

How to Blog for Profit

Without Selling
Your *Soul*

Expanded 2nd Edition



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Introduction

I wrote the first edition of *How to Blog for Profit (Without Selling Your Soul)* as a full-time, professional blogger with other professional bloggers—or at least those who aspired to be—in mind. It was an overview of the essential elements of an awesome blog, as well as tips for growing traffic and successfully monetizing that traffic. It ended with a few tips I've learned on working smarter, not harder, since a blogger's job is never done.

Although I am just as passionate about blogging as I was a year ago, I have also come to realize that while my blog is a significant aspect of my business, it is *not* my business itself. My business goes far beyond just a blog, and far beyond just my own skills as a writer and speaker. They are just important pieces of a puzzle that is much bigger than I ever realized.

It is in this transition that I have come to understand that there is a whole other group of burgeoning communicators who aspire not necessarily to *blog*, but to write books or to speak or to build a business online. And these burgeoning speakers and writers and entrepreneurs attend conferences or mail out proposals or create amazing products in the hope of hitting it big only to be told, over and over again, that these days, in order to publish a book or become a speaker, ***they must first have a platform.***

What a frustrating and daunting task!

How does one build a platform from the ground up? Is it even possible in today's environment, or have the "golden days" of blogging, when everyone had a voice, already passed? How does one navigate the seemingly endless list of tasks that *should* be done without working 24 hours a day? Is blogging even worth the effort?

My goal for this second edition of *How to Blog for Profit* is to expand on some of the most important things I've learned in the past few years about blog creation, traffic platform growth, monetization, and turning a blog into a thriving, profitable business. In addition, I want to provide the most up-to-date information, as the online world changes fast.

Before I dive right in, I need to make a few disclaimers and clarifications:

1. I am a female blogger who writes in a personal finance and lifestyle niche. My blog, www.LivingWellSpendingLess.com, features a wide variety of topics, including money-saving tips, recipes, DIY projects, household tips, parenting ideas, and more. Because the subject matter of my blog is fairly broad and includes everything from recipes and DIY projects to parenting tips and personal finance advice, I have had the unique opportunity to learn what works (and what doesn't) in a variety of niche markets. That said, **my area of expertise is not all-inclusive, and it is possible that some of what I share in this book will not fit for your own genre.**
2. My own blog has earned a full-time income from the monetization strategies discussed in this book for more than two years. While blogging is by no means "easy money" and this is *not* a "get rich quick" book, I believe **it IS possible to make a sustainable**

living entirely from a blog, regardless of the blog genre and audience.

3. For the sake of simplicity and to keep this book focused on the things that will help you create content, grow your platform, and earn an income, **I will assume that you've already started a blog or have some sort of online presence, and that you already have a basic understanding of blogging and social media.**
4. **This is not a technical guide to setting up a blog.** If you are looking for a step-by-step, how-to manual on setting up a blog or establishing accounts on social media, this is not it. There are plenty of books and websites that can help you with this. Please refer to those for technical assistance!

The purpose of *How to Blog for Profit* is to encourage, inspire, and enable you to grow your platform and take your blog to the next level, regardless of whether you have just begun or have been blogging for years. It is filled with practical takeaways and action steps to help you assess and create the most successful plan for your own audience. Regardless of what many online marketers will tell you, there is no one "right" way to make money online. My goal is to give you the tools to reach your own blogging goals, whether those goals be to create a blog, grow your platform, make more money, turn your blog into a business, or all of the above.

Chapter 1:

Start with Awesome

One ordinary day in 2010 I started my own blog, LivingWellSpendingLess.com, out of little more than desperation. My husband Chuck and I were on the brink of divorce, arguing nonstop about my out-of-control spending habits.

Because we weren't speaking and because my normal coping method—shopping—wasn't an option, I turned to the computer. I committed to a monthly budget and decided that public accountability through this thing called "blogging" might be the only thing that could save me.

Amazingly enough, it worked. I learned to save and use coupons and began journeying towards a simpler life, one not dictated by what I have, but who I am.

Of course, that is all a story for a different book.

*This book is about blogging for profit, something I've also learned a lot about since I first began. In fact, within my first four weeks of blogging I realized two important things: First, I was *born* to be a blogger. After all, what other job could allow me to do all the things I love—cook, clean, craft, organize, and write—and still give me the flexibility to stay at home with my kids or to literally work from anywhere? Second, I realized I could *actually**

make money doing what I loved. From that moment on, I set out to learn everything I possibly could about professional blogging.

Knowing that I was practically destined for this job, I set a big fat goal for myself that at the time seemed downright crazy. I wanted to make enough money blogging that my husband, an aerospace engineer, would be able to quit his job and walk away from the career he loathed. Chuck, on the other hand, still justifiably angry with me for years of overspending, scoffed at the idea. Accompanying his skepticism with a steady stream of heavy sighs, he'd say things like, "Stop wasting your time," "Why are you on the computer all the time," and "You know you can't make money on a blog. It's just not possible!"

It took him almost two years to change his mind, and still another year for him to embrace my goal and accept it as his own.

So while my public journey has been about learning to control my spending, my private journey has been learning the behind-the-scenes business of blogging. These two paths have intertwined so tightly that I'm fairly sure I couldn't do one without the other.

That is exactly the way it should be.

Blogging is incredibly personal. Your readers don't *just* come to read what you have to write, they come for *you*, for your unique voice, perspective, and ideas.

The secret to successfully blogging for profit is learning how to maintain authenticity with your readers while at the same time successfully navigating the behind-the-scenes waters of running a business and building a brand.

And while that might seem hard, or even impossible, it's really, truly *not*.

Just stay you.

That's all you have to do. Don't try to emulate other bloggers; don't get so wrapped up in trying to build your stats that you forget to be awesome; don't get so obsessed with getting paid to write a sponsored post that you find yourself promoting things you don't even like. Just stay you. That's it! Easy, right?

Own Your Own Journey

I'm going to give you a whole lot of advice in this jam-packed little book and so many action items for your to-do list that at times you will feel like your head might actually explode. But if you were to take away only ONE piece of wisdom, it would be this:

Don't compare your beginning to someone else's middle.

It's not even my own wisdom! Jon Acuff, blogger and author of the best-selling books *Quarter* and *Start*, is the one who said it first, and he was dead on.

The first time I heard him say it, at a now-defunct blogging conference called *Blissdom* in 2012, I felt as though I had been physically slapped across the face. In that moment I realized that all my insecurities with blogging came from comparing myself to others and from feeling like everyone else was somehow doing it better than I was.

Feeling like I wasn't good enough and trying to emulate other people's success had paralyzed me. At the time I was operating four blogs, one of which employed seven helpers. I was making money, but I was working nonstop, I was ignoring my family, and I was miserable. Truth be told, I was ready to quit.

In that moment, I made a decision that changed my life. I decided to stop comparing and to simply put my head down and

get to work on the things that I actually cared about, not just the things that were earning an income.

Four months later I sold my two most profitable sites and shut down the third, strongly suspecting that I was probably throwing away any chance that I'd ever make enough money to support my family. I was disappointed, but at that point I knew I just needed to refocus my priorities on what was most important to me.

On my one remaining blog, the one I had started with, I decided to simply write about the things I was most passionate about, without worrying about whether I was saying the “right” things, the “popular” things, or even the “profitable” things.

I gave myself permission to be authentic, to be real with my readers, and to be different than everyone else. For a while I even stopped reading other blogs because I found that when I did, all those insecurities would come creeping back in.

And then something amazing happened.

My poor little neglected blog, the one I had all but abandoned as I pursued the bottom line, began to grow. Traffic grew slowly at first, and then faster and faster, until in less than six months' time it was more than ten times what it had been. Those posts written with passion resonated with people. Yes, some people hated what I had to say, but many others didn't.

With an increase in traffic came an increase in income, and incredibly just eight months after I sold my two “money-making” blogs and almost gave up the dream of being a full-time professional blogger, my husband was finally able to walk away from the job he despised to be a stay-at-home-dad.

I could never have predicted where my blogging journey would take me, and had I been able to choose, I probably would've wanted the path to look very different. But hindsight is 20/20, and looking back I don't think there is much I would have changed. You see, everything I know now about blogging, all the rest of the advice that I am going to share in this book, I know because of where I've been.

My lessons were hard-fought but they taught me a lot.

We all have to start somewhere. Your journey will probably not look like mine, and it probably won't look exactly like anyone else's, either. If you are constantly comparing yourself to people who are farther down their path, you will defeat yourself before you even begin. Accept where YOU are in this moment, then own your journey and open yourself up to the possibility of learning everything you can along the way.

First Things First

Your temptation with this book will be to skip to the “good” stuff—the part all about how to make money. Try not to do that, or at the very least, skim it over and then come back to the beginning. The foundation is important. You will just have to trust me on that.

But for now, let's get down to business. It's time to start. I'll spare you the obligatory “what is a blog?” section that seems to be present in every other blogging book I've read, and assume that you already know what a blog is.

In fact, I'll assume that many of you reading this book probably already have a blog, or have at least tried blogging at one point. If not, do a quick Google search on “what is a blog” and then get back to me. I'll wait right here.

Now let's back to where to start.

If your only goal in starting a blog is to make money, you will fail.

I know what you're thinking. *But the title of this book is How to Blog for Profit! Why else would I have bought it if my goal wasn't to make money?!*

So let me rephrase:

If your ONLY goal in starting a blog is to make money, you will fail.

Let me be clear from the beginning that there are far easier and much surer ways to make money than by blogging. Get a part-time job, start a small business, become a direct sales consultant for a company you love. If I had spent the same amount of time and energy doing one of those things instead of blogging, I would probably have a lot more money sitting in the bank right now.

This is not meant to dissuade you from blogging. I love blogging. Remember my two revelations? The first was that I was born to do this. No other job could allow me to pursue all the things I am passionate about and still give me the flexibility to stay home with my kids or take a month-long road trip or start working at five in the morning so that I can be done by noon or allow me to travel and cook and craft and write and still call it *work*.

It is also not meant to dissuade you from trying to make money with your blog. I think anyone who can build an amazing blog can and should be able to profit from that effort. But the effort—lots of it—comes first, long before you ever make a penny, and if you are not also passionate about your blogging subject, if you don't love and care about what you do, the money will never be great enough to justify all the sacrifices, all the time spent, all the heartache.

The place to start, if you want to [eventually] blog for profit, is with great, amazing, compelling, bring-me-back-for-more **content**. In other words, your blog has to be awesome. **You** have to be awesome. That sounds harder than it is because chances are *you are already awesome* in some way.

Find your awesome and write a blog about that.

What do you love more than anything? What are you most passionate about? What makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning, or gets you fired up to a point that you just can't stop talking about it? What is it that you are really good at? What do others ask you about? What topics are you naturally drawn to? What subject do you love to read about?

If you already have a blog and you've been writing about something else, something other than what you are truly passionate about, it is time to make a few changes. Never be afraid to steer your blog in a new direction, if that is where your heart is telling you to go. More than anything else, your readers crave authenticity; if you are holding back, they will sense it. Give them everything you've got. Make it awesome.

That said, everything you write and share, even the most personal details, must be done with intention. There should be meaning behind everything you publish. It doesn't always have to be deep, but it does have to be purposeful.

Here is what awesome is:

- A compelling argument
- A unique observation
- A delicious recipe with mouth-watering pictures
- A cool DIY project tutorial with stunning pictures
- A helpful tip on almost anything

- A touching story told through words or photographs
- A challenge to take action
- A personal struggle (and what it has taught you)
- A beautiful collection of themed ideas from other blogs (with links to those sites)
- A hospitable site that draws people in
- A funny, interesting, or helpful list
- An original idea brought to life
- Something that invokes an emotional response
- Something that compels people to share it with others
- Something that gets people talking
- Something that makes people feel better about themselves
- Something that inspires people to act
- Consistency of quality, tone, and frequency
- Proper grammar and spelling
- High-quality photographs
- Great navigation, with categories that make sense
- A killer blog design
- Intentional and purposeful

Here is what awesome is *not*:

- Posting anything just to get something new up
- Going through the motions of doing things “right” without actually connecting on an emotional level
- Personal ramblings without a particular point
- Sharing too many insignificant details about your life
- Rants that serve no purpose other than to vent
- Poor quality photographs
- Poor grammar and misspelled words
- Writing about every topic under the sun, with no rhyme or reason to it all
- Stealing other people's content and/or recipes
- Copying other people's ideas without proper credit

- Posting nothing but press releases
- Posting something just to make an affiliate sale
- Whining
- Anything that doesn't make any sense
- Posting too frequently
- Posting too infrequently
- No consistency
- An ugly blog design
- Music
- Bad navigation
- Haphazard

There is a whole lot of room for awesome in the blogosphere. Don't think that because other people are already awesome, you can't be awesome too. Blogging is not a zero-sum game. We live in a world of abundance, not scarcity, and there will never be enough awesome, because there is already so much out there that ISN'T. People *crave* awesome. You have to start there.

Get Your (Awesome) Ducks in a Row

What will you write about?

If you can't answer that question clearly and concisely, you're probably not quite ready to be awesome.

Ask yourself the following questions again:

- What do you love more than anything?
- What are you most passionate about?
- What makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning, or gets you fired up to a point that you just can't stop talking about it?
- What is it that you are really good at?
- What do others ask you about?

- What topics are you naturally drawn to?
- What subject do you love to read about?

Awesome comes from passion. If you don't care about what you have to say, why would anyone else?

Develop a clear plan for what you want to write about which includes a main overarching theme topic, 5–8 subtopics, and 4–5 categories underneath each subtopic.

On my site, for instance, my main theme is *the adventure of finding the Good Life on a budget*. My subtopics include Coupons 101, Easy Recipes, Thoughts on Life, Household Tips, Special Days, Easy DIY, Saving Money, and Beginner's Guides. Each subtopic includes several categories. If you look at my site, my navigation bar clearly reflects the intentional plan of my blog. If you follow my posts, you will find that 99 percent of the time, the things I write about fall within one of those subtopic categories.

My main theme is pretty broad and includes a lot of things, but it doesn't include *everything*. Thus, my readers know what to expect and they come back because they enjoy reading about the adventure of finding the good life on a budget. They would be awfully confused if one day I decided to start doing movie reviews, or if another day I randomly wrote an angry rant about the annoying waitress at a local restaurant.

Even more importantly, with a clear structure in place, I have an easier time writing. When I brainstorm ideas I can look at all my various subtopics and categories to help me narrow down my thoughts and ideas within each group.

If you are starting a new blog, think long and hard about what you want to write about. What do you know? What do you love? What are you most passionate about? Don't include recipes if

you hate to cook. Don't include organization tips if your house is a disaster (unless the theme of your blog has something to do with making order out of chaos!). Pay attention to the blogs you love, but don't try to BE the blogs you love. Focus on your own strengths and abilities and make the blog your own.

If you already have your blog, it is never too late to change its direction. My own blog started in a much different place than it is now. Don't let yourself get trapped by thinking that just because you've always done something one way, you have to continue doing it that way. Map out a plan for your ideal site, figure out what changes you will need to make to get there, and then develop a timeframe for making it happen.

One thing that is absolutely essential is a great blog and domain name that captures the essence of what you and your blog are about. Whenever possible, it should be a .com that matches your site name. It should also be easy to spell and easy to remember. If you are not self-hosted, do that immediately! Don't waste time with a blogspot.com or wordpress.com web address. You will want to change it eventually, and sooner is better than later.

I personally recommend being self-hosted on the WordPress.org platform rather than Blogger or any other platform. WordPress.org¹ has more or less become the industry standard and has the most options for design and other features. You will need to pay a few dollars a month for hosting, but otherwise the expenses are nominal.

Once you are set up on WordPress, you need to start creating content. We will talk about this a whole lot more in the next

¹ Please note that there is a significant difference between WordPress.org, which allows you to create your own self-hosted blog, and WordPress.com, which is easier to set up on your own but is NOT self-hosted and will not allow you the freedom to operate or monetize your site in the way you will want to. Save yourself a lot of headaches and make sure your site is self-hosted on WordPress.org from the very beginning!

chapter, but before you try to build traffic or monetize or hire a designer, you should start writing. The only way to know whether you will actually be able to create compelling content will be to *write compelling content*. A pretty design will not bring people back. Killer content will.

The last essential aspect of an awesome blog is a great design and layout. Unless you are actually a graphic or web designer, you should almost always hire someone to do this for you, although I do recommend waiting until you have been blogging for at least a few months to make sure you are able to stick with it. An experienced designer will help make your blog a visual representation of what you are about. The pretty package sells the awesome content, and the difference between a professional design and an amateur one is very obvious.

Are you ready? Let's do this!

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Chapter 1 Action Plan: Start with Awesome

- Determine your main theme, subtopics, and categories.
- Pick a great name and domain name.
- Set up a self-hosted blog on WordPress.org.
- Begin creating compelling content for at least 3–6 months' worth of material.
- Get a professional, well-thought-out design.

Chapter 2:

Content Is King

Think, for a minute, about your favorite blog (or blogs, if you just can't choose). Not the ones you read occasionally, but the one you *can't wait* to read, the ones you find yourself checking even before a new post has a chance to show up in your feed.

What do you love about it? What keeps you coming back day after day?

Is it the pretty blog design or cool logo?

Is it the number of Facebook fans or Twitter followers?

Is it the way the widgets are displayed on the sidebar?

Is it the color of the background or choice of font?

Chances are it is none of those things. Chances are you've barely noticed most of those things for quite some time.

The key to a successful blog is very, very simple: great content.

I dare to bet that your favorite blog is the one that has compelling articles, an engaging writing style, thoughtful insights, funny commentary, mouth-watering recipes, creative projects, inspiring ideas for the home, or really anything that makes you want to stop whatever else you are doing and come see what X blogger

has to share day after day. In other words, your favorite blog has substance that rocks.

Are you following the point of my little illustration here? In order for your blog to be popular, successful, and profitable, **your content has to rock.**

The Editorial Calendar

I have plenty of very successful blogger friends who look at me like I have two heads when I start talking about my editorial calendar. They are doing just fine with their post-when-the-mood-strikes approach, thank you very much, and they have no intention of tying themselves down to some arbitrary schedule.

However, I have found that many of them, when pressed, will admit that being unorganized is not always ideal and that they don't always use their time as efficiently as they could. Press them even further and they will probably admit that their blog might be more successful if they were to buckle down and post more regularly, or if they were to devote more time to building traffic and engaging with their readers.

If you are already popular and satisfied with your number of page views, then by all means, keep doing what you're doing. However, for the rest of you, the ones who bought this book in order to grow your blog and eventually profit from it, I can't emphasize enough how important it is to create and maintain an editorial calendar.

My own editorial calendar is a simple word-processing document with an ongoing list of posts and any other writing assignments due that day. It looks something like this:

MAY 2013

~~W-1-Recipe: Black Bean Chili~~

~~Th-2-Thrifty Thursday~~

~~F-3-Underwritten Post: 7 Ways to Save On Your Next Family Vacation~~

~~S-4-NO POST~~

~~S-5-Weekend Wandering~~

~~M-6-Ditto DIY series Begins!~~

~~T-7-Guest Post: Kristen of Joyfully Thriving~~

~~W-8-In the Blink of an Eye~~

~~Th-9-Thrifty Thursday~~

~~F-10-Underwritten Post: DiY Chevron Nail Art~~

~~S-11-NO POST~~

~~S-12-Weekend Wandering~~

~~M-13-DIY: Doll Stroller Replacement Seat HARBOR STYLE ARTICLE~~

~~DUE-Frugal Family Fun~~

~~T-14-DIY Stepping Stones~~

~~W-15-Recipe: Recipe: Quick & Easy Chocolate Peanut Butter Oreo Pie~~

~~Th-16-Thrifty Thursday~~

~~F-17-Things No One Will Tell You About Being a Caregiver (Walgreens)~~

~~S-18-NO POST~~

~~S-19-Weekend Wandering~~

~~M-20-DIY: Rainbow Button iPhone Case~~

~~T-21-Guest Post-Sarah {DiY Chevron Rug}~~

~~W-22-Blueberry Pie~~

~~Th-23-Thrifty Thursday~~

~~F-24-The 40 Hanger Closet {Underwritten Post}~~

~~S-25-NO POST~~

~~S-26-Weekend Wandering~~

~~M-27-DIY: Chevron Canvas Wall Art~~

~~T-28-NO POST~~

~~W-29-The Mermaid Party~~

~~Th-30-Thrifty Thursday~~

~~F-31-Money Saving iPhone Apps~~

Once a post is published or submitted it gets crossed out. Posts that are in progress get highlighted in yellow, while posts that are finished and ready to go get highlighted in green. Posts that are prepped by my assistant get highlighted in blue, while guest posts are highlighted in purple (when pending), then green (when ready to publish). Here is an actual screen shot of the calendar in color:

MAY 2013

W-1-Recipe: Black Bean Chili
 Th-2-Thrifty Thursday
 F-3-Underwritten Post: 7 Ways to Save On Your Next Family Vacation
 S-4-NO POST
 S-5-Weekend Wandering
 M-6-Ditto DIY series Begins!
 T-7-Guest Post: Kristen of Joyfully Thriving
 W-8-In the Blink of an Eye
 Th-9-Thrifty Thursday
 F-10-Underwritten Post: DIY Chevron Nail Art
 S-11-NO POST
 S-12-Weekend Wandering
 M-13-DIY: Doll Stroller Replacement Seat ~~HARBOR STYLE ARTICLE DUE~~
 Frugal Family Fun
 T-14-DIY Stepping Stones
 W-15-Recipe: Recipe: Quick & Easy Chocolate Peanut Butter Oreo Pie
 Th-16-Thrifty Thursday
 F-17-Things No One Will Tell You About Being a Caregiver (Walgreens)
 S-18-NO POST
 S-19-Weekend Wandering
 M-20-DIY: Rainbow Button iPhone Case
 T-21-Guest Post: Sarah (DIY Chevron Rug)
 W-22-Blueberry Pie
 Th-23-Thrifty Thursday
 F-24-The 40 Hanger Closet (Underwritten Post)
 S-25-NO POST
 S-26-Weekend Wandering
 M-27-DIY: Chevron Canvas Wall Art
 T-28-NO POST
 W-29-The Mermaid Party
 Th-30-Thrifty Thursday
 F-31-Money Saving iPhone App

I try to have my editorial calendar planned at least 3–6 months in advance, and my posts written at least 3–4 weeks in advance. Of course it is sometimes necessary to shuffle things around, depending on circumstances, but I have found that having a clear plan for what is coming up allows me to be more efficient with my time.

