

E-commerce 2018: business. technology. society.

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CHAPTER 6 E-COMMERCE MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

LEARNING TRACK 6.3: BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS

The genesis of the blog can be traced to personal journals published on the Open Pages webbing as early as 1994. News “weblogs” began appearing several years later. By 1999, blog hosting sites such as Open Diary, SlashDot, LiveJournal, Pitas.com, and Blogger.com (which can be considered a forerunner of Twitter) were making the online publishing process accessible to a wider, less technically savvy contingent. How-To manuals and journalism school research heralded the blog’s entrance into the mainstream in 2001.

The precursor to the corporate blog is the “What’s New” or “News” page, still a feature of many websites, on which items of note are posted in reverse chronological order. Technology leaders Microsoft and Macromedia launched the first corporate blogs in 2002. By 2003, 30 to 40 Microsoft employees were regular bloggers. This grew to several hundred the following year, the same year in which Merriam Webster announced “blog” as its Word of the Year. By 2005, advertisers were spending approximately \$100 million on blog ads, and the benefits of corporate blogging were already well-recognized.

Understanding that a well-tended blog could position a company as a thought leader and provide a forum for positive news, managers directed bloggers to post market segment expertise, product guidelines, and consumer tips. In an environment in which customer feedback was valued, negative product or company reviews could be efficiently dispatched. What’s more, the process of fashioning blog posts encouraged teamwork, communication, and innovative thinking among employee contributors. Most persuasively, corporate blogs were proving fruitful at customer relationship building, word-of-mouth advertising, and driving website traffic.

To start a company blog, you must first pick a blogging platform. Popular blogging platforms include WordPress, Movable Type, Blogger, LiveJournal, and Tumblr. Next, invest in hosting your blog on your main website or on a subdomain. If you publish your blog on a host site, such as WordPress.com, the SEO (Search Engine Optimization) credit accrues to the host site rather than your own.

Keywords are your next hurdle. Think about what visitors would be searching for on Google that would direct them to your site. What problem does your product or service solve? Compose three-

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to four-word phrases using industry-specific and geography-specific terms, if applicable. These long tail keywords can also consist of technical terms, rarely used relevant words, and precise, but little-known words. Long tail keywords are more easily ranked and thus more likely to land your site on the first search results page. Head terms are the opposite—more common, more popular, and more frequently searched. The head terms will account for most visits to your website. The long tail keywords each contribute only a small amount of traffic, but there are many of them. In order to maximize website traffic, you will have to spend some time figuring out the long tail keywords that people use to find your site.

Make a list of your keywords and phrases. When you begin posting, use these phrases in posts that educate visitors and explain how your product can meet their needs. The more posts you compose, the more indexed pages there are for search engines to locate. Businesses that blog 16 to 20 times per month receive more than double the traffic of those that post four times or less per month. Compose a post for each keyword and phrase. Invent titles that use these brand and market-segment specific terms. Avoid sales-oriented posts. Blogging is most effective as a marketing tool when you offer expertise and knowledge. However, do explain how your product outstrips its competitors.

Your goal is to keep visitors engaged long enough to entice them into a call-to-action (CTA). For example, you can offer a free download of a guide or e-book or invite them to attend a webinar. When they respond, you will capture their e-mail address and other identifying information. CTAs are often placed in the blog sidebars. Clickable banners for your most popular offers can also be placed in different parts of the blog. The body of a blog post is not off limits. Contextual CTAs can link a word or phrase in the post to its corresponding offer.

Whether a single company blog is sufficient, or whether you should have multiple blogs is dependent on your audience. If you have several niche audiences with distinct needs, separate blogs may be necessary. Start with a single blog, segregated into content categories based on the keywords in each post. Regular, frequent blogging will drive diverse audiences to your content.

Finding new topics to blog about is a constant challenge. You can answer questions frequently posed by customers, explain how a product or service functions, or outline its advantages vis-à-vis its competitors. You can also review trends in your market segment or industry, interview subject matter experts, and conduct price comparisons. Reviewing internal communications often uncovers topics that can be tweaked into blog posts. After removing any confidential material, you may have an engaging post that highlights your company persona by appearing to divulge its inner workings. Key marketing, advertising, or customer service employees can be recruited to list questions they encounter from customers in the course of a day. This will result in blog topics galore. Circulate a document between departments to troll for suggestions, encouraging coworkers to build on one another's ideas. Organize brainstorming groups and invite group members to guest blog. Rather

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than interviewing subject matter experts, invite them to guest blog to expand their audience and raise their SEO.

Finally, if you are going to provide links to external articles, proper organization, or content curation, is essential. Thoroughly vet all material to select the most worthwhile and relevant pieces for each topic. Save your readers time by presenting a coherent, focused collection. Curating also enables you to develop relationships with industry leaders and other bloggers. Always obtain permission and credit your sources.

In order to increase website traffic and generate leads, you must blog regularly. This may mean several times a week, or once daily, depending on how many new visitors it takes to garner the requisite number of leads. Once you acquire a readership, it is important to blog on a schedule so that followers know when to check back. A content calendar can help you to schedule posts that target a specific keyword so that you can analyze the results. Alternating between brief, trendy posts and more substantial topics is another sound strategy. Every blog post should be furnished with buttons so that it can be shared on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. A photograph, infographic, comic, or other type of image should accompany each post. Catchy blog titles are crucial. Keep headline length between eight and ten words. Tell readers precisely what the post will teach them how to do, what they will learn, or how many tips they will get. Effective headlines convince the reader that a topic is significant, useful, or newsworthy. Current research, new product launches, or a hint of controversy will attract readership. Search engine optimization that maximizes lead generation will generate increased website sales.

SOURCES: "How to Create an Award-Winning Business-To-Business Blog," by Lisa Alloca, Forbes.com, December 5, 2017; "An Introduction to Business Blogging," by Magdalena Georgieva, HubSpot, accessed January 18, 2016; "The Early Years," by Clive Thompson, New York Magazine, February 20, 2006; "The Rise and Rise of Corporate Blogs," CNN, December 20, 2005; "A Brief [and Subjective] History of Corporate Blogging at Microsoft," by Korby Parnell, MSDN Blogs, May 20, 2005.