a tiny website, made by one person, or a handful of people, with the goal of creating information that can be beneficial to people.

On this blog, you will write posts. Each post is a single page containing information.

The concept of blog I talk about in this book is not one of a diary, where you write everyday things as they happen. That is something you can definitely make, but it's not the thing I'll be talking about.

By blog, I mean a personal site, or a product/company site, where you regularly write interesting content that can be beneficial to other people.

People that will find the solution to their problem on your blog.

I want to highlight this point because it's central. The blog must be useful to other people. Without this fundamental concept, your blog has no reason to exist.

Why a blog does matter

Blogs are the fundamental building block of today's internet. Think about it. We have huge giant corporations that create walled gardens where people are constantly drawn to, like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter.

Those are places that are engineered to give you addiction and consume, debate, consume, debate, consume. And if you are in the lucky 1%, you will be one of the stars of those walled gardens, and you will profit from other people consuming, debating, consuming, debating, consuming.

What are those people consuming? Their time.

With notable exceptions, most of the people create mostly useless content and consume useless content. Have you ever looked at the "Trending" tab on YouTube? It's full of garbage. There are notable exceptions, of course, but a blog is one of those rare places on the Internet where you can create something of value without making a giant corporation benefit from your work, and you are the owner of your little corner of the world.

I'll soon tell you more about the "own your platform" concept, but here's the gist: a blog matters because it's 100% yours.

Is blogging still relevant?

This is a legit question. Is blogging still relevant in today's world, dominated by social media and big platforms?

Can the underdog still find some space on the Internet? Don't we have too many sites already?

First, we'll never have too many sites. There's less than 1 person creating content for every 100 people. This is a rule for all media consumption: there are ~100 TV or radio stations in a country with 100 million people. Same for newspapers.

The same goes for the Internet. If you start creating, and you do your job well, eventually your content will surface and you will have success. Whatever success means to you.

This is possible with videos on YouTube, podcasts, and blogs of course.

So why should you start a blog instead of making videos? It's a choice. We can't all be good at making videos, and we can't all have a voice made for podcasts. We can't all be good at writing.

But if you happen to enjoy writing and you like the idea of having your own little corner on the Internet, then creating a blog might be what you are looking for.

Should I have a personal blog or a company/product blog?

If you are a freelancer, working solo, or you are a solopreneur, a company of one, you might have a tough decision ahead: should you create a personal blog or a company blog?

There's a big distinction in this. In my opinion, a personal blog is way better because companies and projects come and go. You might sell your company in 3 years.

Your personal brand, however, will stick with you wherever you go. The benefit I give to a personal brand is that you have the ability to experiment and pivot, if necessary. If you create a brand that's too tied to a product or area, you can't switch without changing the name and domain, so it can be very confusing to people and it's very hard to make it work nicely.

And most likely you'll have a hard time finding a good idea, at first, so it's always good to have more than one option and not having to start from zero.

Why a blog and not videos or podcasts?

In the last few years, videos and podcasts have grown tremendously.

Videos, in particular, are very popular. Kids want to become YouTubers when they grow up.

Both videos and podcasts are awesome. I watch YouTube every day and I am subscribed to several podcasts, too.

There's one thing I noticed about those platforms, however. Podcasts are very hard to discover. I only discover new podcasts if I see one mentioned somewhere. Or by word of mouth.

And in addition to having great content, as a podcast owner, your voice tone is a differentiating factor that makes me like a podcast or not. You are either born a podcaster, or you're not.

With videos, it's the same thing. Your personality is a unique differentiating factor in a great YouTube channel.

Plus, videos, if made well, are a huge effort in time, energy and equipment you need.

A blog, on the other hand, can be made quite anonymously, you don't need to have that uniqueness that makes you liked on YouTube, you have a great channel for organic discovery of your

blog posts (Google), and you are not trapped into a platform (YouTube). More on this later on.

You don't have to choose one over the other, of course.

Many times a blog is used alongside a YouTube channel, or a podcast. More than just to cross-post content from one channel to another, but as a complementary tool.

When done well, it's a powerful combination.

Define who are your readers

A blog that's successful and useful to other people is a blog that has a readership in mind.

I'm sure you've stumbled upon those blogs or sites that talk about a little bit of everything.

It seems all very random, and you don't find a reason for coming back to that site, so you forget about it.

If you happen to visit a website that talks just about your favorite topic, you might save it for later in your bookmarks, or leave the tab open to go back to it later.

This happens because the owner of the site is not just writing about everything that comes to mind: they have a specific kind of person they are talking to.

And this is what you should do, as well. Carefully define the kind of person you want to talk to, with your blog.

You have to pick a niche.

Pick a niche

Picking a niche is the way you can define what your little corner of the internet will be all about.

It can be all about you, your hobbies, passions, and stories. But then not many people would find it much useful. Maybe one post can solve their problems, but will they ever come back? Probably not.

Because it's not about you, it's about your readers.

Pick a niche. A small subject.

Say you're a programmer. You can write a blog about the C++ programming language, write 2 posts a week, and never run out of topics for 20 years. It's probably a niche that's too broad, not much of a niche.