In addition to this simple word-processing calendar, I also like using the editorial calendar plug-in for WordPress to get a visual picture of what posts are coming up. This plug-in shows an actual calendar that you can drop and drag your post drafts into. I will usually start a post draft as soon as I've taken the photos or started taking notes for it. That way my graphic assistant can upload the photos directly to the correct post, which saves me a lot of time! I usually have at least 20–30 active drafts in progress at any given time.

For DIY and food bloggers, maintaining an editorial calendar is especially important! Having an idea of what crafts and recipes you will be sharing over the next few months means you can do all your shopping in one trip and then spend a day or two crafting or cooking all your posts for the next month, freeing up the rest of your time to edit photos, work on copy, and build traffic. Even if you can afford to hire help, there is a LOT you will still need to do yourself. Work smarter, not harder in order to maximize your time (something we will talk more about in chapter 11).

Creating and maintaining an editorial calendar also allows you to preplan for seasonal posts, events, and series, which can end up driving more traffic to your blog. It also gives you the freedom to take a week or two off, whether planned or in an emergency, having already prepped all your posts for the downtime. This came in handy for me recently when my family was involved in a bad car accident and I wasn't able to work quite as much as

usual. Sometimes you just never know. I'm not a Boy Scout, but I love their motto: Always Be Prepared.

While it might seem overwhelming at first to try to come up with three months of awesome content when you've barely managed a whole week of really great posts so far, it is actually not as difficult as you might think. Really! The key is developing a habit of regular brainstorming sessions. Before you know it, you'll have so many ideas for posts you'll hardly know where to begin.

Brainstorming

After reading my philosophy on editorial calendars, you probably won't be surprised that I actually schedule my brainstorming sessions. Once or twice a month I will set aside an hour first thing in the morning—the time of day when I am sharpest and I do my best work—to brainstorm as many post ideas as possible.

I have found that the easiest way to do this is to take a pad of sticky notes and lay several notes out on my desk. (I now use a specific brainstorming page in my blog planner, which we will also talk more about in chapter 11.) On the top of each one I will write down one of my blog's subcategories, and then I will simply start pondering ideas and writing them down on the correct note as quickly as I can. When I get stuck in one category, I move on to the next until they are all full. Then I gather up my sticky notes and begin adding the posts to my editorial calendar, shuffling around previously scheduled items as necessary.

Some of my best impromptu brainstorming ideas come while I am cleaning my house. I usually keep a notepad handy on my desk to jot down those ideas as they come.

Finally, I will also sometimes brainstorm on the go using the notepad on my iPhone, usually when I am stuck waiting at the doc-

tor's office or while traveling. I love that my notes get sent straight to my email inbox, where I can then once again add them to my editorial calendar.

Your own brainstorming sessions might look completely different; the key is to do them regularly, as often as you can. Trust me, the more you brainstorm, the easier it becomes and the better your blog will be for it.

The Discipline of Writing

I'm just going to say this up front: if you truly hate writing, then blogging probably isn't for you. No matter what your blog is about, compelling content does, for the most part, involve a lot of writing. If your writing is terrible, your blog will probably fail.

Are there exceptions? Of course, but the exceptions usually have something else so awesome people are willing to overlook the less-than-awesome writing.

At this point I'm guessing a few of you may be thinking, *Well, I've never been a good writer. I hate writing. Clearly I should just quit.* This is not meant to discourage you or make you want to give up. It is meant to make you work harder.

Writing is, even for the most naturally gifted writers, a learned discipline. In 1990 a man named Anders Ericsson did a study that found in order to become an expert at something, you must practice it for at least 10,000 hours, which is the equivalent of practicing twenty hours a week for TEN YEARS. In his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell explains that this 10,000-hour requirement is a minimum for anyone truly exceptional. If you want to be a great writer and therefore a great blogger, you have to write and write and write.

How many of us can say we write that much?

The thing about becoming a good writer is that the more you do it, the better you will be. It takes practice. LOTS of practice! It also takes the discipline of actually sitting down at your keyboard to write, not necessarily because you are about to pound out the next great American novel, but because if you don't keep writing, you won't get better.

Don't wait until inspiration strikes; chances are, you'll be waiting a long time. Instead, once you've brainstormed your list of topics, it is time to actually start writing those posts. Each morning (or evening or whenever your brain is clearest and your environment is free of distractions), force yourself to write a certain number of words (I like 500) and don't stop until you've met your goal. You'll be amazed at how quickly your writing will improve and how much you are actually able to get done.

If you struggle with grammar and spelling, be sure to have someone edit for you, at least for a while. Consider joining a writing group, either online or in real life, so that you can get honest feedback and constructive criticism.

My husband proofreads almost everything I write, and I honestly don't know what I would do without him. He catches the little spelling mistakes that my brain skips over and that spell-check doesn't always pick up on. He also lets me know when something doesn't flow right or if something doesn't quite make sense. His feedback is invaluable.

How to Write a Killer Blog Post

Once you are determined to sit down and just start writing, it is time to get going on your first killer blog post, one that your readers will really respond to. A truly fantastic and compelling blog

post usually means more traffic, more comments, more pins on Pinterest, more tweets, and more Facebook shares, all of which will help grow your blog.

But what makes a killer blog post?

A killer blog post:

- **Makes a clear point.** A killer blog post always has a clear takeaway, a message that can be boiled down to one short sentence. If you, the author, aren't able to summarize your point, how will the reader be expected to follow your logic? Always write with the point in mind. If you have multiple points, split it into two posts.
- **Evokes an emotional response.** The posts that people remember (and share) are the ones that make them feel a certain way, whether that be happy or angry or encouraged or inspired. This means they usually take a stand one way or another. Neutral might seem safe, but it is boring and forgettable.
- **Is easy to read.** Blog posts should be clear and concise. Statistics show that blog readers tend to skim, so use short paragraphs, headers, and bullet points. It is okay—essential even—to write conversationally, but proper grammar and spelling is mandatory. Always.
- **Teaches a simple lesson.** Whether your post is a DIY tutorial showing how to make something, a recipe, or some other helpful tip, the best blog posts stick to one clear and easy-to-follow lesson. This is not to say you can't do complicated projects or recipes, but I can guarantee that the projects with the best response will be the simplest of the bunch.

- **Stirs up controversy.** Killer blog posts take a stand and force the reader to react one way or another. The stronger the stance, the more intense the reaction will be. Of course don't be controversial just for the sake of stirring up controversy! Readers can sniff inauthenticity a mile away. If there is a particular topic you truly feel strongly about, don't try to come off as neutral. Neutral is boring. Just be prepared for people to disagree with you!
- **Is visually appealing.** Killer blog posts have killer images to go with them. This is not only important for recipes and DIY, but with the advent of Pinterest, for ALL articles. I can't tell you how many awesome articles I haven't pinned because there was no image to go with it. We will talk a LOT more about this later!
- **Is not overly complicated.** Don't use large words when a small word will suffice. I once heard Tsh Oxenrider from TheArtOfSimple.net say that her pet peeve is when someone uses the word *utilize* when *use* means the exact same thing in all situations. I don't think I have used *utilized* since!
- **Makes you say WOW.** This is the awesome factor again. Whatever you share, whether it be a recipe, a party, an idea, or a project, should be so compelling that your reader can't help but stop whatever they are doing and pay attention. If it's not great, don't bother. You are better off sharing one WOW post a month than twenty forgettable ones.
- **Empowers the reader.** A killer blog post isn't about YOU or what you've done or created or cooked. Yes, you may be sharing something you've done, but the best blog posts do it only in a way that makes the reader feel that THEY could do it too, offering clear tips and helpful instruction.

- **Is unique and interesting.** A killer blog post has something new to say. It presents a unique viewpoint or an interesting perspective. It gives readers a different way of looking at a problem that perhaps they hadn't considered before. It is fresh and sharp.

Keep in mind that not all of these tips must or even should be used in one post, but generally the more of them that you can hit, the better off you will be.

Pillar Content

Building a successful blog requires writing and creating as many killer blog posts as you can. My own personal goal is to write a killer post every single time. What is the point, otherwise?

The way I look at it, my time is precious. As a blogger and small business owner, I will always have too much to do and not enough time to possibly get it all done. I am not going to waste my time writing content that is just okay. I am better off spending that time promoting the awesome, compelling, killer posts I've already written—in other words, promoting my pillar content.

Pillar content, for those of you who don't know, consists of those blog posts that draw traffic. These posts provide the structure to your blog, and they become the posts that people remember, the ones that get lots of comments, pins, Facebook shares, or that are easily optimized for great search-engine traffic. Generally, the more pillar content you create on your site, the more successful you'll be.

On my own site I've written lots and lots of pillar-content posts, and I continue to create several more each month. If you go to www.LivingWellSpendingLess.com, you will see a series of images

on my sidebar labeled “Popular Posts.” Those are some examples of pillar content.

It used to be that many blogs were more like online diaries than websites. Posts were published chronologically, with the newest post at the top. Once a post was bumped off the front page, it was likely to be relegated to the depths of the “archives,” never to be seen or heard from again.

Back in the day, a few smart bloggers (and a few lucky ones too) realized that individual blog posts could be optimized for great search-engine results, and they benefited from continued traffic on older posts for popular search terms. The vast majority of bloggers, however, seem to be either confused or overwhelmed by exactly how to optimize a post for great search-engine results (we will talk more about that later too!), thus often unknowingly limiting their traffic to their most current posts.

While search-engine optimization (SEO) is still very relevant, Pinterest has completely leveled the playing field and it is now a whole new ballgame. Again, we will talk a lot more about Pinterest in chapter 5, but for now just know that pillar content is important because THAT is the stuff that goes viral.

Are you following me? The train of thought is pretty simple, really:



Killer Posts = Pillar Content = Viral Traffic = More Money for You

• • •

Chapter 2 Action Plan: Create Consistently Killer Content

- Create and begin using an editorial calendar.
- Schedule a brainstorming session at least once a month.
- Write every day, whether you feel like it or not.
- Write at least one pillar content article per week.

Let's talk a little more about how to get there. Because, as we all know, content is king, *but...*

Chapter 3:

Presentation Is Everything

We live in a visual world that is only becoming more visual by the day. When it comes to web and graphic design, quite frankly, most people's expectations are pretty darn high and getting higher all the time. Websites and blogs aren't the "new thing" anymore, which means there are too many well-designed, beautiful blogs out there for a poorly designed, amateurish-looking blog to ever do well.

Here is the brutal truth: you can write the best, most interesting, most compelling articles in the whole world, but if the package doesn't sell it, you are doomed. If your site design is garish or obviously looks like you did it yourself, or if your graphics are ugly, your navigation frustrating, or your images are poor quality, most people will turn away before they even give you a chance.

I've learned this lesson firsthand on my own site. My previous site design was very pretty, at least to me, but it was *busy*! It had four main colors, flowers in the header, stripes in the background, a navigation bar that didn't make any sense, and, to top it off, a long footer with a serious case of TMI (too much information).



The problem wasn't really that it was ugly, or even that it wasn't a professional design. It just was way too *much*, particularly because I had begun writing a lot more about cleaning and organizing and simplifying, since that has been a major theme in my life. The busy design didn't fit the content, and the blog was floundering.

I actually couldn't see the problem for myself. One morning I stumbled across a nasty comment that someone had written about my site design on a post of mine they had shared on Facebook. The comment said something like, "Why is this lady talking about organizing? Her site is the ugliest, most cluttered website I've ever seen!"

Ouch.

I'm sure she hadn't intended for me to read that particular comment, but her brutal honesty was definitely a rude awakening. It made me realize just how important it was to have a blog design that didn't just reflect my own personal tastes, but that presented my content in the best possible light.

After several months of licking my wounds and pondering the situation, I finally decided that she might be at least partially right. I contacted my blog designer (Heather Moritz of [Moritz Blog Design](#)), and together we came up with a design that was simple, organized, and easy to navigate, with fewer colors and more white space.

My traffic started climbing almost overnight, not just a little bit, but dramatically. I started getting a lot more traffic to older posts because with the new navigation, people could actually *find* what they were looking for, and all the fantastic pillar content that I had worked so hard to create was finally being read and pinned and shared.

Presentation is everything.

If you've been blogging for a while and already have a blog design in place, this is the time to take a step back and look at it with a critic's eyes. Even if you spent money on a professional design, even if you *just* got it all set up, be brutally, painfully honest. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is some aspect of your design holding you back? Is it too cluttered, too garish, or too confusing?
- Does your navigation make perfect sense? Can your readers find what they are looking for?
- Does your design tell newcomers, at first glance, what your blog is about? Would they be able to tell in thirty seconds the main types of posts at your site, and would they know how to find them?
- Are your graphics crisp and clean? Do they use appealing, high-quality images?
- Are your fonts easy to read?
- Is there a clear call to action? Do your readers know what you want them to do or where you want them to go?

Try to look at your site with the eyes of a stranger, and if you can't, ask a trusted friend or colleague to give an honest assessment. You might be surprised at what they see. Another great way to get an unbiased opinion is to use [Peek](#)², a free user-testing service. Just go to the site, enter your URL and email address, and they will send you a five-minute video of someone using your blog for the first time.

While improving your user experience is an ongoing challenge, for now, let's talk about some of the most important elements of a good blog presentation.

Keep It Organized

Remember back in chapter 1 when you determined exactly what you planned to write about, and you developed your main site theme, your subtopics, and your subcategories? This is where you use them. Your website's navigation should make it easy to find the things you write about in a way that makes sense to even the most casual and inexperienced blog reader. If it doesn't, change it.

For the record, creating cohesive navigation that ensures a great experience for the reader does NOT magically happen on its own. Additionally, unless you are paying a whole lot of money for your design, your blog designer will not be creating your navigation either, nor should they be.

Here's why: no one knows your content like you. Take the time to create categories, and to fit those categories into subtopics. Make sure every post is categorized, and then eliminate categories that don't fit. Once everything is categorized the way it should be, make sure your navigation bar is clear, concise, and easy to—you guessed it—navigate.

² www.peek.usertesting.com

Next, take the time to make sure your very *best* content is highlighted in a way that stands out to people, and make it available to them in as many ways as you can. Did you write a killer series or e-book? Make a button for your sidebar that highlights it AND make it a category in your navigation bar. Do you have a few awesome posts that readers love? Make a popular post page AND add a “most popular posts” section to your sidebar.

Above all, make sure it makes sense. Ask a few honest friends or family members—preferably ones that don't spend much time on your site—to critique your navigation. Could they find what they were looking for? What were they drawn to? What turned them off? Then, once you've gotten an honest look at what is wrong, fix the problems!

Keep Your Design Clean and Simple

I suppose this is a matter of personal preference, but I firmly believe that the best blog designs are also the simplest. Your design should include the bare minimum of what people need to be able to find, and nothing else.

Yes, of course you want your blog design to reflect your personality, but it should do so in an understated way. The most important thing to remember is that an amazing design won't keep people if the content stinks, but a bad or overly busy design will turn people away, even if the content is amazing.

Your design should be the tasteful wrapping that makes people want to see what's inside.

Here are a few “clean” blog designs I love:



www.andreadekker.com



www.thenester.com



www.thepleatedpoppy.com



www.the36thavenue.com



www.lifeingraceblog.com



www.glynniswhitwer.com



www.graceuncommon.com



www.moneysavingmom.com

And then of course there is my new design, which is much simpler and a big improvement from my previous design.



You'll notice that none of these blogs look anything alike, nor are any of them "blah." Clean and simple means they can let the content show through. Between advertising, social media buttons, subscription boxes, and blog posts, every single site is full of information overload. Do your readers a favor and keep it simple.

Rock Your Images

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to have amazing *pinnable* photos enhancing every single blog post. We live in a very visual world, and Pinterest has only made it more so. If you are not willing to do what it takes to ensure that the images on your site pop, you might as well quit right now. It is that important.

Of course not everyone agrees with me on this point and some people may even be quick to point out a number of very popu-

lar websites that don't have great images or even any images at all. However, I would dare to bet that most—if not all—of the sites in question became popular in the early days of blogging, way before the advent of Pinterest, when the blogging culture was much different than it is now. They now have the luxury of *already being successful* to ensure that their loyal readers will continue reading.

My main contention is that the *current* culture has changed significantly. There are now thousands upon thousands of blogs out there to compete with, and more being created every day. Just like a beautiful design won't save your blog but a bad design will sink it, beautiful images will enhance and help you promote the amazing content that is already there, while poor-quality pictures will mean no one even takes the time to look.

Of course, depending on the subject matter of your blog, you don't necessarily have to take your own photographs. There are plenty of stock photo services available that can provide gorgeous, compelling imagery for your blog. The downside is that most of these services charge for their photos, which can get expensive quickly.

In addition to the photos I take myself, I frequently use stock images from stock photo sites such as iStockphoto.com and 123rf.com. iStock generally has a better selection, but their prices have gone up significantly in the past few years.

That said, if you are a DIY or food blogger, or even if you do an occasional DIY project or recipe on your blog, you will be well served to learn as much as you can about photography, staging, and photo editing.

There is far too much to say about photography to include in this book, but here are a few quick general tips that can help get you started and improve your photos right away:

- **Your camera matters.** If you plan to take a lot of photos for your blog, invest in at least a starter DSLR camera. I have used my trusty Nikon D3100 for several years now, and still love it. It is easy to use and has a great guide mode that helped me shoot in manual mode before I fully understood how manual mode worked. While sometimes I dream of upgrading my camera body, I found that first investing in a premium lens for my starter body was a much wiser choice. The 24-70/2.8 lens is super versatile and gives my photos that great blurriness in the background that I love.
- **Get the lighting right.** There is nothing more important to a photograph than good lighting! In fact, learning about photography is more about learning to understand light than anything else. Bright, indirect daylight is best. If you are shooting food or crafts, shoot during the day, either outside in the shade or in front of a well-lit window with your back to the window. Make sure you are out of the direct sunlight! Whenever possible, avoid using your flash.
- **Check your background.** Make sure there is nothing weird or distracting in your background. The plainer, the better!
- **Use the “Rule of Thirds.”** For better composition, imagine your photo split into thirds horizontally and vertically, then try to get the main focal point of your photo to be on one of the lines or at one of the four intersecting points.



There are lots of great online resources for learning how to work your camera. I have personally used and like the MomTog's Un-Manual. I think it is a great guide with a ton of easy-to-follow information. My only real problem with the Un-Manual was that the author uses and references a Canon for all the detailed instructions and diagrams. Since I shoot with a Nikon, it was a little trickier to learn from.

I have also taken several online photography courses, including Ashley Ann Photography's Snap Shop, Sweet Violet Photography's Simply Basics, and MeRah Koh's Magical Light course. They were all *extremely* helpful, and I highly recommend any of them.

Make It Pin-Worthy

I've already alluded to the importance of Pinterest when it comes to promoting your blog, and rest assured I will be talking about

Pinterest a lot more before this book is done. There is a reason for that, and not just because I think Pinterest is fun (which I do!).

Right now there is no single better way to promote your blog content than Pinterest, particularly if you haven't yet established a platform. Quite honestly, when used correctly, Pinterest is more powerful than Facebook, Twitter, Google+, StumbleUpon, SEO, blog hops, link parties, and even paid advertising *combined*. It is, in my opinion, the number one thing worth spending a lot of time on to get it right, and while it is never a good idea to put all your eggs in one basket, something must be said for seizing an incredible opportunity.

The great thing about spending the time to make your content "pin-worthy" is that doing so actually *makes your content better*. Pin-worthy content is also share-worthy via other social media outlets, and more SEO friendly as well. If something does well on Pinterest, it will do well pretty much everywhere else. Pinterest is just the fastest way to draw attention to it.

So what makes content pin-worthy? Pay attention now because this part is important: **the most pin-worthy posts are the perfect combination of compelling content and highly pinnable images.**

In the last chapter, we talked a lot about creating killer content and the importance of being awesome. Awesome content is compelling. Awesome content makes people want to click over *right then and there*. Awesome content then makes those readers re-pin and share and comment, which in turn convinces other readers to do the same. **Awesome content sells itself.**

But Pinterest is a visual site, which means that the accompanying image to your awesome content must be equally compelling.

Your image must sell your content. In other words, the image you pin should tell enough of your story to make people want to read more.

Pinterest is still pretty new, but there have been a few studies on what types of pins get more re-pins. These observations are a good place to start.

A recent article from Curalate Insights³ found that:

- Colorful images are better than monochromatic images.
- Bright images are better than dark images.
- Warm colors are more likely to be re-pinned than cool colors.
- Close-up shots are more likely to be re-pinned than panoramic shots.
- Pins without faces are far more likely to be re-pinned.

At this point you may be thinking something like, *Well, my blog isn't about crafts or home decor or recipes, so Pinterest doesn't really apply to me.* Surprisingly, my own anecdotal research and personal experience on Pinterest has found that while recipes and DIY images do tend to get re-pinned quite a bit, they don't drive nearly as much blog traffic as articles and images that relate to something interesting, helpful, inspirational, or life-changing.

People will pin and collect images they like, simply because they are pretty or interesting or inspiring, or because they look delicious. Converting those pins to page views means taking your beautiful images one or two steps farther. Those images must correspond to great content, and your image description on Pinterest must be engaging enough to capture people's attention

³ <http://blog.curalate.com/the-perfect-pinterest-pin-how-to-optimize-your-images-for-maximum-engagement-on-pinterest/>

and give them enough of a sense of urgency to want to read that post right then and there.

This means, if you are a DIY or home decor or food blogger, your beautiful images must connect on an emotional level or they will simply be re-pinned without really driving traffic. On the other hand, if you are a writer, this means making your accompanying image compelling enough to sell your story, similar to the way a book cover sells its content.

Here are a few examples of some of my own most popular pins to give you a better idea of what I am talking about. All of the following pins have been pinned and re-pinned thousands of times and have driven tens of thousands of new readers to my blog. Notice that they represent a variety of subjects, from recipes to cleaning tips to DIY projects and beyond, but that each one has three important things in common—great content, a nice image and graphic that works with the title, and a compelling description to make you want to click and read that post.



how to REMOVE ALMOST ANY STAIN

www.LivingWellSpendingLess.com

from Living Well Spending Less™


How to Remove (Almost) Any Stain

No one wants to toss a perfectly good shirt because of a stain that won't come out! Next time, try these tried & true techniques for removing almost any stain. From blueberries to wine, these simple steps will keep your laundry looking good as new. There's even a cute printable cheat sheet to hang in your laundry room!

📌 161 ❤️ 13

Pinned from
livingwellspendingless.com

ONE BOWL BROWNIES



www.LivingWellSpendingLess.com

from Living Well Spending Less™

One Bowl Brownies

Craving chocolate? These amazing brownies whip up super fast in just one bowl, and you can even make them out of leftover candy instead of chocolate chips! I seriously didn't believe homemade brownies could beat the box version, but this recipe proved me wrong!

📌 141 ❤️ 20

Pinned from
livingwellspendingless.com

DIY DRY SHAMPOO



www.LivingWellSpendingLess.com

from Living Well Spending Less™

DIY Dry Shampoo

Need an easy way to keep your hair looking fresh and clean in between washings? This DIY dry shampoo is a snap to whip up and costs just pennies!

📌 91 ❤️ 8 📄 1

Pinned from
livingwellspendingless.com



10 SMART WAYS TO BUILD AN EMERGENCY FUND

www.LivingWellSpendingLess.com

from Living Well Spending Less™

10 Smart Ways to Build an Emergency Fund

Want to save money or pay off debt, but aren't sure where to start? Don't miss these 10 super smart ways to build an emergency fund fast, plus a ton of awesome tips & ideas from LWSL readers!

📌 109 ❤️ 24

Pinned from
livingwellspendingless.com



10 Tips for Getting More Done Every Single Day--great advice for how to work more efficiently and make better use of your time!

85 repins 12 likes



The BEST cream cheese buttercream frosting recipe! Only 3 ingredients, 5 minutes, and SO yummy--you'll never buy the store bought kind ever again!

201 repins 25 likes



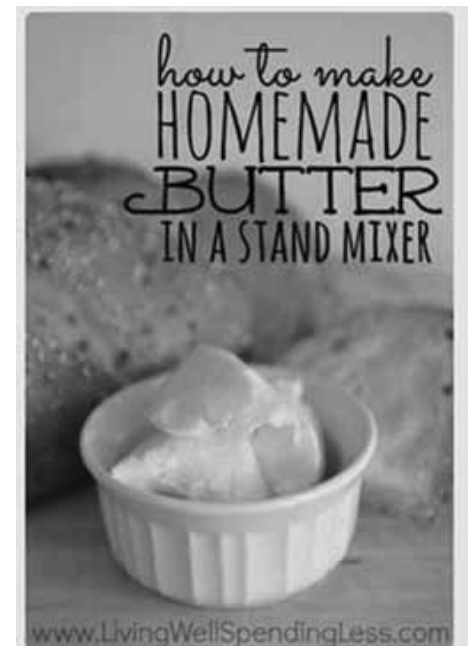
from Living Well Spending Less™

How to Create a Cleaning Schedule That Works For You

While it might seem overwhelming at first, a cleaning schedule can actually make keeping your house clean a whole lot easier! In just 3 easy steps, this super helpful post shows you exactly how to create a personalized cleaning schedule that will work for your own home. There are even free printables for four different types of cleaning plan!

355 35

Pinned from
livingwellspendingless.com



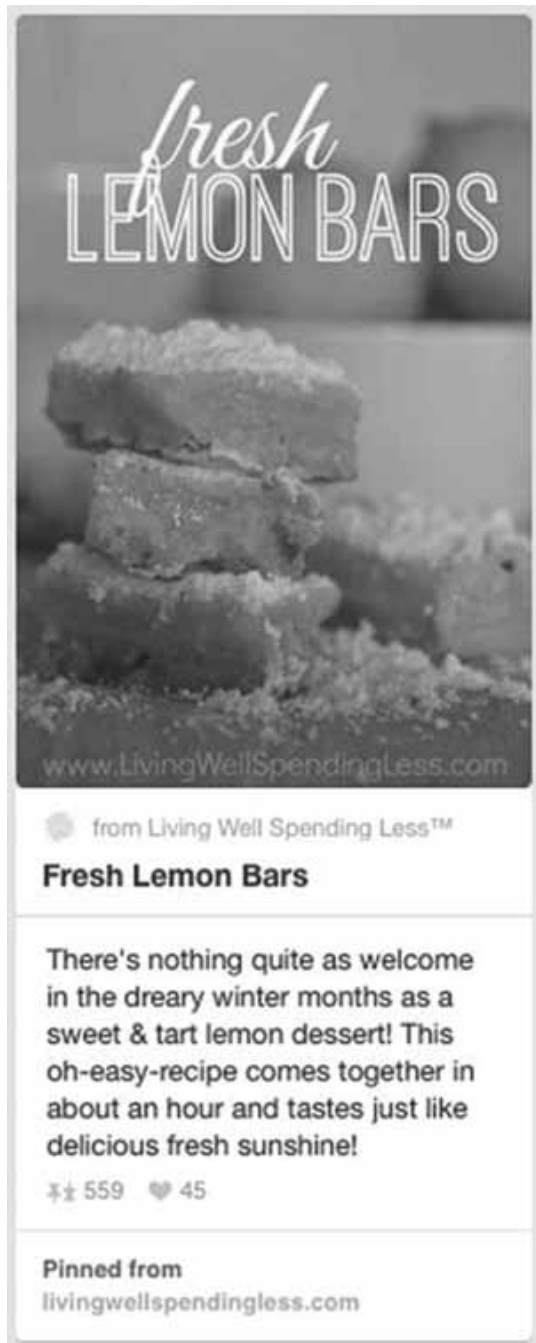
from Living Well Spending Less™

How to Make Homemade Butter

How to make homemade butter in a stand mixer. I seriously cannot believe how easy this is! It costs less, tastes better, is fun to do with kids and it makes buttermilk too!

494 23

Pinned from
livingwellspendingless.com



Do you see how that works? It really is a very simple formula:

Awesome Content + Compelling Image + Engaging Description
= More Traffic.

Sounds good, doesn't it?

...

Chapter 3 Action Plan: Refine Your Presentation

- Do an honest assessment of your current blog design. Ask for feedback from a few friends, then make a plan for what to change.
- Create an organized, well-thought-out navigation bar.
- Keep your design clean, simple, and free of unnecessary extras.
- Learn basic photography skills or begin using stock photos.
- For all awesome content posts, create "pin-worthy," compelling images that include an engaging description.

Chapter 4:

Growing Your Platform

Before I get you too excited about the limitless possibilities of Pinterest (though it might be too late), we are going to back up and take a quick look at some of the traditional or “old school” methods of building traffic and growing your platform. It seems a little silly to even use the word *traditional* to talk about anything blogging-related when blogging is only about fifteen years old, but the truth is that blogging and social media are constantly changing.

What worked well five years ago now seems archaic, and what works now may very well be just a flash in the pan. In fact, my main reason for self-publishing this book rather than taking the traditional route was that traditional publishing simply takes too long and technology changes too quickly. I wanted this information to be as relevant as possible right now, even if that means I have to update every year.

So why bother with “old school” methods at all, you might be wondering, if technology is changing so fast? The answer is that when you are trying to grow a blog and build your platform, it is best to get traffic any and every way you can. While viral traffic from social media—which we will talk about in the next chapter—can be faster and more efficient when it works, it is also more volatile. What is white hot one day can be ice cold the

next. I have learned the hard way that it is never a good idea to put all your eggs in one basket. The more diverse your streams of traffic, the more stable your blog will be.

The smartest approach to building blog traffic is to approach it from a variety of angles, in however many ways you can, focusing on both short-term gains and long-term growth.

But before I delve into the various ways to build your blog traffic, I have to start with a strong word of caution, as I know there are probably more than a few readers who will go straight to this chapter without bothering to read about the importance of content and presentation first. Are you ready? **Don't try to build your blog traffic if your blog isn't ready.** Just don't do it.

There really is no point in trying to build your blog as a business if your content is just okay, your navigation is an exercise in frustration, your do-it-yourself design screams amateur, and your poor-quality images are completely uninspiring and un-pin-worthy. Yes, maybe your parents will read it and love everything you have to say. The rest of the world will pass.

Always keep in mind that **sustainable blog traffic growth only happens if your content rocks.** Getting people to come once is one thing; getting them to come back again and again (then tell all their friends to come too) is what will ultimately build your blog. If you are working like crazy to build your traffic and you aren't seeing any results, it might be time to go back to the drawing board and re-evaluate your content.

But now, with that lecture out of the way, let's look at some of the traditional approaches to building your blog traffic.

Word of Mouth

Quite honestly, this is how many bloggers got their start, and how most bloggers continue to get started down the blogging path. You start a blog, write a few things, then tell a few friends or a few family members who in turn—if what you're sharing is any good—share with a few more friends and extended family members, and so on and so on.

Word of mouth is a great way to start building blog traffic, and to start getting feedback from people you know and trust. They can tell you if you are on the right track (or what needs work) before you try marketing yourself to the masses. Telling people you know that you are writing a blog is also critical practice; if you can't sell your blog to your best friend, then to whom can you sell it to?

Before you go out and start telling people, put some time and thought into crafting your “elevator pitch”—your thirty-second overview of what your blog is about, and why people would want to read it. Practice it, hone it, OWN it. Then go out and let people know!

If you are in the beginning stages of blog writing, or even if you've been writing for a while but haven't quite dared to tell those closest to you, here are a few ideas:

- Send a quick email to everyone in your address book, inviting them all to read your latest (or favorite) blog post. Be sure to include the link! If you're feeling brave, let them know you would love to get some honest feedback, then ask a few specific questions. Just be sure you're prepared for honesty!
- Every single time you publish a blog post, share it with a comment on your personal Facebook page. Again, ask for feedback!

- Have inexpensive business cards printed, then share them with everyone you know.
- Have an inexpensive bumper sticker or car decal printed with your web address. This is how all my neighbors—even the ones I didn't know—started reading my blog! (A word of caution—depending on what you write about, that can get weird. Sometimes it is better that your neighbors don't know about your blog.)
- Politely ask the people you trust who you know read (and like) your blog to spread the word. You can do this via a blog post, or at the end of each blog post, or in person.

It is easy to feel embarrassed at first when you are promoting your blog. Maybe you're afraid your friends will mock you or think your ideas are silly. Perhaps you just aren't quite confident that anything you've written is worth reading. In all honesty, your friends *might* mock you—mine certainly did when I first started! Worse yet, your blog might actually not be worth reading, at least not yet. However, if you don't face your fears and learn how to promote yourself from the very start, beginning with the people who know you best, you will probably never be able to build a successful blogging business. At the end of the day, YOU will always be your best marketer, and this will be true whether you have ten readers or ten thousand readers.

I personally think it is helpful to look at it a different way. If you were starting a brick-and-mortar business, you would be darn sure to tell every single person you knew about that business, and then you would ask those people to tell everyone they knew, and so on. You wouldn't stop telling people, because your livelihood would depend on it!

If you think of your blog as a business, even before it makes a dime, telling people (and improving your product through early

market research) stops feeling like shameless self-promotion and a whole lot more like the thing you do when you believe in something.

Blog Hops and Link Parties

For those of you who don't know, a blog hop is a collection of links hosted by a blog or group of blogs intended as a way to get to "know" other bloggers. The idea is that you link up your blog, then go visit as many of the participating blogs as you can, and that they then do the same for you. A link party is similar, but usually requires that you link up individual posts that fit within a certain theme, such as DIY or recipes.

When I first started blogging, I was pretty methodical about actively participating in blog hops, and it did help me start to build a base of traffic beyond my own network of friends and family. However, as my blog grew, I found the process of linking up, visiting multiple blogs every day, and leaving as many comments as possible to be too much work for too little payout.

However, I do still participate in link parties quite frequently, and I even host a link party on my own blog called Thrifty Thursday. I have found link parties to be a lot better for driving traffic than blog hops because they are usually more targeted to specific genres. Additionally, many hosting blogs, including mine, will feature a few blog posts from the link-up each week, which is usually a great source of extra traffic and new readers!

The downside of link parties and hops is the amount of time it takes. It can be very time consuming to link up to many different blogs each week. Even so, linking up is still a great way to get your content in front of other bloggers, which is always a good thing. My recommendation is that you try out a few different par-

ties that fit well with your own genre, and then stick with the ones that drive the most traffic.

After seeing the success of Thrifty Thursday on *LivingWellSpendingLess.com*, many people have asked whether I think starting a link party is a good way to build traffic. My honest answer is no, at least not for the amount of work that is involved. Getting a link party started is a huge commitment that takes a *lot* of time, not simply to set it up each week but to go out and promote and invite people to join. While I am very happy that Thrifty Thursday has taken off and become successful, I can't say it was worth the amount of time involved, nor can I say I would do it all over again.

Commenting on Other Blogs

In my first few months of blogging I read as many books and articles as I could about the subject of growing your blog traffic, and everything I read said "leave comments on bigger blogs within your same genre." I took this advice to heart and became a very frequent commenter on a few my favorite blogs, sometimes leaving as many as five or ten comments a day.

In my defense, most of my comments were thoughtful and helpful and genuinely contributed to the post conversation, and, to be fair, all those comments did drive a *lot* of traffic to my blog, especially from the one blog I commented on most often. However, I have to admit that more than a few times my "helpful" comments crossed the line into somewhat spammy, shameless self-promotion territory.

While the traffic was nice, and I do in fact recommend commenting on bigger blogs as a great way to build traffic, I don't recommend becoming *that* girl (or guy).

I learned that lesson the hard way when five minutes into my first blogging conference I bumped into that blogger I had been spam-stalking for several months, and, upon telling her my blog name, she said, “Oh, I know who you are. You leave a *lot* of comments on my blog.” At that moment I pretty much wanted to sink into the floor and die, and I can guarantee you that I have never spammed another blog since!

That blogger and I have since become friends and I can now laugh about my over-zealousness. That said, I did learn an important lesson, one that is even more apparent now that I have been blogging for long enough to be the target of more than a few spammy blog comments myself.

The lesson is that while bloggers pretty much universally *love* to get comments, and while most seasoned bloggers don’t mind helping newbies when they can, trying to “scam” the traffic that those bloggers worked incredibly hard for just isn’t a good practice. It could even get you banned from a site, or, as in my case, end up being one of your most embarrassing and truly cringe-worthy blogging moments ever.

A much better approach is to read blogs you like—particularly ones that would have great crossover traffic—and if a post genuinely moves or inspires you, leave a thoughtful comment with your website URL in the appropriate box. You can even have your name be Your Name @ Your Website Name, and as long as your comment is genuine and insightful, it won’t come across like spam or shameless self-promotion. On the contrary, depending on what you have to say, it might just spur quite a few people to go check out you and your blog.

Promoting Other Bloggers

One of my favorite ways to build goodwill (and hopefully traffic, of course, in a roundabout way) is to feature, link to, and promote

other blogs and bloggers as much as possible. This approach is more of a “pay it forward” approach. If you are generous with your promotion of others, eventually others will be generous with their promotion of you.

Promoting another blogger can be as simple as linking back to another blogger whose post or idea inspired some facet of whatever post you happen to be writing about. Most blogs have trackbacks enabled on their site, which means if you link to a particular post (and not just their home page), the blogger will automatically receive an email, or “trackback” to notify them that they’ve been linked to.

I can’t speak for anyone else, but I know that whenever I receive a trackback email, I *always* go check out the blog that is linking to me. At the very least, I will read that article, and sometimes I even end up reading a lot more.

Another great way to promote other blogs is to feature a round-up of ideas relating to a particular topic. On my blog, I do this every time I am getting ready to plan a party. After searching the web and Pinterest for ideas, I will create a photo collage “inspiration board” for my chosen party theme, then link back to each blog or website included on the board. (**Note:** Be sure to do your due diligence and find the ORIGINAL source of each photograph! Also, do not post a full-size photo on your blog without permission!)

Here is a sample “inspiration board” from my blog:



Sources:

1. **Mermaid Party Dessert Table** {via Chickabug Blog}
2. **Sand Castle Cake** {via One Charming Party}
3. **Oyster Cookies** {via Catch My Party}
4. **DIY Beachy Pallet Sign** {via Blue Eyed Yonder}

5. **Mermaids This Way Sign** {via Tami G Photography}
6. **Under-the-Sea Mermaid Party** {via Party Wagon}
7. **Mermaid Tail Cupcakes** {via Catch My Party}
8. **Glycerin Goldfish Soap Favors** {via The Blue House Chronicles}
9. **Starfish Mermaid Princess Wands** {via Catch My Party}
10. **Ocean-Inspired Tissue Puffs** {via Mom Tog}
11. **Starfish Sandwiches** {via Mama Peapod}
12. **Mermaid Party Tissue Wreath** {via Etsy}
13. **Mermaid Photo Op** {via The Party Animal}

As my blog has grown, I've also found that hosting guest posts and publishing a weekly "Weekend Wandering" column featuring my favorite picks of my Thrifty Thursday link party are also both great ways to promote other blogs and bloggers. Amazingly enough, the pay-it-forward mentality really does work, and I have found that the more I focus on building others up without expecting anything in return, the more it comes back to me in other ways.

Networking and Collaboration

The opportunity to meet and collaborate with other bloggers is without question my very favorite part of blogging. Even if blogging would have only stayed a hobby—and not become a full-time job—it would have been worth every moment simply because of the amazing friendships I have made over the past three years. I can say without hesitation that I count many of my online blogging friends among my nearest and dearest, and that I am a better person for having known them.

Aside from the personal benefits, forging genuine friendships with other bloggers has opened so many doors for me. It has given me the opportunity to partner and collaborate with some amazing people, which has in turn helped grow my blog. I can honestly

say that almost every fantastic opportunity I've had while blogging has come from a personal connection I've made.

That said, I do think it is important to point out that the true friendships and real relationships came **first**. Had I sought out "friendships" with other bloggers for the purpose of building my own blog, I have no doubt those friends would have seen right through me and my less-than-honorable intentions.

Blog conferences are by far the best way I've found to connect with other bloggers. There is really something so amazing and inspiring about being in a room full of people who "get it"—this crazy, misunderstood profession we call blogging—and if you are willing to put yourself out there even a little, you are almost certain to find at least one or two kindred spirits in the crowd. In fact, these days my main purpose for attending conferences is most often just the chance to connect. I almost always get more out of the late-night gab sessions and conversations in the hallways than from the actual sessions themselves.