A better niche would be C++ programming for embedded devices. Or using C++ to build games.

Then filter out this group of people a little bit more. Using C++ to build a 2D game engine. You can write for years, too, but this time if one person is interested in this subject, they will bookmark the site

and download everything they can because you are the expert (or, more expert than them) and they can get a lot of value from you.

It's a marathon

I want to give you another concept that will frame your blog for success.

It is not a sprint. It's a marathon.

As with everything in life, creating a successful blog takes time.

Creating a blog, per se, is a matter of hours if not minutes. This is why everyone can start a blog.

But creating a successful blog, depending on what you consider "success" can take years, and not many people welcome this fact with joy.

People like immediate, fast success. It almost never happens, unless you are very lucky.

Consider it your marathon.

CHAPTER 3: PICK A GOAL FOR YOUR BLOG

You can start a blog for multiple reasons. No one has the same ambitions, the same drive, the same starting point.

Get a job

One goal for a blog might be to help to get your first job.

Suppose you are getting ready for your first rounds of interviews as a Junior Frontend Developer, and as you are learning the technology and experimenting, maybe following an online course, you document everything you are learning.

I think this is great for 3 reasons:

1. you reinforce your learning
2. you build up an online presence
3. you get better at documenting and explaining technology

As you approach the interview and send out applications, companies will see that you have a website, you are great at explaining technology, you know how to communicate, you definitely know your stuff.

And this is a great advantage over any other job applicant that does not have a website.

Get a raise or a better job

If you already have a job, you might want to step up your career and get a better pay, or switch to another niche in the field you are interested in.

Having a blog that positions yourself as an expert in the thing you want to work on is definitely a big plus.

You can leverage your blog at your current company, to reposition yourself as a senior developer.

Your colleagues will look up to you and your writing for topics that you wrote about and will perceive you as an authority in the field.

Get better/more clients

If you are not interested in getting a job and prefer being the independent freelancer with a queue of prospect clients lined up, blogging can be a game-changer for you.

I experienced this first-hand when I started my career in tech.

I jump-started my career by finding work on freelancing sites. It was hard to compete with freelancers all around the world, much more experienced than me in many cases, sometimes located in a lower cost of living area, which allowed them to provide the same service at a fraction of me.

I had started a blog about the subject I was specializing into, an open-source CMS, written in Italian, my own language, and people from Italy slowly started to perceive me as an expert and were more than willing to pay a premium to work with a person that spoke their language, worked in their timezone and was one of the few expert in the field in the country.

My blog was key to this because people searched for topics they knew they needed help with, and found me.

At some point, I was even able to reject client proposals because I had too many requests and I could choose the ones better for my business and more interesting to me.

Demonstrate your expertise

A common denominator benefit with either getting a job or freelancing clients is this: a blog

helps you demonstrate your expertise and show it off to other people.

Some people are more naturally inclined to show off their abilities.

Sometimes, depending on culture and perception, we can even think of them as more capable of what they really are.

Some other people are less inclined, perhaps because of introversion or shyness.

Blogging is a great way to demonstrate your expertise even for people not naturally inclined to raise their hand in public, because it's a medium that has very low friction than for example creating videos that show your face on YouTube.

Document your learning

A great goal for your blog could be to document your learning. Perhaps being more interesting in the job market is not something you are interested in right now, or you just want to write about your hobby.

A blog is a great track record for everything you learn.

I have a terrible memory for example, and sometimes I just create a blog post to remember how I made something work.

I used to write notes on an app on my computer, but now I default to blog posts because I realized I can help other people by publishing my notes on the Internet.

Structure your thoughts and learn more

The way I used to learn better back in school was by creating very detailed notes about a subject.

And I only made them for subjects I was interested in, which in retrospect explains why I was good in some classes and bad in others.

You can use your blog as a way to learn better.

I am a huge proponent of learning through blogging because it works.

I long exhausted the topics I know, and I use blogging as a way to learn a subject and at the same time being helpful to other people.

When I write a new blog post I am forced to create a mind map of the subject and try to frame it, before writing about it.

I learn much more than just reading about it and then do something else.

Become better at explaining things

A great benefit of blogging is that over time you'll become better at explaining things.

You will take fewer things for granted, and you'll think more from the point of view of who is listening to you, rather than just write a bunch of words to be perceived as an expert.

This will help you tremendously in your career and as a person.

Grow your audience

A great benefit of having your own blog is that over time you'll start to build a little audience.

As with many things, the more time you dedicate to it, the more audience you will grow.

People might get to know you. Recognize your name. You will not become famous (except in rare cases), but this might not be what you want, too.

That's not what an audience is for. And honestly, I see many developers raise an eyebrow when marketing subjects come into play.

An audience is great to test your ideas. An audience can help you figure out something. An audience is your group of people, the people that

trust you and that can help you move to the next level.

Express yourself

A blog does not need to be a means to an end.

My favorite blogs are the ones that are playgrounds for creativity and expression. Especially when applied to programming and computers in general.

A blog is a great way to have a track record of all your past creative projects.

Your own centralized creative hub.