Here are a few tips to (hopefully) make connecting with other bloggers at your first (or next) blog conference a little easier:

- **Focus on connections.** You'll be tempted to try to attend every session to "maximize" your investment. Resist that temptation. Attend the sessions that really appeal to you, but don't be afraid to skip a session in favor of going out for coffee with the gals you met at breakfast, or to sleep in because you stayed up half the night chatting with the roommate you just met.
- **Find a roommate.** If you are going to your first conference by yourself, try to find a roommate. Most blogging conferences have Facebook groups with a roommate connection thread—use it! Even if you and your roommate don't ultimately become BFFs, there is something comforting about knowing at least one other person in the crowd.

- **Engage, don't card swap.** There is seriously no bigger turn-off than having someone hand you their card before they've even said hello. I honestly don't even bother keeping the cards of people I haven't had an actual conversation with. And when in doubt of what to say, ask a question!
- **Listen more than you speak.** Before I head off to any conference, my (older, wiser) husband always tells me, "Remember, honey, you have two ears and one mouth." It is his gentle way of reminding me that I tend to talk a lot when I get nervous, but that the way to best connect with people is to ask questions and genuinely listen to the answers. It is also the best way to learn!
- **Foster your friendships.** If you are lucky enough to connect with one or two people in a real and authentic way, don't let that friendship fade out before it has a chance to truly bloom. Start reading the blogs of the people you met, and leave comments so they know you were there. Send an occasional tweet or text message just to say hi. Connect on Facebook. In other words, be a friend!

Guest Posting

Guest posts, when done well, can be a fantastic way to gain exposure and drive traffic to your site. On the flip side, guest posts, when done poorly, can be a complete waste of time. The key to a successful guest post is not only posting on a site with a similar audience, but to write something so good that your host's readers will want to check out your site to read more.

On LivingWellSpendingLess.com I love hosting guest posters, but as anyone who has written a guest post for my site will attest, I am *extremely* picky. Even after a post topic has been approved, I almost always send the post back for at least one revision by the

author, and sometimes multiple revisions, until I feel that it is the right fit for my audience. Moreover, guest posters on my site are required to submit original content and to match the standardized format, tone, and feel of other posts on my site so that there is consistency for the reader.

And while all those requirements might sound like a whole lot of work (because they are), I believe that the benefits of guest posting on my site make it worth the extra effort. First of all, I promote my guest posts just like I would any other pillar content post on my site. They get re-promoted via social media on a regular basis and continue to drive a steady stream of traffic long after the post has been published. The better and more popular the post, the more I promote it and the more traffic it generates.

If you are interested in guest posting for larger sites, here are a few additional tips to keep in mind:

- **Ask for guest-post guidelines.** Many large websites get dozens of requests each week for accepting guest content. While I can't speak for anyone else, I can say that of the requests that come in to LWSL, close to 95 percent get deleted immediately, simply because they look like spam or the author is very obviously trying to promote a product or business. Before offering a list of prefabricated posts, instead try asking for a copy of the site's guest post guidelines to be sure that your post is a good fit for that particular site.
- **Only submit original content.** Most sites will require that the post submitted is 100 percent original. Yes, that means more work for you. That's just part of the deal.
- **Don't be overly familiar.** As a guest poster, you are writing to a new audience, not your own. Don't use cutesy terms or

slang or refer to the readers as "friends." Instead, maintain a slightly more formal version of your own voice than you would use on your own blog. Furthermore, don't assume this audience will understand a term you've written about before, or that they will click your link to read more. Your guest post should not require further explanation.

- **Don't make your post self-promotional.** Yes, you want your post to drive traffic to your site, but filling your post with links will only annoy your host and their readers. One or two relevant links are probably okay, but more than that is inappropriate.
- **Submit your BEST content.** Don't waste time with guest posts if you are not also willing to make your guest posts really, really, *really* good. While I can't speak for other sites, I can say that when a guest post on my site is really good, I add it to the rotation of my other pillar content and continue to promote it via social media *indefinitely*. This means that it will continue to drive traffic to those sites for months and years to come. Of course, if the post is just okay, I will either not publish it at all or simply let it fade away into the archives. A great guest post provides value to the reader and keeps them coming back for more!

Building Your Email List

There are many bloggers—particularly those in the blogging and marketing expert categories—whose sole focus is growing their email lists. Rather than focusing on a variety of traffic avenues, they instead aim to have as many people as possible signed up to receive their emails. They contend that it is much better to work on building something you control than to spend time building a presence on someone else's platform, and will even claim that all other metrics, whether they are page views, unique blog

visitors, Facebook fans, or Twitter followers, are little more than *vanity metrics*.

Their main goal is to grow an email list that they can then convert into a sales funnel from which to sell their products, which often tend to be expensive courses or membership sites on some aspect of platform building, such as how to grow an email list, how to create a Pinterest or Facebook marketing plan, how to get published, or how to build an online business. For the products they are selling, and the audience they are trying to reach—other online marketers—this model is *extremely* effective. Who is more willing to pay \$300–500 or more for a course than someone who is trying to build an online business in order to do *the exact same thing*?

The problem with this model is that tends to be somewhat circular. While it works very, very well for marketers who are marketing to other marketers and selling expensive—albeit valuable—products or services to other online business owners who don't mind investing in order to be successful, it doesn't work quite as well for someone whose main audience might look very different. Stay-at-home moms ages 25–55 aren't usually interested in spending \$250 for a course on how to better manage their home. And this doesn't make stay-at-home moms ages 25–55 a bad audience; it just makes them different.

That said, I do think it is extremely important to work at building an email list. Not only is an e-newsletter a great way to regularly connect with your most loyal readers, an email list can also be a powerful marketing tool, even if it is not your primary source of income. While your audience may not be the right fit for an expensive marketing course, it is most certainly the right fit for e-books and other products you may have to offer that are related to your blog's topic. After all, who will be more interested in buying your book or course than the readers who already know and love your blog?

Before you start building your list, do a little research into what email service you would like to use. I have used MailChimp for several years and really like it, but I am now in the process of moving to a slightly more sophisticated service called InfusionSoft. I have also heard good things about both MadMimi and Aweber.

Here are a few proven strategies for building your email list:

- **Place your subscribe box in a prominent place on your blog.** Better yet, place your subscribe box in multiple spots, including at least one place above the fold (a term derived from newspapers, but referring to the point at which your reader has to scroll down to see more content). Great options include at the top of your sidebar, somewhere in your header, or in a special bar at the very top of your site. (Check out HelloBar.com for a free customizable bar that works with a variety of email services.) You might also want to consider some sort of pop-up box for email subscriptions.
- **Offer an incentive.** It is much easier to convince your readers to take the time to subscribe when you are offering them something of value in return. Consider creating some sort of freebie that will appeal to your target demographic, then set up an auto-responder using one of the email services listed above to automatically send out the freebie upon sign-up. On LivingWellSpendingLess.com I offer my subscribers a free eleven-page goal-setting workbook, while I have seen other sites offer everything from a freezer-cooking guide (MoneySavingMom.com) to an *Inside My Toolbox* e-book (MichaelHyatt.com) to a *7 Days of Love* workbook (TheDatingDivas.com).
- **Invite your readers to subscribe.** Readers often need a lot of reminders and more than one invitation before they

will finally take action. While you certainly don't want to become a nuisance, it is more than okay to go ahead and ask people to subscribe every now and then, especially if you are giving away a great freebie!

- **Promote your incentive on social media.** Create a great pillar content post to go along with your freebie that you can pin regularly on Pinterest, or use LeadPages.net to create a simple opt-in page that you can then pay to promote on Facebook. (You can see an example of my pillar content post here: <http://www.livingwellspendingless.com/2013/09/03/filling-the-time-jar-5-steps-that-will-change-your-life/>, or see my opt-in page here: <https://ruthsoukup.leadpages.net/goal-setting-workbook/>)

Search Engine Optimization

As little as two or three years ago, search engine optimization—otherwise known as SEO—would most certainly have warranted a chapter of its own. To be fair, SEO is still extremely important, and search traffic can and should still be an important source of traffic for your blog. Search-engine traffic tends to be the highly targeted type of traffic that is much more likely to click on the keyword-based ads on your site which, not coincidentally, also happen to be managed by Google. Believe me, we will talk a lot more about that connection later in chapter 7!

Over the past few years I have studied extensively the ins and outs of SEO and read pretty much every book and article I could get my hands on. If you *really* wanted all the boring details, I could probably talk your ear off for *hours*. Truthfully, if I thought knowing more boring details about the intricacies of search engine optimization would help you make more money, I would include it, but at the end of the day, I honestly believe

that the only thing you *really* need to know about Google and SEO is this:

Google's ONLY goal is to bring the BEST possible results for a given search.

This means that you can't trick Google into thinking you've written the best post ever about how to catch a dragonfly if your post is actually about how to catch grasshoppers. The Google algorithms are incredibly sophisticated, looking at everything from the content itself to how long visitors that are searching for a particular topic stay on that page.

SEO is not about “tricking” Google, and you should be extremely wary of any service that promises they can. SEO is really more about helping Google understand what your post is *actually* about, rather than figuring out the hottest search term. You do this by adding title tags, meta descriptions, and meta keywords, which sounds much more complicated than it actually is.

Title Tag: The title tag refers to the words that show up at the very top of your browser window when you open a particular web page. The default title tag is generally the post title, but you can change the title tag to be whatever you want it to be. The title tag is also what shows up in bold in the Google search results. Your title tag can be as long as you want it to be, but Google will only read and use the first 70 characters, so it is generally best to keep it to 70 characters or less. **Of the three on-site optimization choices, I have found the title tag to be the most important and the most relevant to Google.** Thus, at the bare minimum, you should ALWAYS take the time to optimize your title tag.

Meta Description: The meta description helps tell Google what your post is about, and it is also what shows up underneath the

bold title in your Google search results. I have found it helpful for “selling” a particular post that is already getting good search results, but not always absolutely necessary. The default meta description, if you leave this field blank, is the first 150 words of your post.

Meta Keywords: Meta keywords are any search keywords or phrases you would like to see associated with your post. Google doesn’t give much weight to meta keywords, but other search engines, such as Yahoo and Bing, do consider meta keywords in their results, which makes this field worth filling out as well.

My site uses the Thesis platform for WordPress, which has a convenient SEO section built in, and I have always been very happy with it. If you don’t use Thesis, there are a variety of SEO plug-ins, such as Yoast, that offer the same capabilities.

Here are a few example of how I optimize my posts:

Title Tag

Custom Title Tag [?]

Sugar-Crusted Blueberry Cake with Sour Cream Glaze | Blueberry Recipe

69 Search engines allow a maximum of 70 characters for the title.

Meta Keywords

Meta Keywords [?]

blueberry cake recipe, best blueberry cake, how to make a blueberry buckle

Meta Description

Meta Description [?]

Sugar-Crusted Blueberry Cake with Sour Cream Glaze. This cake is amazing! The perfect blend of tartness, sweetness, & crunch—the sugar crust is simply to-die for!

165 Search engines allow a maximum of roughly 150 characters for the description.

Title Tag

Custom Title Tag [?]

how to make a paper party hat | party DIY | party hat tutorial

62 Search engines allow a maximum of 70 characters for the title.

Meta Keywords

Meta Keywords [?]

how to make a paper party hat, frugal party ideas, DIY party projects, party hat tutorial, frugal kids party ideas, sweet s!

Meta Description

Meta Description [?]

Step-by-step instructions for making an adorable paper party hat from scrapbook paper.

86 Search engines allow a maximum of roughly 150 characters for the description.

Title Tag

Custom Title Tag [?]

princess tea party | frugal party ideas | living well spending less

67 Search engines allow a maximum of 70 characters for the title.

Meta Keywords

Meta Keywords [?]

"princess tea party" "tea party ideas" "frugal party tips" "how to throw a tea party" "kids party ideas"

Meta Description

Meta Description [?]

What better way to celebrate a 5th birthday than with a Princess Tea Party? Easy and frugal ideas for throwing an enchanting and royal tea party.

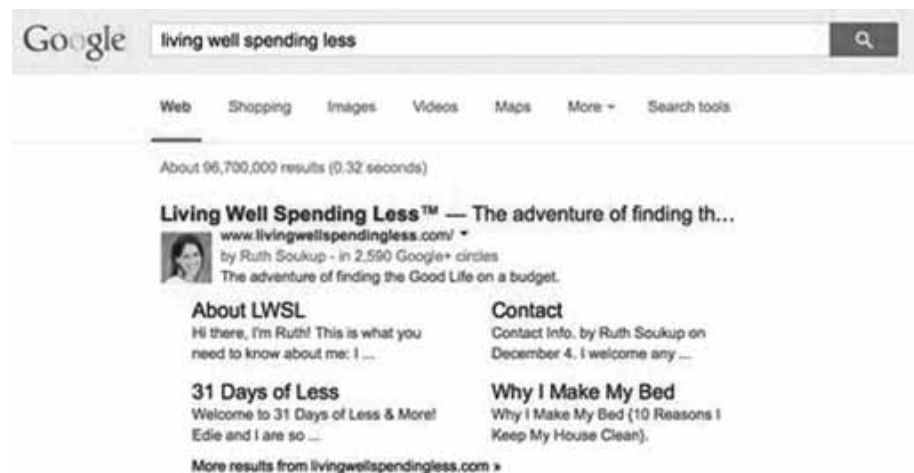
146 Search engines allow a maximum of roughly 150 characters for the description.

One strategy I do recommend when it comes to SEO is optimizing your pages—your title tags in particular—for more specific long-tailed keywords. Simply put, a long-tail keyword is a string of keywords, such as “how to make a paper party hat,” rather than just “party hat.” Remember, Google’s goal is to match the best results to a particular search, so you are better off showing

67

up as the top post to the 100 people who are searching for “how to make a paper party hat” than as the 100th result to the 100,000 people who are searching for “party hat.”

A second important strategy for SEO that is relatively new is going through the steps to claim authorship of your site through Google. This will connect your website to your Google+ page so that your pretty picture shows up next to your website in Google search results. (You can do this here: <https://plus.google.com/authorship>)



Quality content counts for a whole lot—at least as much as all the on-site optimization you can do—and if Google sees your site as spam, with too many posts, too much duplicate content, or too many very short posts, you will get majorly penalized.

The biggest problem with search engine optimization is that, aside from doing what you can to optimize your posts and website pages and claim authorship, your SEO ranking is pretty much completely *out of your control*. While Google may not actually rule the world (yet), they do have all the say when it comes to

which pages show up for which search results, and they are very good about guarding their secrets.

I don't know about you, but when it comes to my business, I am very reluctant to rely too heavily on something that I have no control over. While I do continue to research new developments in SEO and while I still optimize every single page and post I publish, and even while Google still accounts for about 15 percent of my blog traffic, I no longer count SEO among my major blog-growth strategies. Instead, my focus is on producing consistently high-quality content that gets shared and read through a variety of channels.

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Chapter 4 Action Plan: Grow Your Platform

- Start telling people about your blog and asking them to read it—your friends, family members, neighbors, etc. Have business cards printed and get into the habit of sharing your elevator pitch.
- Find some blog hops and link parties within your blog genre to participate in, then make a habit of linking up each week to the ones that you notice bringing traffic to your blog.
- Read other blogs and comment regularly.
- Promote other bloggers by featuring their posts, hosting guest posts, or linking to a blog post you liked.
- Network and collaborate with other bloggers by joining online groups or attending blog conferences or local meet-ups.
- Submit guest-post inquiries to several larger blogs within your same niche.
- Create an incentive for email subscribers and begin actively building your subscription list.
- Optimize your website and web pages for better search engine results.
- Claim authorship of your site on Google.

Chapter 5:

Social Media and Viral Growth

The first time one of my blog posts went “viral,” I felt like I had hit the traffic jackpot. I had been blogging for more than two years, writing lots of posts that I was plenty proud of, including quite a few that generated a great response from the readership I had worked so hard to grow.

Then one day I wrote a post about why I took all my kids’ toys away (and why they wouldn’t get them back), and something about what I wrote resonated. It struck a nerve and got people talking. My readers not only responded, they shared the post with others, who in turn shared it with even more people. Not all of the responses were positive—there were lots of people who vehemently disagreed with me—but to me the important thing was that people were reading and talking and *sharing*.

That initial viral traffic boost faded, but it totally changed the way I approached my blog and my traffic-building strategy. After two years of diligently following the old-school methods I discussed in the last chapter, growing steadily but *slowly*, I realized that viral growth—if I could figure out a way to sustain it—would be the best way to take my blog to the next level.

The definition of “going viral” is not totally clear. My husband insists that something has only gone viral if it has at least a million views. My own definition doesn't have that sort of hard number attached to it. Instead, I believe that viral growth is defined as any fast and significant growth that comes from a large number of people sharing your content through social media. In other words, it is basically “word-of-mouth” marketing on steroids, enhanced by the game-changing world of social media.

Why Being Awesome Matters

It is not a coincidence or even just bad luck that by the first time one of my blog posts finally went viral I had already been blogging for two years. On the contrary, those two years were spent learning all the critical elements it takes to write an awesome blog post, all those essential pieces of the puzzle that I already went over in the first few chapters of this book.

Viral blog traffic is *amazing*. If you are fortunate enough to be able to capture it, your blog audience will grow exponentially, far beyond your wildest dreams. That said, viral traffic is also completely transparent. You can't trick it. You can't pay for it. You can't force it. It is truly the purest form of growth because it is based solely on the simple idea that **if people like what you have to say, they will share it with others.**

So what does that mean? It means—and pay attention because this is important—**your content will NOT go viral if it isn't awesome.** Awesome comes with time and with practice and with diligence. It means honing your craft, writing regularly, improving your images, and rocking your blog design. Once you've learned how to do all that—once you've mastered the art of creating amazing, compelling, truly pin-worthy and outstanding content—learning to capture the viral traffic is the easy part.

A Highly Subjective Social Media Overview

Unless you've been living under a rock, you are probably at least somewhat familiar with the various options for social media—Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, StumbleUpon, Tumblr, YouTube, Reddit, SnapChat, Vine ... the list goes on and on. I don't know about you, but as a blogger, I look at that list and immediately feel stressed out. How is anyone supposed to keep up with *all* that social media and still create awesome content?

Here's my highly subjective short answer: You're not. Most social media is a complete waste of time.

I know at this point you are probably thinking, *Wait just a minute here, isn't this chapter supposed to be about viral traffic growth through social media?* Then how can it be a waste of time?

Remember that I said *most* social media is a waste of time. If you are treating your blog like a business—which you *should* if you are planning to blog for profit—then your social media time should always be viewed in terms of Return On Investment (ROI). The return, of course, is the amount of traffic you receive to your blog. Having a million Twitter followers is great, but if almost none of them turn into readers, *what is the point?*

I personally spend very little time trying to build my Twitter, Google+, Instagram, or YouTube following, and I don't even have a presence on LinkedIn, StumbleUpon, or Reddit. From a blog standpoint, I see them largely as a waste of time because they don't drive traffic, mostly because *those sites are not where my readers are.*

This is not to say that YOU shouldn't spend time trying to build your presence on one or more of these platforms. It really

just depends on where your readers tend to be. For my demographic, which tends to be women ages 25–55, the most widely used social media channels *by far* are Facebook and Pinterest, while other sites, such as Google+, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Reddit are far less popular. Thus it makes sense that I focus the bulk of my social media time and attention on the channels that will have the biggest impact—Facebook and Pinterest. That said, a blog with a very different demographic, say tech-savvy men ages 20–40, might have much more success focusing their social media strategy on Twitter and Google+, while a blog that reaches professionals ages 30–50 might be better suited for LinkedIn.

If you are not sure which social media channels are most heavily used by your blog's target demographic, take the time to do some research. It will save you the effort and frustration of barking up the proverbial wrong tree.

Quality vs. Quantity

Before we dive right into the nitty-gritty of building blog traffic through social media, I need to make a distinction between quality and quantity. While your social media platform is usually measured in numbers—the bigger the better—none of those numbers tells the whole story. You could have millions of “followers” on a particular social media channel, but if those followers don't translate to blog readers and people who are *actually* interested in what YOU have to say, those million followers don't translate to a lot of *genuine* influence, nor do they translate to blog traffic.

Not sure what I mean? Let's look at a couple of different social media channels and see how numbers don't always tell the whole story.

First up? Pinterest.

If you have a blog, you probably already know that Pinterest can be an incredible tool for growing your platform and driving blog traffic. In fact, later in this chapter we are going to talk a lot more in depth about exactly *how* to use Pinterest to get your message out there and drive traffic to your blog. I love Pinterest and I credit much of my own site's growth to this simple-but-genius social media platform.

But if you've spent any time on Pinterest, you may have noticed what I call “Power Pinners”—people who have managed to gain hundreds of thousands of followers, or, in some cases, even *millions* of Pinterest followers. And knowing what a powerful driver of traffic Pinterest can be, it would seem that anyone with a million Pinterest followers would automatically have a huge blog with lots and lots of readers. After all, they've already got this amazing following, right?

Wrong.

The reality is that many of the “Power Pinners” currently on Pinterest were early adopters who got very lucky. They got in on the ground floor, when this new social network was still in beta-testing mode and just getting started. In the beginning, the powers that be at Pinterest wanted to make sure people were following each other, so anyone who joined the network would automatically be signed up to follow fifty of these “early adopters.” As Pinterest began to gain speed and millions of people began joining, those early adopters—the ones lucky enough to be receiving all the automatic follows—gained an instant audience.

Except, not really.

While gaining a million followers almost overnight might sound like an answer to prayer, the reality is that those instant audiences weren't actually engaged. They didn't actively choose to follow any of these Power Pinners, and in some cases they weren't even interested in the same things. As those followers began following people they were "actively" interested in, the pinners that they weren't actually interested in got more or less ignored. That is not to say that not a single one of those million followers are genuinely engaged—even 10 percent of a million is a lot of people—it just illustrates my point that numbers alone are not the whole story.

But Pinterest isn't the only social media platform with inflated numbers. Twitter has been somewhat notorious for the large number of users who have attracted so-called "followers" by buying them online. A quick Google search will reveal hundreds of companies offering thousands of new "followers" for just a few dollars.

But on Twitter it is not just fake followers that you have to watch out for. Conventional Twitter wisdom says that in order to gain more followers, you should use hashtags liberally, particularly for trending topics. Doing this well can result in thousands of new followers, particularly if one of your tweets happens to go viral. But depending on whether that tweet is related to the audience you are trying to attract, it might not matter.

I read a recent news story about a member of the White House Press Corp—Carrie Budoff Brown—who tweeted a few photos of President Obama's visit to King Abdullah's private ranch in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi media is tightly controlled, and as a result, the Saudi people have been given almost no information about the king in recent years. Ms. Brown's photos were an instant sensation in Saudi Arabia, and literally overnight she

gained almost 15,000 new followers, almost all Saudis wanting just a little bit more.

But I'm sure you can see the problem. Ms. Brown doesn't live in Saudi Arabia, nor does she have frequent access to the Saudi Arabian king. It was a one-time event, a fluke. In fact, by her own admission, she rarely even uses Twitter. While many of those 15,000 new followers from Saudi Arabia may not actually bother to "unfollow" Ms. Brown's account, they probably won't be all that interested in much of what she has to share from now on. They are certainly not a devoted, engaged tribe. Of course, on the other hand, Ms. Brown's story got a lot of media attention in the US which could result in more "genuine" followers—people who are interested in US politics and want a more behind-the-scenes view of the White House Press Corp.

Even Facebook is not immune to this problem of unengaged followers. Much has been said about Facebook's move to more or less force business pages into paying for engagement through the use of Facebook ads. There have been a lot of grumbings about the fact that these "paid" followers gained from legitimate Facebook ads are really just from fake accounts. While later in this chapter we will talk in depth about Facebook advertising (and how to avoid fake followers), this issue is definitely a concern.

Many businesses and blogs have also gotten into the habit of incentivizing Facebook likes, either in exchange for the promise of a freebie, a coupon, or a contest entry. While this is one way to quickly boost likes, it also dramatically increases the number of people who only "like" a page to get a freebie, not because they are actually interested in what the page has to offer the rest of the time. If that number of "uninterested"—and therefore unengaged—people is a large percentage of a Facebook page's

likes, Facebook's algorithms will assume that *no one* is really interested in that page and limit its organic reach even more.

While thousands—or even millions—of followers on a given social media channel looks really great on paper, and *might* even be enough to get you an amazing six-figure book deal, those thousands of unengaged followers probably won't buy a whole lot of books or take the time to read your blog. In which case your first book might also be your last, and you won't even have a successful, profitable blog income to fall back on.

When it comes to building a platform, the *quantity* is important, but the *quality* of engagement matters even more. It is better to have 10,000 readers who are fully engaged than 100,000+ who are mostly indifferent, people who inadvertently followed you because it was required as part of a giveaway or to get a freebie, or because you happened to be an early adopter and they were assigned to follow you when they signed up.

Of course if you are just starting out, perhaps even 10,000 followers sounds daunting—maybe at this point you'd happily settle for 100. My point is not to give you an arbitrary number to try to attain, but to emphasize that your level of engagement matters just as much—if not more—than the number itself. Don't fall for gimmicks

Why We Can't Ignore Facebook

I don't know of many bloggers or businesses that don't have a love-hate relationship with Facebook. I will be the first to admit that few endeavors are more frustrating than writing a fantastic, life-changing blog post only to have it seen by approximately four people, one of whom is you.

I see post after post of blogger friends who are beyond exasperated by the apparent futility of a platform that clearly intends to penalize business pages in every way they can, friends who vow they will never pay for engagement, and friends who declare that they are giving up on Facebook, that it is nothing more than a waste of time, and they will from now on be found only on Google+.

I understand their frustration, I really do. And much as I would like to say Facebook is dead so don't even bother, the truth is that Facebook is still the largest, most powerful social media platform on the planet. It is so big that it absolutely dwarfs all other social media sites. It is so big that it is bigger than Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Google+ *combined*. It is so big that *one out of every five* page views on the *entire Internet* is on Facebook.

That is why we can't ignore Facebook, at least not completely.

It may have peaked and its power may be fading, but right now it is still far too big to pretend it doesn't count.

Creating a Facebook Strategy

So what's the right solution? How do we maximize our reach and impact on Facebook without spending thousands of dollars or without driving ourselves crazy in the process?

I think the key is consistency.

We often look at Facebook from a one-post-at-a-time perspective, hoping that the next post we randomly throw up there will be the one that sticks, the one that gets lots of engagement and shares. When it doesn't, we try again and again and again, never truly gaining any traction.

A smarter approach is to take the time to develop a long-term strategy and to make a plan that includes regular posts and updates on a consistent schedule. Instead of randomly posting three or four updates one day, then getting frustrated and not posting anything for days, you methodically and regularly post a set number of updates every single day. These can even be scheduled using Facebook's own scheduling tools.

It is important to know that the goal of Facebook's EdgeRank algorithms is to allow people to see the highest quality content. While there is certainly plenty of room to debate what determines high-quality content, the fact remains that the powers that be at Facebook can pretty much do whatever they want. **All we as bloggers can do is try to fill that need for high-quality content.**

While funny memes and quotes used to get a high level of engagement, those types of posts are now being penalized by Facebook's algorithms, even when they receive a high number of likes and shares. Thus, bloggers should mainly concentrate on sharing their own content in multiple posts per day.

I personally think it is a good idea to mix up the type of posts shared as well, alternating between link posts and photo posts, which include a link in the description.

A link post is one that pulls up an image from the post and a teaser, which is either taken from the meta description or the first paragraph of the post. Facebook will automatically pull an image from the post, but the image that gets pulled is not always the best size for the horizontal-rectangle format. However, Facebook does give the option to upload your own image for the link, which usually looks a lot better! Thus, when I am creating my post graphics, I always create a Facebook version that is 1200 x 627 pixels. This is what a link post looks like on Facebook:



A photo post, on the other hand, can be any dimension of photo, though I have personally found that square photos seem to take up the most space and have the largest impact. For photo posts, the link should be included in the photo description, as shown:



My own Facebook schedule is just a simple word-processing document that allows me to see at a glance my plan for the day and the coming week. It also allows me to go back and see what I have already posted so that I am not posting the same content too frequently.

Here is a small sample of what it looks like:

Monday, May 5th:

9:15--Link to Kitchen Gadgets
 12:15—Photo + Link to Chalkboard Coasters
 3:15--Link to Taco Bites
 6:15—Reader Question
 9:15-Photo + Link to Kitchen Gadgets

Tuesday May 6th:

8:30—Link to Lemon Sugar Scrub
 11:15—Photo + Link to Speed Cleaning
 2:15—Link to Life Lessons
 5:15-Reader Question—Mother's Day Ideas
 8:15-Photo + Link to DIY Uncrustables
 11:00-Link to Hummingbird Cake

Wednesday May 7th:

9:30--Link to Italian Chicken
 12:30-Photo + Link to Rainbow Garden Markers
 3:30--Link to Car Repairs
 6:30-Reader Question—
 9:30-Photo + Link to Italian Chicken

Thursday May 8th:

9:30--Link to Thrifty Thursday
 12:30-Photo + One Bowl Brownies
 3:30-Link to Coffee Bean Soap
 6:30-Reader Question—Mother's Day Gift
 9:30-Photo + How to Sell Your Stuff

I tend to post the same type of post around the same time each day. I can't say for sure whether this is the best way to do it, but it is easier for me to stay consistent this way. If I am publishing a new post, I will share it first thing in the morning and then again as my last post of the day. The remaining posts—aside from one reader question—are usually taken from my LWSL archives. I tend to repost the most popular content every 4–6 weeks, while less popular or seasonal content gets rotated less often.

Paid Promotion on Facebook

One question that I hear quite often is whether or not paying for Facebook promotion is worth the expense. Over the past year I have spent a lot of time experimenting with targeted Facebook ads, and my cautious conclusion thus far is that, when done well, with the right targeting and for the right reasons, Facebook advertising can be very effective.

But only if done well.

In developing your Facebook strategy and deciding whether to pay for promotion, it is essential to first look at your objectives. What is it that you want to accomplish from your Facebook presence? Is your goal to engage with your current fans, to attract new Facebook likes, or both? Are you mostly interested in promoting your blog posts, or are you actually trying to sell a product? Do you simply want to get people to your blog, or do you have a specific purpose, such as building your email list?

If your goal is simply to engage with readers or to get your readers to click over to a particular blog post, you will probably find that paying for promotion is a losing proposition. Unless that particular post is heavily monetized, you will probably not see enough of a return to make your investment worthwhile. You are better off doing what you can on Facebook for free and instead focusing your time and effort on creating the best quality content that you possibly can, and then investing your resources into other avenues of promotion or blog growth.

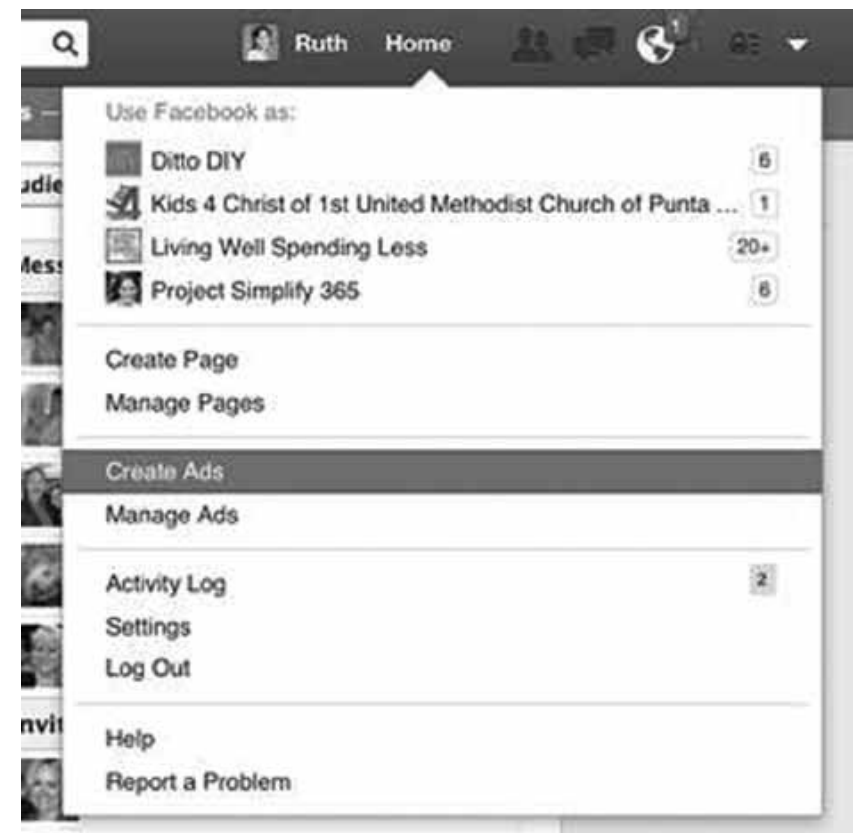
On the other hand, if your goal is to attract new Facebook likes, sell a product, or build your email list, paid promotion on Facebook might just be well worth your investment. Even when engagement is low, there is a certain legitimacy that comes from having a significant fan base on Facebook, particularly if one of

your goals is to work with brands. Moreover, if you are trying to sell a product or want to build up your email list, targeted Facebook advertising can be extremely powerful.

Let's take a look at each of these options individually.

Facebook Promotion to Increase Page Likes

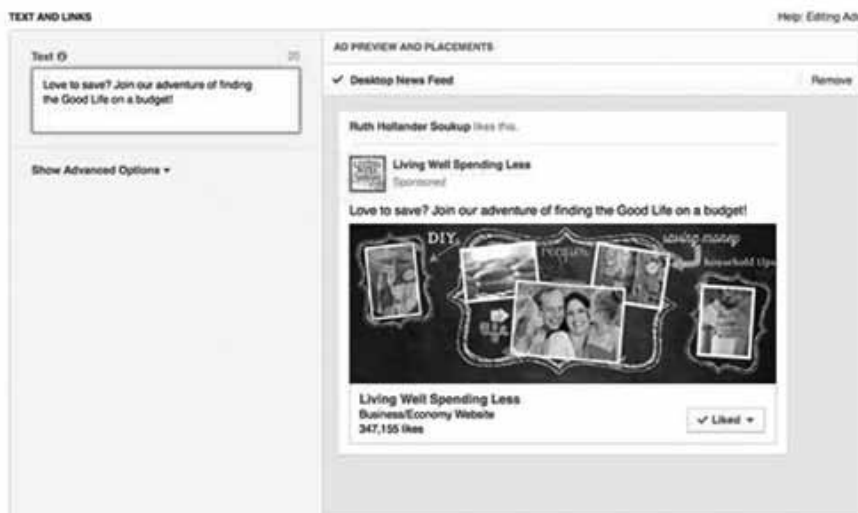
Facebook promotion to increase page likes is fairly straightforward. On your Facebook home page, select Home in the top right corner, and then select "Create Ads."



On the next page, select the "Page Likes" option.

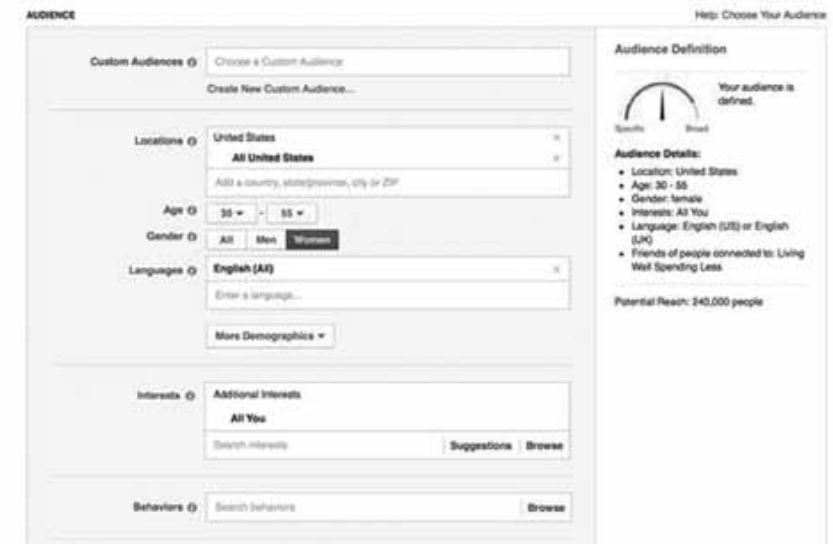


Next, choose your photo and your text. Facebook will automatically pull your page's wallpaper photo, but you also have the option of adding additional images. It is best to start with some sort of question for the reader you are trying to attract. (In this case, I ask, "Love to save?")



Next you need to narrow your audience so that your ad is only shown to the people in your blog's target demographic. This is key! In this case, I chose to target my ad only to women ages 30–55 who

live in the United States, who speak English, and who like ALL YOU Magazine (a magazine that shares a similar audience to my blog).



Furthermore, I also targeted this ad only to people who fit all the above criteria AND whose friends already like *Living Well Spending Less* on Facebook. This means that when the ad shows up in those people's feeds, they will see that one or more of their friends already likes my page, which gives it more legitimacy and makes it more likely to attract new likes.



Finally, choose your budget and timeframe in which to run your ad. For increasing page likes, I will generally choose a small dollar amount, such as \$5–\$10 a day, then let the ad run for about a month before making any changes.

The screenshot shows the 'CAMPAIGN AND AD SET' configuration page in Facebook Ads Manager. The campaign is named 'Living Well Spending Less - Page Likes'. The ad set is named 'US - W - 30-55'. The budget is set to 'Per day' at '\$10.00', with a total of 'Up to \$310.00 over 31 days'. The schedule is set to 'Run my ad set continuously starting today'. The start and end dates are both '5/14/2014' at '3:00 PM'. On the right, the 'Estimated Daily Reach' is shown as '1,200 - 2,200 people'.

Facebook Promotion to Sell a Product or to Build an Email List

Paid promotion on Facebook for the purpose of creating more conversions and selling a product can also be very effective, provided the income generated from the product sold is more than you are spending on advertising. Likewise, paid promotion for the purpose of building a large email list can be a great investment as well. The process for both these tactics is almost identical.



The first step for either strategy is to create a sales page or opt-in page, either directly on your blog or by using a service such as LeadPages.net. This is an example of my email opt-in page, which was created using a template on LeadPages.net, but you could also create a similar page for promoting your product, or you could also write a compelling blog post with a call to action, whether it be purchasing your book or signing up for your email list.

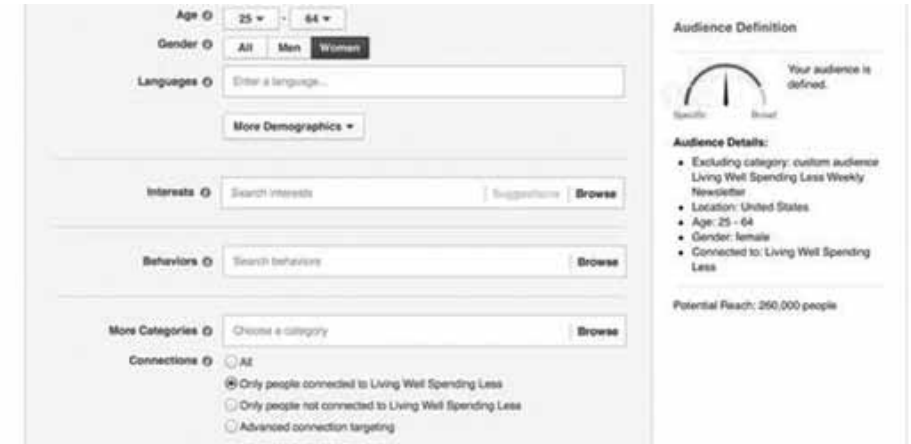


The next step is to create a status update post on your Facebook page promoting your sales page or opt-in page. Your

promotional copy for this should be warm and engaging, and the link should go directly to your sales or opt-in page.



Once you have created your post, you can pay to promote it and expand the reach. As with promoting to gain more Facebook page likes, the more you narrow down and target your audience, the more powerful your promotion will be.



However, in this case many times the most powerful audience—and the audience most likely to purchase your product or sign up for your email list—is the audience you already have, those people who already like your page. Instead of targeting for new likes, you can narrow your focus to only people who already like your page.



In the case of building your email list, it may also be helpful to create a custom audience of people who are already email subscribers. That way you can exclude this audience in your targeting, as there is no point in paying to advertise to people who already subscribe to your list.

Paid promotion on Facebook is definitely not an exact science, but it can, under the right circumstances and for the right reasons,

be extremely powerful. Although the idiosyncrasies of the Facebook EdgeRank algorithms can be somewhat frustrating, the fact remains that this is still the only advertising option on earth that is both relatively affordable and able to be completely customized to reach your target audience.

The Best Social Media ROI: Pinterest

The main problem with Pinterest is that on the surface it has the appearance of being little more than a visually stimulating black hole of wasted time. While pinning DIY projects, home ideas, recipes, quotes, and other compelling images is certainly fun and a great way to pass the time, how can what appears to be a frivolous pastime really impact your blog traffic, particularly if you happen to be a more “serious” blogger whose topics fall outside of the food, DIY, and home decor sphere?

Don't be deceived by the pretty packaging! Pinterest may in fact be the most powerful organic marketing tool the world has ever encountered, at least up until this point in time. It is the fastest-growing social media site ever, becoming the third largest social media site behind Facebook and Twitter in just three years, even when two of those three years were beta-testing, invite-only years. At the current rate of growth, Pinterest will eventually climb to the top of the list. But even more significantly, **Pinterest users convert to readers.**

The whole point of Facebook and Twitter and all the other social media sites is to connect with other people, to let your friends and family know what you are doing in that moment, or how you feel. Occasionally someone might share a link to an article they found interesting and a few of their friends will read it, but most won't because they are too busy sharing what is new in their own life. Viral shares do happen, but they are the *exception*, not the norm.

Conversely, the *entire goal* of Pinterest is to **share great content**. There are no status updates and few personal connections. Users come there to find ideas and articles and to be inspired, to pin and repin and then repin some more. If a pin is beautiful or compelling or offers the solution to a problem, it will get pinned and shared and drive traffic. Furthermore, the content that gets pinned and drives traffic on Pinterest goes far beyond food or crafts. In fact, I would dare argue that the most popular pins on Pinterest have nothing to do with food or crafts and much more to do with helping the reader solve a problem or answer a question, whether that be about saving money, parenting, blogging, marketing, or pretty much anything else.

A recent study by BloomReach on Pinterest versus Facebook traffic to retail sites found that Pinterest users spent 60 percent more than Facebook users, that Pinterest traffic converted to a sale 22 percent more than Facebook traffic, and that Pinterest traffic “bounced” far less while viewing almost twice as many pages. While most blogs aren't selling products, those numbers are still significant, because they show that Pinterest users are ready and willing to click through an image to get the actual content.

Thus, although Pinterest might seem like a fluffy waste of time, it is in reality the only place you will find a truly captive audience of 85 million people, one that is growing larger every day. With those kinds of numbers, the rate of return is huge. Time spent on Pinterest is well worth the investment, as long as you are careful about your strategy.

Developing a Pinterest Strategy

If you are doing it right, your Pinterest strategy will have three main goals. First, you will want to increase your number of Pinterest followers, since more followers equals more pins. Second—

and if you are a blogger this goal is far more important than your first goal—you want to dramatically increase the amount of blog traffic coming from Pinterest. In other words, you want to create viral Pinterest traffic to your blog. Third, you will want to convert the traffic that comes to your blog into loyal readers who return again and again.

Achieving those goals will take a multifaceted approach. This includes:

Improving Your Pinterest Home Page

The first step is going to be to improve your actual Pinterest home page. Your Pinterest name should represent your blog so that it is as easy as possible for your readers to find you. If your blog is closely tied to your own name (like Ree Drummond of *The Pioneer Woman*), then using your own name is probably okay. On the other hand, if your blog name is what people tend to remember, your Pinterest name should be your blog name, and not your first and last name.

Take time in crafting your description to write something that is personable and original and a good representation of what you and your blog are all about. Be sure to include your blog address! I can't tell you how many times I've checked out someone's Pinterest profile and couldn't find an actual clickable link to his or her blog.

While it might be tempting to use your blog logo as your image, I personally think it is better to use a nice, professional profile photo of yourself—preferably the same one that is visible on your blog. Pinterest currently uses square profile photos, so be sure to crop your photo if necessary.

Once you've improved your profile, it is time to work on your boards. Your boards should display a good representation of what you and your blog are about. It is best to divide your boards into specific niched categories—the more specific, the better. Thus, instead of creating just a "food" board, you could have one for meat dishes, one for side dishes, one for vegetarian, one for appetizers, one for soup, and so on. Instead of "desserts," split your boards into "cookies," "cupcakes," "pies," etc. If you find a board is too broad, split it up. Highly niched boards are more likely to get searched and followed.

Your Pinterest boards should be well organized on your profile page. Some people organize them alphabetically; I prefer to group mine in like categories, with all the food boards together, crafty boards together, and so on. My collaborative boards are ordered after my personal boards, from largest to smallest, and then at the bottom are my newest boards that I am still working to fill.

Every single board should have a beautiful cover, so that anyone coming to your profile page will see a beautiful, visually stunning collection of boards. Don't feel like all your covers need to use images from your own blog. I tend to think that wordless covers look better overall. If a particular board doesn't have any images that would make a great cover, then specifically search for something to pin to that board. Pinterest is all about the visual; making your page pop is the first step.

While you are editing your individual boards, make sure to also check that they are each categorized (which makes them more searchable by Pinterest and more likely to show up on the "popular" pages), and also that each board has a great description telling what that particular board is about.

Finally, if you don't have one already, begin a "Best of [YOUR BLOG]" board that is solely dedicated to pinning your own best, most pin-worthy content. This board should be at the top of your page so it is the first thing anyone sees.

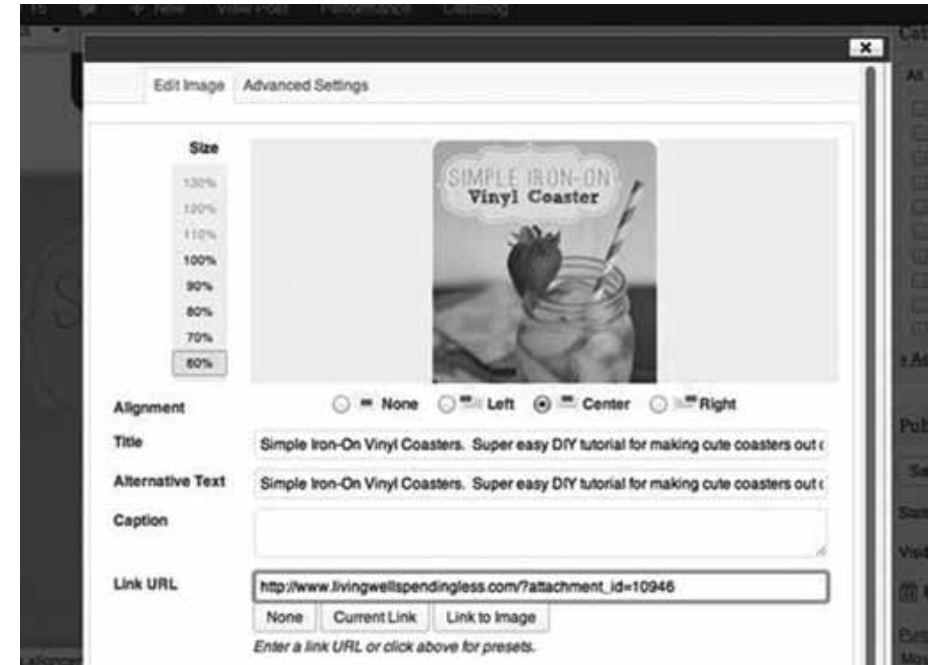
Increasing Your Pin-Worthy Content

It shouldn't come as a surprise that the more truly fantastic and pin-worthy content you produce, the more opportunities you will create for viral traffic growth. After you've made sure your Pinterest home page is beautiful and engaging, your next priority should be maximizing the number of pinnable posts you have to choose from.

Sadly, so many people who are lucky enough to have one post go viral simply watch that traffic burst fade away without ever knowing how to recapture the audience or the buzz. One awesome, amazing, crazily-successful-on-Pinterest post does not a successful, sustainable, and profitable blog make. Instead, a great blog is created from a consistent stream of high-quality posts that offer value and interest to the reader.

Increasing your pin-worthy content means, from now on, creating content that rocks, using all the guidelines we discussed in chapter 2. It means making sure that your images are pin-worthy and that your pin descriptions are compelling.

It also means going back through every post you've ever written to add better images, edit the content, or even delete if necessary. Be sure also to actually change the title of your images into an engaging pin description like this:



This way when someone uses the Pin It bookmarklet, the description you want them to use will automatically show up in the pop-up box. (This is so much better than something like DSC-2295, which is not at all compelling!)



Harnessing the Power of Collaborative Boards

While growing your own Pinterest following is definitely important, there is a way to grow your pinning audience overnight, no matter how many followers you are starting with. Large and active collaborative boards are the quiet unsung heroes of successful Pinterest marketing, and the little-known secret to driving a ton of viral traffic to your blog.

If up until now you haven't paid much attention or haven't been pinning to the collaborative boards you are already a part of, or if you've ignored invitations to additional collaborative boards, you have been missing a *huge* opportunity. Every collaborative board you join that has been started by someone else gives you the chance to have your pins seen by a whole new set of readers—all the people following that particular board.

Even more importantly, the pins you pin to a collaborative board hosted by someone else *do not show up in your own feed*. That means anyone following you will not be inundated with pins when you start pinning to multiple boards. This is important, because it means that you can safely pin the same pins to multiple boards without annoying your own followers or flooding their feed with pins.

Your goal should be to join as many large and active collaborative boards as you can. The key is that they be active, meaning that collaborators are pinning to them almost constantly, and that content is rotating through the feed relatively fast so that you can pin to them more often. The more collaborative boards you are able to join, the better. You can always drop the smaller, less active boards later on.

You can find collaborative boards to join in a variety of places. You can start by politely asking your friends and colleagues to

add you to any groups they are a part of. You can also check out other Pinterest users' pages (especially those with a large number of followers) to see what groups they are part of, then check the group descriptions to find out if any of them are "open" groups you can request to be invited to. Another great source for finding collaborative boards is by joining a Pinterest Collaborative Board group on Facebook. A fourth strategy is to start your own collaborative board, then invite others to join. Who knows? They may even return the favor!

Strategic Pinning

Once you've joined several collaborative boards and increased your pin-worthy content enough to have a good number of high-quality pins to choose from (at least 25–30, but the more the better), it is time to start pinning in a more strategic and intentional way. Pay attention to where you are pinning which pins, and on your busiest boards, pin your most popular pins at least once a day, being careful to vary the time of day so that you are ideally hitting different people every time.

Continue pinning to your own boards as well, being sure to pin other people's content to your own boards at least 80 percent of the time. The pins to collaborative boards can be mostly your own content.

Try not to pin the same pin to multiple boards at the same time. It is possible that at least some of the same people follow the same boards, which means they would be seeing the same pin multiple times in a row—definitely a turn-off. If someone happens to click your recent pins tab, it will also look bad to have the same pin show up multiple times in a row.

Strategic pinning is all about balancing your own well-rounded board of pins from all over, with a good marketing strategy of

getting your own blog content shared with as many new people as possible. It takes time and practice to get it right, but the key takeaway is **that if you are not strategically pinning the best of your content to multiple collaborative boards on a regular basis, you are not pinning enough.** A pin here or there just won't cut it.

Remember, the more pins you put out there, the more opportunities you create for traffic to come back to your blog! Viral traffic doesn't have to happen by accident, or simply be the result of "getting lucky." Look closely and you will see that viral traffic is almost always the right combination of awesome content enhanced by a compelling image and description, which is then smartly marketed to reach as big of an audience as possible.

Retaining Pinterest Traffic

The biggest downside of Pinterest traffic versus other forms of blog traffic is that visitors from Pinterest tend to be far more transient and far less engaged. In fact, it is entirely possible that someone may find your blog through Pinterest and not ever realize that they are no longer on Pinterest. Have you ever complimented a friend's tasty dish at a party, only to have her respond with an enthusiastic, "Oh thanks, I got the recipe on Pinterest"? The reality is that she found the recipe *through* Pinterest, but that she got the actual recipe *from a blog*. She just doesn't realize the difference.

As a blogger, I know just how frustrating this can be. After all, we work hard to create amazing content. Is it too much to ask for a little recognition?

In a word? Sometimes.

While it is natural, and even appropriate, to feel possessive and territorial when it comes to our own content, the fact is that casual Internet users don't always make clear distinctions from one site

to another. Your site may just be one of twenty or thirty they come across in the course of one hour-long Pinterest surfing session.

So what's the solution? Is it even possible to truly retain Pinterest traffic? How does one convert casual visitors who may have stumbled across a site accidentally into regular readers who will come back again and again?

Here are a couple of strategies that can help:

- **Create a good first impression.** This goes back to something we have already talked about, but your presentation is key. You will have about three to four seconds to attract a new reader, which means at first glance, your site must look like a place they will want to spend some time. A simple, attractive, aesthetically pleasing design, a title and tagline that clearly explain your site's purpose, and a well-organized navigation bar are the three most important facets of drawing people in during those critical first few seconds.
- **Establish a personal connection.** Make it clear to a new visitor that there is a real person behind your site. Include your headshot in a prominent spot above the fold, and include an easy-to-find link to your "about" page, then make your "about" page highlight your personality and explain what your blog and your brand is all about. Make people want to get to know you!
- **Highlight popular content.** Do you have a few posts that have done well on Pinterest? Create images for your sidebar to highlight these posts. This will help encourage your new visitors to keep reading.
- **Attract subscribers.** Offer an incentive for email subscribers, then prominently feature your email incentive in your

sidebar and above the fold in order to convert new visitors into email subscribers.

- **Create consistency.** One of the biggest mistakes I see on Pinterest is when sites go a little crazy trying to take advantage of every font and graphic available on PicMonkey. It is much, much better to choose a few fonts and to create a consistent, signature style for all your pins so that they stand out on Pinterest as yours. Pinterest visitors may not recognize your site or your pins the first, second, or even the third time, but if they see them often enough, they will start to recognize them eventually.

Although Pinterest can be a powerful tool and is currently perhaps the best and fastest way to build a new platform, it is not perfect, and it is never a good idea to become too reliant on one source of traffic. For sustainable, consistent growth, be sure to use Pinterest wisely, but also work at building and retaining traffic through other mediums.

• • •

Chapter 5 Action Plan: Build Blog Traffic through Social Media

- Stop believing that you must have an active presence on every single social media outlet. Instead, focus primarily on the social media that you see driving traffic to your blog.
- Create a Facebook marketing strategy that includes a regular posting schedule.
- Determine your objectives, and decide whether or not paid promotion on Facebook might be right for you.
- Improve your Pinterest home page. Change your user name to match your site name, arrange your boards in an organized and aesthetically pleasing way, and make sure all your cover images “pop.”
- Make sure that all your best posts have compelling, pinnable images and engaging post descriptions.
- Join multiple collaborative boards to increase your Pinterest presence.
- Strategically repin your best pins on a regular basis.
- Work on converting new visitors to regular blog readers.

Chapter 6:

Show Me the Money

It never ceases to amaze me that among all of my blogger friends and colleagues who make their full-time income from blogging, not one of them earns that living in exactly the same way. The beauty of professional blogging is in its versatility. If you've managed to build a great blog with a steady flow of traffic, there are nearly an infinite number of ways to monetize your platform.

In fact, as I was writing this chapter, I thought it might be helpful to do an informal survey of some of the full- and part-time "professional" bloggers that I know, just to give you an idea of how differently monetization works for everyone. It is interesting to note that while many of them earn a full-time income, almost none of them comes to that income by the same path.

Blogger Case Studies*

"Allison" has been blogging for five years. Her popular lifestyle blog offers DIY projects, recipes, and home-decorating ideas. Her gross income is well over 100K a year. One of her biggest strengths is reaching out to brands, and as such approximately three quarters of her income comes from private advertising and sponsored content. The rest comes from ad network advertising. She earns almost nothing from affiliate advertising or selling her own goods or services.

"Brandon" has been blogging for almost six years now. His personal finance blog offers great financial and savings tips. He also earns over 100K per year, but more than half—55 percent—of his income comes through affiliate links. About a third—35 percent—of his income comes from ad network advertising, but only 3 percent comes from working directly with brands. The remaining income comes from direct sales of his own e-book.

"Connie" has been blogging for just over three years. She writes a fun and quirky decorating and DIY blog with highly pinnable images. As a result, her blog has grown a lot in the past year as Pinterest increases in popularity. She currently earns about 80K a year from her blog, but is hoping to hit the six-figure mark very soon. She is very skilled at maximizing ad revenue on her site, and as a result 70 percent of her income comes from ad networks. The rest is evenly divided between affiliate income, working directly with brands, and freelance writing for other sites.

"Darcy" has been blogging for more than seven years and earns well over 100K a year on her very popular frugal lifestyle blog, which features recipes, deals, coupon tips, DIY projects, and home management advice. Approximately 75 percent of her income comes from affiliate sales. Ad networks provide about 15 percent of her income, while the remaining income is split between direct sales of her own e-book and working directly with brands. She also earns book royalties and speaking fees, which she does not include as direct income from her blog.

"Eddie" has been blogging for four years. His blog is not focused on any single niche topic, but offers observations on life in general. He currently earns about 60K a year from his site. Half of that income comes from working directly with brands in the form of sponsored content and private advertising, while 30 percent comes from ad network advertising and the rest mostly from

affiliate sales. He does particularly well selling a friend's popular e-book.

"Felicia" has been blogging for six-and-a-half years on her home-decorating blog, but she has never considered it a full-time job. She now earns approximately 40K a year from her blog. Sixty-five percent of that income comes from online consulting and virtual decorating services she provides through her blog. Thirty percent comes from working directly with brands, mostly through reviewing or featuring home decor products on her site. The rest comes from ad network advertising.

"Geri" has been blogging for three years. Her blog fits within the home niche, focusing mostly on ideas for improving the look and feel of your home. She currently earns about 35K a year. Ninety percent of her income is divided evenly among ad networks, working directly with brands, and direct sales of her own e-book and design services. The remaining 10 percent of her income comes from working as a virtual assistant for another blogger.

"Hannah" has been blogging for just over four years but has only recently started thinking about turning her children's product review blog into a full-time business. She currently earns about 20K per year; about 70 percent of that comes from working directly with brands. Another 12 percent comes from affiliate advertising, while most of her remaining income comes from social media consulting. She earns almost nothing from ad networks.

"Irene" has been blogging part-time for more than six years. Her blog has evolved a lot over the years, but is now focused mainly on home decorating. She currently earns just under 25K a year, and about 60 percent of her income comes from selling her own e-book on decorating. Of her remaining income, 10 percent comes from ad networks, 20 percent comes from affiliate sales, and 10 percent comes from writing for other blogs.

"Jack" has been blogging for eight years. His highly niched blog focuses on building guitars. Jack's primary monetization strategy is selling detailed plans for how to build guitars, a strategy that has paid off with an average income of 150K per year. While these direct sales account for approximately 90 percent of his income, he also earns about 5 percent of his income from ad networks and 5 percent from affiliate sales.

And then there is me. I have been blogging for almost five years, and in that time I have owned and operated four different blogging websites, including my oldest and only current site, *Living Well Spending Less*.

Two of the sites I used to own were coupon and deal-related sites. About half of the income from *those* sites came from a behind-the-scenes business I set up to license my site's original coupon-store sale matchups to other couponing sites. The rest came primarily from affiliate sales, with perhaps 5 percent coming from ad networks. I sold those two sites as a package to a private buyer in August of 2012.

On *Living Well Spending Less*, about 65 percent of my full-time income currently comes from ad network advertising. Of the remaining income, approximately 15 percent comes from affiliate marketing sales, 10 percent comes from direct product sales, 5 percent comes from private advertising and working directly with brands, and about 5 percent comes from freelance writing or consulting.

**No real names have been used in this section. Some of these case-study blogger profiles were created from a compilation of several bloggers with similar backgrounds and streams of income. All blogger profile data was received anonymously.*

Don't Rush It

If you were paying close attention, you may have noticed a couple of patterns in all these blogger profiles, despite the fact that every blogger earns a living in a slightly different way. The first is that all of us have been blogging for at least three years.

For most bloggers, it takes time to build enough steady traffic to earn a living. Even if you decide to run ads, use affiliate links, or work with brands from day one, your traffic will ultimately determine your ability to monetize. If you spend too much time worrying about how to maximize your streams of income before you've spent time creating fantastic, compelling content and before you've built up a certain level of traffic, you'll never reach your full potential.

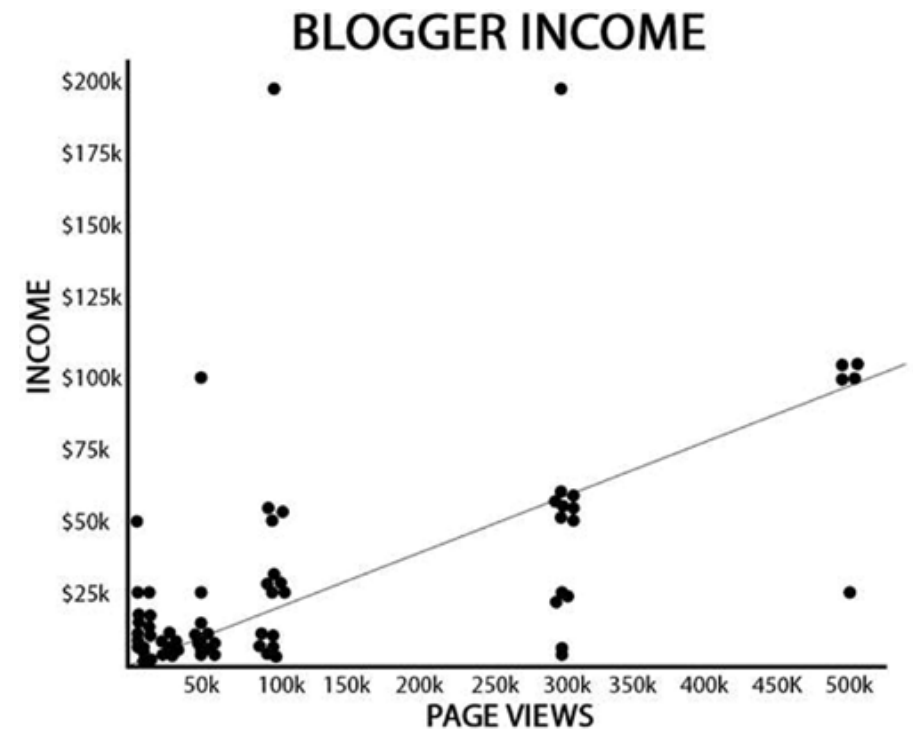
The very best thing you can do if your long-term goal is to make money on your blog is to Slow. Down. Avoid frantically searching for integrity-compromising, "money-making" opportunities, and keep your eye on the bigger picture.

Blogging as a business is unique in that there are very few businesses that require almost zero up-front startup costs. It literally costs almost nothing to start a blog. Nothing, that is, except time. Your time is your capital investment, and if you are not patient, you may very well blow it.

Don't overload your site with as many obnoxious video or pop-up ads as possible. Don't agree to write sponsored posts or host giveaways for products you don't even like, just to make a few quick bucks. Don't be so focused on the dollar signs that you forget to be incredible. Instead, focus first and foremost on creating content that draws people in and helps increase your page views. You can't monetize a platform that doesn't exist.

The Tipping Point

While updating this book for the second edition, I thought it would be interesting to see if there was actually any true correlation between a blog's average monthly page views and its income potential. I did another blogger survey, this time to ask bloggers not only how much they were earning, but how many page views their blogs received.



This is what I discovered:

- While there are certainly outliers on the graph, there is definitely a strong relationship between the number of monthly page views a blog receives and the amount of income it earns.

- Nearly all blogs receiving less than 10,000 page views per month earn less than \$10,000 per year, while blogs receiving 25–50,000 page views per month tend to fare only slightly better, earning between \$10–15,000 per year.
- Blogs that receive around 100,000 page views each month are likely to earn around \$25,000 a year, and blogs that earn around 300,000 page views each month are likely to earn close to \$50,000 per year.
- The scale continues to rise from there, with blogs that receive 500,000 page views per month earning around \$100,000 a year, and blogs that receive over a million page views earning \$200,000 or more.

If your goal is to earn a full-time income of \$50,000 per year, it would appear that the tipping point for focusing on monetization strategies versus traffic growth is 300,000 page views. If your blog is currently receiving more than 300K page views but not producing \$50,000 in annual revenue, then it is probably time to focus less on growth and more on maximizing your current income streams. On the other hand, if your blog is receiving less than 300K page views, then your main focus should be on creating content and building your platform through the methods already discussed in this book.

Monetization Overview

In the next few chapters we will go over these different monetization options in detail, but for now I will start with a quick and dirty summary, just so if there are any options that are not familiar, you will know what in the world I am talking about!

- **Ad Networks:** Advertising networks such as Google AdSense, Media.net, Lijit, Pulse Point, Burst, and BlogHer, work with

large number of advertisers, who pay the network to place their ad on your (and many other) sites. Depending on the ad network, you could receive a pay-per-click payment, a CPM (cost per thousand views) payment based on the number of page views, or some sort of combination of those two things.

- **Affiliate Advertising:** Affiliate advertising is an ad or a link to a company or product that results in a commission IF the click through that link results in a sale. This includes Amazon links, or links to products on affiliate networks such as Commission Junction, ShareASale, LinkShare, PepperJam, or eJunkie.
- **Private Advertising:** Private advertising is any paid ad or link on your site that is paid directly by the company doing the advertising, rather than by a network. It is generally one specific ad in one specific spot that stays up for a designated amount of time. Some bloggers use a service or dedicated marketing person to sell their private ads; others handle ad sales themselves.
- **Sponsored Posts and Brand Promotion:** Working directly with brands to promote their product or service within a post or series of posts is another popular monetization strategy. This can include sponsored or underwritten posts, which are generally posts written on a topic chosen by the sponsor; product reviews, which are posts written for the sole purpose of telling readers about your own experience with that brand/product; brand ambassadorships, which can involve multiple posts, giveaways, and social media promotion; conference sponsorships, or paid product giveaways.
- **Selling Products:** Selling products on a blog can include selling everything from original e-books or e-courses to

handmade items, or even blog promotional items such as t-shirts, tote bags, and bumper stickers. This is different from affiliate advertising in that it involves selling your own products rather than someone else's.

- **Selling Services:** Depending on your blog niche, this could include everything from hosting local classes and services (such as coupon classes or professional organizing or party planning), to online consulting services such as virtual home decorating services. This could also include social media consulting or virtual assistant work for other bloggers.
- **Writing and Speaking:** Some blogs are established for the sole purpose of building a platform that can then be used to launch a traditional writing and/or speaking career. Traditional publishers will often not even consider a book proposal if the author has not already established an online presence. Likewise, many successful speakers get their start by first writing a popular blog.

Reasons NOT to Monetize a Blog

The title of this book is *How to Blog for Profit*, and it is primarily intended to give you the tools you need to build a successful and profitable blogging business. That said, there are situations where monetizing—or at least focusing on monetization—isn't a great idea.

The biggest reason not to monetize—or at least not to spend any time worrying about monetization—is if you and your blog are brand new to the blogging world. At minimum, the first six months should be about creating incredible, compelling, and downright awesome content and about planning a cohesive design and navigation in which to present your content. It should be about discovering what you like and don't like blogging about, and

about creating an online space that will draw people in and keep them coming back.

This doesn't mean you can't place a few ads within the design or on the sidebar as placeholders for when you are ready to monetize, but getting those ads to perform simply shouldn't be your focus. Your traffic is not going to be high enough to make the time spent tweaking worth the effort.

Likewise, wasting your time on product reviews or small giveaways just to get a few free things can not only hurt your credibility, but distract you from reaching your long-term goals.

Remember, your investment capital for a business blog is your time. If a short-term opportunity doesn't fit within your long-term vision for your blog, it is not a good fit. Keep your eyes on the prize.

Some other, less common reasons not to monetize include: your blog is written to support a cause such as a church or nonprofit organization; you feel ads or sponsored content would damage your credibility; or contractual obligations prevent you from doing so.

That said, as we have seen from our case studies and will see in the coming chapters, there are many different ways to earn income directly and indirectly from a blog or website. Even if sidebar ads or sponsored content isn't a good fit, chances are there are other streams of income related to your blog that would work very well.

Words of Advice

Finally, I also asked my anonymous blogger panel to offer their best advice for someone who wants to make money from a

blog. They were incredibly candid! Here's what some of them had to say:

"Be very, very careful about accepting any kind of sponsored posts. They decrease the value of your content, and it's just not worth doing free posts. You're selling out your readership every single time."

"Don't go into blogging to be a stay-at-home, working mom. It takes YEARS to make good money, and you'll likely make about \$5 an hour to start with! Don't cheat your way into blogging. Only do it if you'd be happy to do it for free. I didn't put any advertising on my blog for a year and a half. I had several posts that went viral, and that's when I saw a lot of traffic for the first time. That's when I really began making money. Organizing your schedule and being careful of not letting your blogging take over your family time is key."

"Be ready to work. You can make money, but you will have to WORK for every penny!"

"Remember that the money will probably come from multiple sources and that the smaller payments do add up. Also, I think it is import to invest in your blog if your goal is for it to be a business. Try and set up a blog budget so you have money allocated for things like marketing and technology needs. I signed up for a conference before the blog was making any money and it really paid off. I'm making enough now to pay for the conference, and I made a lot of connections with brands and other bloggers."

"Build up your readership. Always be working on building up followers on all of your social networks. Create the very best content that you can, and with sponsored posts, be sure that you are original and engaging. Your readers do not want to feel like they are reading an advertisement."

"Write as if you already have thousands of regular readers and great income; produce top-notch quality and let your personality shine."

"There are certain affiliates that just don't resonate with my readers. There have been times that I put a lot of time into crafting a post highlighting a certain deal or offer and it just tanks. It takes time and experimentation to figure out my readers' interests and what they are willing to spend money on."

"Start with advertising so your blog readers aren't surprised or unhappy when they start to see ads on the site!"

"Be ready to work hard and wait patiently. Celebrate every small victory, and remember that your voice is an important one in the blogging community because no else writes like you."

"For someone who wants to start to make money on a blog, I would advise them to really focus on their content and promoting their content. When I first started I did not know what I was doing, so I would post sometimes just to have something posted. Now, I really focus on writing good content that people want to read and then promoting what I have written. It is hard starting out because you may write awesome content, but then no one reads it because you do not have a lot of traffic. Spend the time to promote your article when you can through social media, blog hops, guest posts, and so on."

"Invest in your email subscriber list first."

"Slow and steady wins the race! There will always be those bloggers who immediately make a ton of money right off the bat, but I think the majority of people aren't like that. I've steadily grown our blog over the past year (we started in January of 2013), and I feel like our income has come from steady, hard work. You can't

do nothing and expect to make money. Treat your blog like a business, and it will pay off.

Also, don't sell your soul. You will get TONS of people emailing you with opportunities to do sponsored posts or ads on your site. Don't take all of them. Not only will your readers be turned off by this, but it makes you look cheap. I have a decent amount of sponsored content on my blog, but I only accept offers from companies that I believe in, can fully endorse, and can create an authentic post for. It's paid off for me to keep my integrity."

"Write about what you are passionate about and serve your readers first. They are your customers. They are your income source, so serve them well."

"Find time to work your business every single day. When I started I gave up my free time in the evenings after work until I was able to make enough to quit my job. Do something for your blog every day."

"Try out different revenue sources to see what works best, and don't compromise the integrity of your blog. I've also realized that several different income streams can add up pretty quickly!"

"Build an audience ... build an audience ... build an audience."

• • •

Chapter 6 Action Plan: Monetize Your Blog

- Realize that every blogger earns an income in a slightly different way. Don't compare yourself to others, and be willing to seek out your own unique opportunities.
- Take it slow. Don't expect to start earning a sustainable income overnight. Remember that your capital investment in your business is time.
- Begin considering what methods of monetization would work best for your own blog genre.

Chapter 7:

Profit through
Ad Networks

When it comes to monetization, sidebar and banner ads (and ad networks) are usually the first things that come to mind, especially to those unfamiliar with the business of blogging. They are easy to see and understand, and therefore the most concrete explanation for how to make money on a blog to someone who just doesn't understand. The model seems simple:



I would dare argue that profit through ad network advertising is one of the best of all blog income streams, and that the more income you can generate from ad network revenue, the more able you will be to focus on creating awesome content, which will help grow your traffic, and in turn—you guessed it—increase your ad revenue.

The thing that makes ad network revenue preferable to many other income streams is that it is completely passive. Once your ads are in place, *you don't have to do anything*. They make you

money just by sitting there. They don't have an opinion about what you write, nor do they require you to spend time pitching to brands or trying to convince your readers to buy something. It is about as close to free money as you can get.

While the above model seems easy to follow, the reality of how ad networks really work is not *quite* that straightforward. If it were, all the bloggers that we just read about in the last chapter would be making the bulk of their money from ad networks. After all, who wouldn't want free money? Instead, what we saw is that only one out of eight was making more than 50 percent of their income from ad networks.

So what is the problem with ad network revenue? Why do some smaller blogs earn much more than others with way more traffic? Why don't more bloggers focus on increasing their blog revenue from ad networks?

Aside from the fact that being able to earn ad revenue through ad networks requires a certain level of blog traffic, the main problem that I see with ad network revenue is that it can be inconsistent. Trends can cause certain niches to rise in popularity. Advertisers are willing to bid more for their ads, which then makes those ads extremely profitable. If you happen to fall in the right niche at the right time, you might do very well for a while, but then, as the trend starts to fade, so will your earnings. Once you've come to rely on an income stream, the prospect of losing it can be a very scary thing.

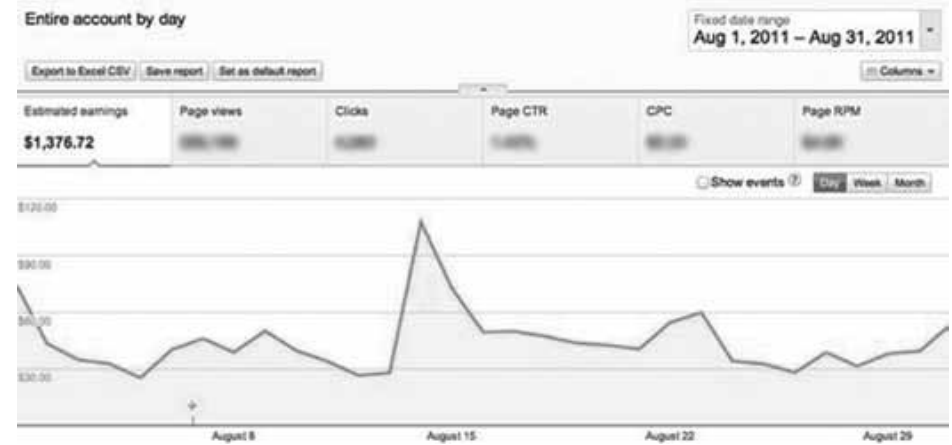
I learned this lesson the hard way during my first year of blogging. In May of 2011, the show *Extreme Couponing* began airing on TLC, and all things coupon-related became very big news. Companies all wanted a part of the action, and there was a huge influx of advertisers bidding on ad space on blogs within the coupon and frugal-living niche.

While my blog traffic increased considerably, my ad revenue spiked exponentially, at a far faster rate than my traffic. At the time, Google AdSense was really the only form of monetization I had on my blog, but with my niche at a premium, I was earning \$200-\$300 a day in ad revenue, while in the previous month a good day brought in maybe \$5 or \$10. In other words, May 2011 was a very good month.

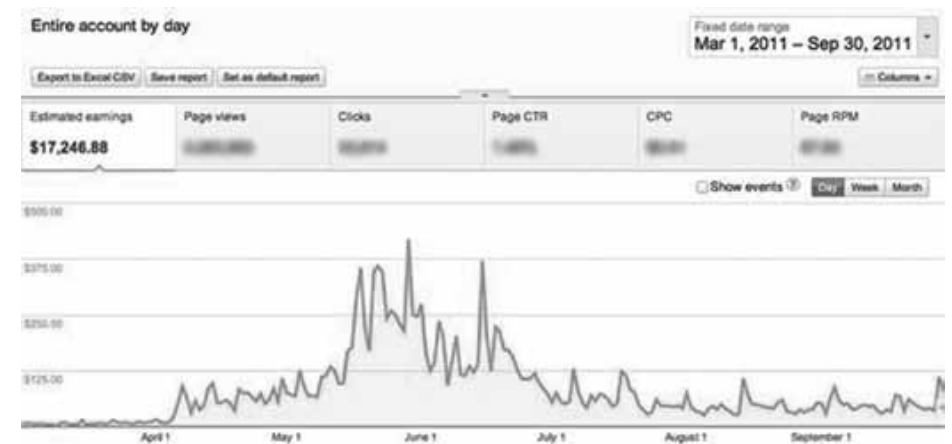


It didn't last.

The first season of *Extreme Couponing* ended and the show went off the air for the summer, while at the same time, the number of coupon and frugality-niched blogs exploded. People lost interest in coupons, and the proverbial bubble burst. Ad space was no longer in demand, and the prices dropped and dropped and dropped. It was a very stressful summer as I watched my earnings—and traffic—fall month after month.



By August my revenue had dropped to roughly one-fifth of what it had been in May. Even though that August revenue was five times what it had been in March, just five months earlier, it still felt like a failure. Had I been blogging longer when the *Extreme Couponing* boom happened, I may have been able to see the bigger picture and take it for what it was—an unusually lucky spike that couldn't possibly sustain itself. At the time, it just stung.



But hindsight is 20/20, and through that experience I did learn a lot, not only about the ups and downs of ad network revenue, but also about the importance of diversification and “not putting all your eggs in one basket.” I realized that if I was going to make money as a blogger, I would never again want to become dependent on just one stream of income.

After the great AdSense crash, I began actively seeking out other ways to make money on my blogs. I focused on freelancing and affiliate revenue, and eventually began working directly with brands as well. I also added additional ad networks, such as Media.net (now connected to Yahoo! Ads) and Lijit, and I worked to optimize ad placement on my site in order to both maximize and stabilize my ad network revenue. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, ad networks now provide about 65 percent of my income, while the rest comes from a variety of sources including affiliate advertising, private advertising, freelance writing, and consulting.

So what does that mean for you?

It means that ad network revenue is incredible when you can capture it. It is the easiest, most passive way to make money on your blog, which means you should actively try to optimize and capture as much of that revenue as you can. However, it also means that you need to err on the side of caution when you approach ad network revenue. Diversification is key. If you are serious about blogging for profit, let ad networks be an important revenue stream, but not your *only* source of income.

Ad Network Options

There are literally dozens of different ad networks to choose from. Furthermore, not all ad networks are limited to banner advertise-

ments. There are now ad networks for text ads, RSS feeds, social-media sharing, email, and more.

First-tier ad networks such as Google AdSense and Yahoo! Ads (also known as Media.net) sell all their own ads, which are then placed on their own blog publishers' (bloggers) sites. Second-tier advertisers sell some of their own ads, but also syndicate ads for first-tier ad networks. This is why you see some of the same ads on other networks as you do on Google AdSense.

Some ad networks pay on a pay-per-click (PPC) basis. Google AdSense is the most well-known of the PPC networks. Others pay on a cost-per-thousand (CPM) ad views. Some of the larger networks require an above-the-fold or top-placement ad.

Here is a fairly comprehensive (but not all-inclusive) list of the various ad network options.

Major Banner Ad Networks (Require at least one above-the-fold ad)

Google AdSense is by far the largest and most common ad network around, and for most bloggers also the highest-paying network. Google does require an above-the-fold ad, and limits the Google ads on any one page to three image ads and three text links.

BlogHer Publishing Network is a leading news, entertainment, and information network for women. BlogHer is fairly selective about who they allow in their network. They require top placement for their ad (which is why I have personally never used them). BlogHer blog publishers often get opportunities for sponsored posts as part of their membership in the network.

Media.net uses Yahoo! and Bing to provide your blog with relevant ads. Media.net uses a slightly more complicated formula that is partially based on CPMs and partially based on per-click data. They do not serve image ads, but rather use boxes of text ads that can be completely customized to match your site. They prefer an above-the-fold ad, but it is not absolutely required. I have used Media.net for years and have been really happy with the results. However, they can be a little pushy, which is sometimes a turn-off for other bloggers.

Other Banner Ad Networks (Most do not require above-the-fold ad placement)

Adversal focuses on many different topic areas. Requires at least 50,000 page views a month.

Beacon Ads is a religious ad network that puts bloggers in charge of their own ads and allows them to set their own prices.

BlogAds allows bloggers to sell their ad space, to set their own prices, and to reject or accept ads, which offers plenty of control over which ads to accept.

Burst Media offers more specific targeting ads through Burst Mom (for mom blogs), Burst Stadium (for sports blogs), and Burst Ella (for “trendsetters” such as fashion and design blogs).

Cox Digital Solutions is a “network of networks” with over two hundred niche ad networks.

EverythingMom Network is the first vertical ad network for Canadian mom and family bloggers. Currently closed to new applications.

Federated Media focuses on independent bloggers with a loyal following; they are fairly selective. FM allows ad buyers to buy specific placement on certain blogs.

GlamMedia is a large ad network targeting women and trend-setters.

Lanista Concepts is a smaller ad network providing competitive CPM rates.

Lifetime Moms is a smaller ad network with a mom and woman focus. They do require one above-the-fold ad.

Martha’s Circle is the Martha Stewart blog network, which includes an advertising network. Fairly selective, it is primarily for blogs with a food or DIY focus.

Moms Media is a “vertical network” that focuses on reaching moms with advanced targeting options.

MTV Ad Networks is for music, entertainment, and kids/family sites.

Pulse Point is a competitive network that allows bloggers to set their own ad rates.

Price Grabber is a general CPM-based ad network.

Rivit Media offers ads for blogs with a DIY and crafting focus. It supposedly guarantees at least a \$0.40 CPM.

Sovrn (formerly Lijit) is another large ad network now associated with Federated Media. Offers a large variety of standard CPM ads.

Technorati Media is an ad network for bloggers in a wide variety of topic areas.

Tribal Fusion is one of the largest ad networks; they only accept blogs with over half a million visitors per month or more.

Alternative or Non-Banner Ad Advertising Networks

Chitika uses readers' search queries to provide ads targeted specifically to their interests. In some cases, the ads show up only to readers who have arrived via a search engine.

Kontera offers contextual in-text ads as well as an option to syndicate your content.

RadiumOne is a multimedia ad network offering options for mobile advertising, as well as social-sharing advertising through their Po.st widget.

Skim Links is in-text advertising that automatically turns certain words into clickable affiliate links.

Vibrant offers contextual, in-text, CPM-based advertising.

Optimizing Ad Placement

Obviously no one blog will be able to display ads from twenty-six different advertising networks, at least not without completely covering your site with nothing but ads and alienating all your readers. So how do you know which ones to choose? How do you know where to place the ads that you do have, and how on earth do you maximize the revenue from the ad networks you are working with?

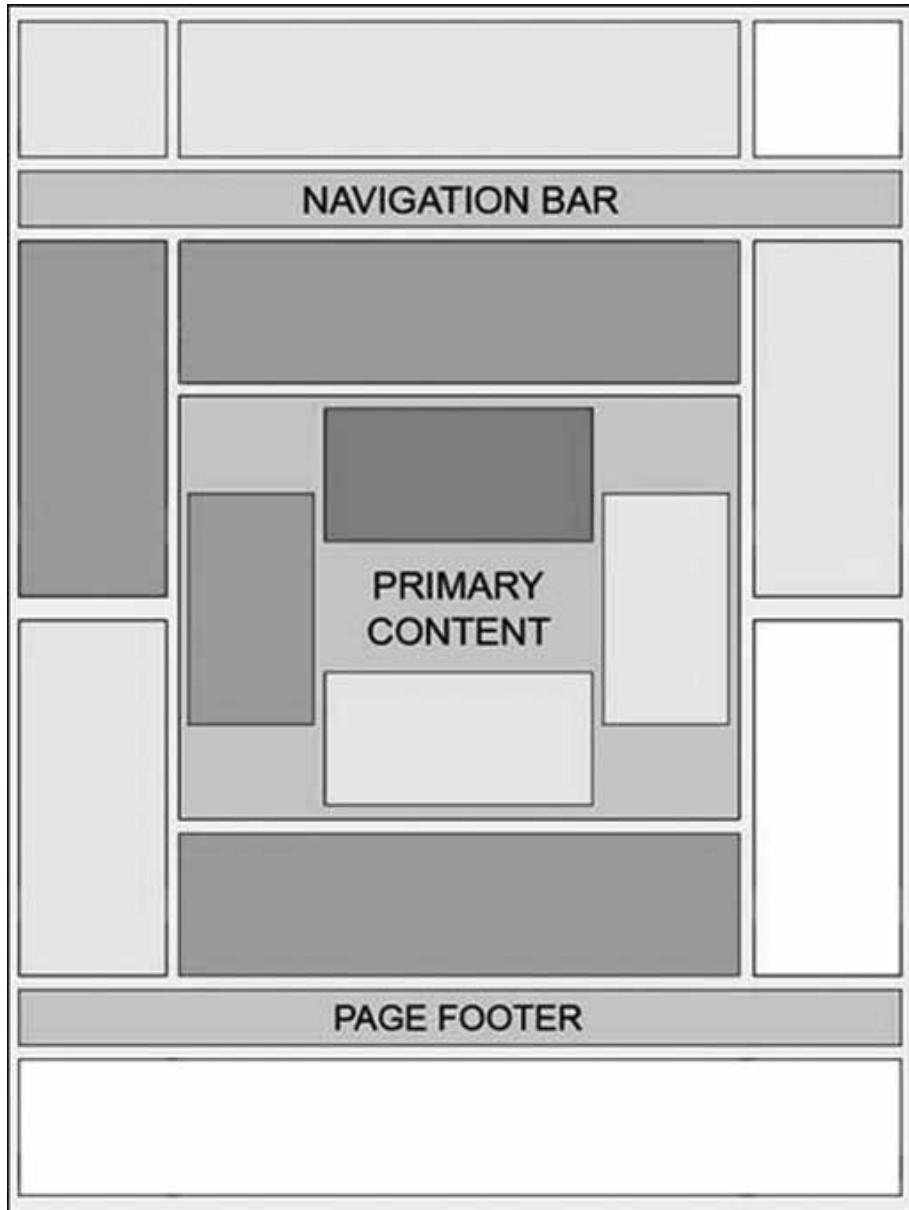
The simple (but not easy) answer is this: through a lot of trial and error.

But first, a word of caution: If your blog is new or you've been blogging for a while but your traffic is still pretty low, the absolute worst thing you can do is spend endless time and energy trying to tweak and maximize your ad revenue. If you have fewer than 50,000–100,000 page views per month, all the tweaks in the world probably won't make that big of a difference. Put up a few ads from AdSense and one or two other networks, then call it good and instead focus on creating awesome content and growing your traffic. Once your traffic has grown considerably, you can revisit your ad strategies.

The first thing to consider when placing ads on your site is where they will go. According to Google's "heat map," the best ad placement is directly above, below, or to the left of your primary blog content, with the darker orange areas showing the most optimal spots for ad placement.

If you think about it, this makes perfect sense. When a new reader comes to a site, their eyes naturally travel from left to right and from top to bottom on the page. Thus, they are more likely to notice and to click on ads that are placed on the left-hand side of your blog content, as well as right above it or right below it.

It is important to remember that this heat map is only relevant for ads that pay on a per-click (PPC) basis. CPM-based ads will generally get the same number of impressions regardless of their placement on the page. (However, ads that appear lower on the page or near the footer will get fewer impressions because not everyone scrolls all the way down. Most CPM ads account for this.)



If it works for your site, one of the easiest changes you can make to begin optimizing your ad network revenue is to move your sidebar to the left-hand side. It might at first seem like too drastic a change, but I have found that regular readers will

adapt pretty quickly, and new readers will never know the difference.

If it doesn't work at all for your site design to move your sidebar to the left, then don't worry too much about it. According to ad revenue expert Andrew Marzka of AdThrive.com, the difference isn't great enough to warrant a major redesign.

It is also important to incorporate your ads into your design in a thoughtful way so that they look natural and intentional. Your ad space should never overwhelm your content, but rather blend seamlessly into your overall design. As seen in this graphic from Google, your site layout should highlight your blog content, not your ads. (The ad is represented by the blue box.)

Good example: site layouts that highlight content

Bad example: site layout that pushes content below the fold



Optimizing Ad Revenue

Of course optimizing ad placement is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to optimizing ad revenue. The next piece is placing and stacking or “waterfalling” your ads so that the most profitable get premium placement and the less profitable ads are in the secondary spots. This ensures that you are always running the ad networks that produce the highest CPMs.

The best way to optimize your ad placement is through an ad-serving service such as Google DoubleClick For Publishers (DFP). However, because Google DFP is fairly complicated and time-consuming to set up, it is probably not something you want to worry about until you have at least 100,000–150,000 page views per month.

So what is Google DFP? In a nutshell, DFP is an ad server that will serve all your ad tags at the same time. Once you’ve set it up with all your various ad network codes and the corresponding CPMs that each network is currently earning, Google DFP will automatically serve the highest-paying ad at any given time and make it so that AdSense is forced to compete with all your other networks. Additionally, DFP makes all your ads run more efficiently and makes them all load at the same time.

Keep in mind that while Google DFP is a free service, it is not particularly user friendly. It requires some knowledge of coding and programming in order to set it up correctly, and if you are interested in learning to use it, you should be prepared to invest a significant amount of time figuring out how it works.

If coding isn’t your thing, you can hire a DFP expert to set up, monitor, and maintain your DFP service. The best resource I have found for this is a company called AdThrive. AdThrive was founded by Andrew Marzka, a former math teacher who originally started learning about DFP and ad optimization to help his wife’s

blog. I am not exaggerating when I say that he is pretty much a genius when it comes to maximizing ad revenue. In the year that I have been working with AdThrive, I have personally seen more than a 150 percent increase in ad network revenue, which is actually low compared to many of his clients. In fact, his average increase in revenue for his clients is a whopping 239 percent!

The best part is that AdThrive currently offers DFP service at no up-front charge, instead requiring one ad underneath the footer on your site. Not surprisingly, the service has quite a long waiting list. While the full-service AdThrive Premium option is currently only available for blogs with 300,000 page views or more, AdThrive is now also offering an additional service for smaller blogs called AdThrive Standard, which is available for blogs with 100,000 page views or more. If you are interested in being added to the AdThrive waiting list for one of these services, you should sign up right away at <http://www.adthrive.com/>.

If your blog has not hit the minimum requirements for AdThrive, or if you would simply prefer to manage your own ads, here are a few of Andrew’s best tips:

- Place as many ads as you can above the fold. At the bare minimum, there should be at least one ad above the fold, but more is better.
- Apply to as many reputable ad networks as you can so that you can test them out and see which ones work best for your site.
- Designate one ad space on your site as a “test” space and start testing different networks to see how they perform. If you find one that performs well, begin using it in your other spaces.
- When evaluating ad networks, don’t look only at CPMs, but instead also consider fill rate—the percentage of ads per

page view that actually get shown—and look at actual earnings. Many ad networks have huge discrepancies in their impressions, so their CPMs may be inflated. A very high CPM rate is not all that valuable if the fill rate is very low.

- Set minimum “floor” rates with the ad networks that will allow it, and then install passback tags that will allow a different ad network to show up in that space if the minimum rate is not met.
- Make sure your final layer in every ad space on your site will be 100 percent filled all the time. You can’t earn revenue on ads that don’t show up.

One additional caution that Andrew offers for those who would prefer to set up DFP on their own, is that most people set it up wrong so that it is displaying too many Google AdSense ads. Per the AdSense terms of service, there can be only three Google ads displayed at any given time on your site. Google code installed directly onto your site will automatically limit the number of ads shown to three, but DFP code does not automatically limit it. Since violating the terms of service is a good way to get kicked out of Google AdSense, this is definitely something to watch out for!

DoubleClick For Publishers is still a fairly new service, which means there aren’t yet a whole lot of resources available for telling you how to use it or set it up. I couldn’t find any books on the subject, but I did find a fairly comprehensive tutorial here: <http://www.labnol.org/internet/google-dfp-tutorial/14099/>

If your blog has fewer than 100,000 page views per month or if you just aren’t interested in trying to learn and set up DFP on your own, your options for ad optimization are a little more limited. However, don’t let this discourage you! Your ad revenue can still be quite substantial, even without DFP.

While you won’t be able to set up Google DFP to *automatically* serve the highest-paying ads, you can still do your own research and analysis to make sure you are maximizing your ad revenue.

Start your optimization process by placing your highest-paying PPC ads—most likely Google AdSense—in your most premium spots, based on the Google heat map. If you are using BlogHer or another network that requires top-page placement, you may want to put a banner above your header so that you can still place your AdSense ads somewhere in the orange zone.

After you’ve optimized your PPC ad placement, place ads from your other ad networks in the remaining ad slots on your site. According to Andrew, you should apply to every single network that you can in order to maximize your options.

This is where trial and error will come in to play, as you will need to test your various ads to see how they perform. However, resist the temptation to swap them out every few days! Test an ad network for at least two weeks before switching it out.

Be sure to keep track of which ads you place in which slots, writing down all performance stats, as well as notes about what type of ads performed the best, fill rate, and so forth. Then only keep the ads in place that earn the highest CPM.

Easy, right?

Content-Based Advertising and SEO

There is one more piece of the content-based PPC ad network advertising puzzle that doesn’t really get talked about all that much considering—at least in my opinion—it is probably the single most important aspect of ad revenue optimization. It is the critical connection between search engine optimization and content-based advertising.

Put simply, the readers coming to your site as a result of a Google search (as opposed to your regular readers, or even those referred from other sites such as Pinterest), are FAR more likely to click on your Google ads. Thus, more Google traffic equals more money in your pocket.

If you think about it, this makes perfect sense. Google users are searching for something, whether it be a product, recipe, idea, or information. They enter key search terms into the little Google box, which in turn leads them to your site, where, lo and behold, the ads served by Google magically display relevant ads that happen to coincide perfectly with whatever the reader happened to be searching for. Coincidence? Not a chance!

Those readers who have arrived via search engine are already primed to be clicking on links. After reading your content they have to go somewhere else, and chances are, they will still be searching for more info. Clicking on the pretty ad next to your article displaying a completely related topic is just a natural progression of normal search behavior.

This phenomenon is especially true for search results that pertain to a highly targeted niche. For instance, on my site, some of my most searched pages relate to couponing and saving money on groceries, or more specifically, “how to start couponing,” “how to save on food,” and “extreme couponing tips.”

These search terms correspond to very targeted ads in the coupon niche that generally have a fairly decent payout. I find that my ad network earnings are always significantly higher on days that there are a high number of searches for those terms, such as when TLC airs an *Extreme Couponing* marathon.

In chapter 4 we talked about some simple ways to optimize each page of your blog for better search-engine results. Do this consistently

for every single post (and go back and do it for older posts as well), then monitor your search engine traffic through Google Analytics to find out which search terms are driving the most traffic.

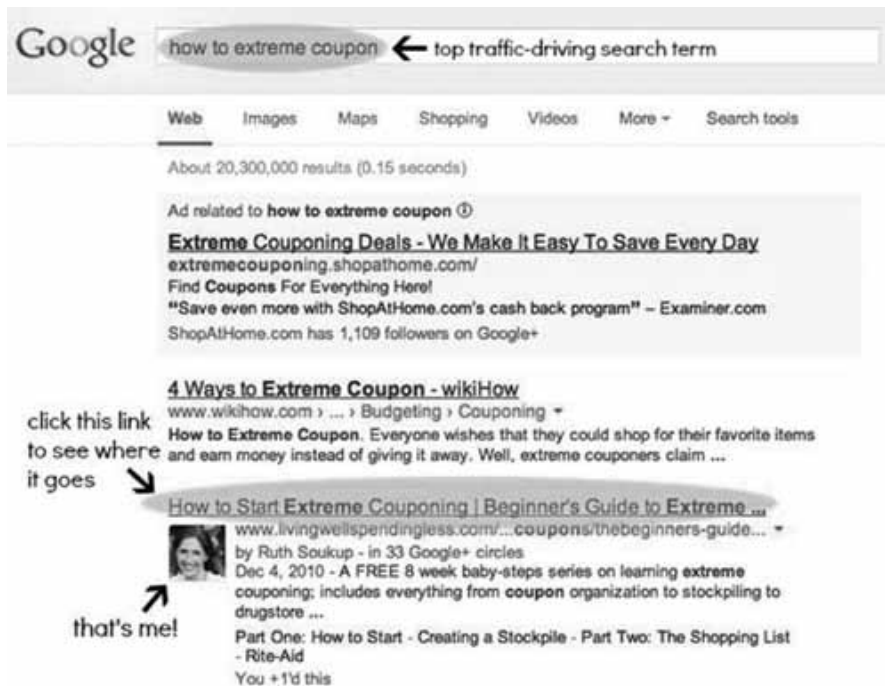
In order to check this in Analytics, go to Standard Reports → Traffic Sources → Search → Organic. This will bring up a list of the search terms that are being used to bring visitors to your site. Now that Google allows users to cloak their searches, the top item will most likely be “(not provided).” For my own research purposes, I always just assume that the rest of my results are a representative sampling of the results I can’t see. I also ignore any searches related to my own site name, since those don’t really count.

	Keyword	Visits
	Results cloaked by Google; assume numbers are representative of shown results.	40,924 % of Total: 4.70% (875,229)
1.	(not provided)	15,614
2.	how to extreme coupon	1,881
3.	living well spending less	1,713
4.	livingwellspendingless	737
5.	how to start couponing	718
6.	how to start extreme couponing	545
7.	how to make a burlap wreath	335
8.	how to extreme coupon for beginners	312
9.	extreme couponing tips	209
10.	livingwellspendingless.com	198
11.	couponing for beginners	171
12.	diy mercury glass	156

The next step, once you’ve determined which search terms are driving traffic, is to find out which specific pages those search terms are driving traffic to. In some cases, it will be obvious. For

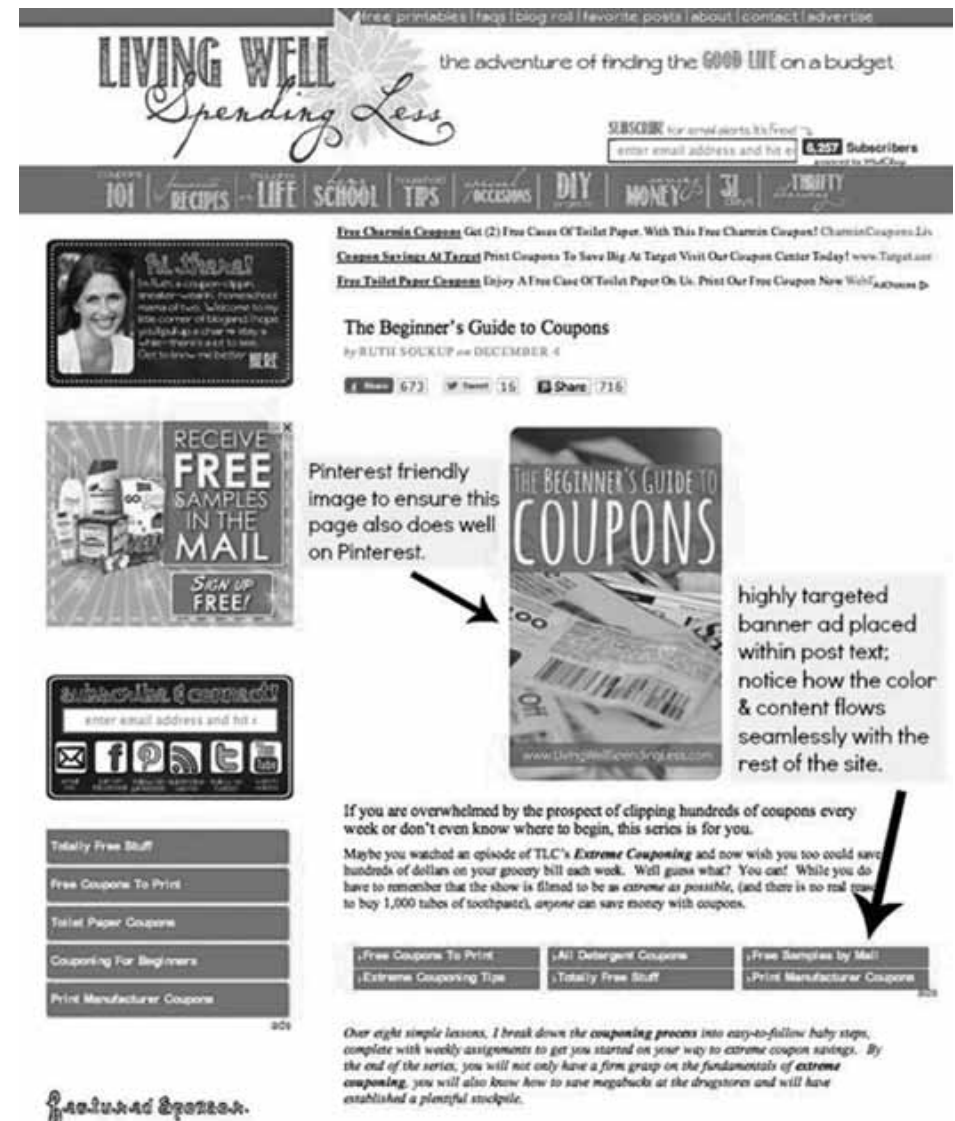
instance, I have only one post related to how to make a burlap wreath, as well as only one post related to DIY mercury glass, so there isn't a lot of question about the landing page for those particular search terms.

However, when it comes to the couponing terms, the landing pages aren't immediately obvious, since my site has multiple posts and pages related to couponing. The easiest way I have found to determine landing pages is to actually do a Google search for that exact term, then click on the link and see where it goes.



Then, once you know exactly where that traffic is going, you can optimize the page itself with highly targeted ad network ads right within the post text itself (in the dark orange zone on the heat map).

For my coupon-related pages, I have chosen to install targeted ads from Media.net, as they can be customized to match the look and feel of my site. These are by far the highest CPM-producing ads on my site. Here is what it looks like:



Notice that while this page receives a lot of search engine traffic, it is also optimized for Pinterest traffic as well, since it makes sense that if people are searching for this topic on Google, they would also be interested if they saw a compelling image on Pinterest that leads them to this same page. Thus, it is a good idea to consider this type of on-page ad optimization for all your most popular pages, *regardless* of where the traffic is coming from, but *especially* when it comes from search engines.

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Chapter 7 Action Plan: Optimize Your Ad Network Revenue

- Apply to as many ad networks as possible and begin comparing CPMs.
- Rearrange your site and ad placement so that more ads fall within the “hot” zone.
- Optimize your ad revenue through “waterfalling” your ads, placing the highest CPM ads in the premium spots and the lower CPM ads in the lower slots.
- Set up Google DFP or hire someone to manage Google DFP on your site.
- Optimize any pages that do well on search engines with additional content-based advertising.

Chapter 8:

Profit through Affiliate Sales

Depending on your blog topic and niche, affiliate income—or earning money through commission from third-party sales—can be incredibly lucrative. Common sense would indicate that the more traffic a site receives, the more income it will earn through affiliate links, but surprisingly, this is not always the case.

From what I have observed, the most successful affiliate sales come from creating a relationship of trust with your readers. They will buy the things you recommend because they like what you have to say and they trust your opinion. I have seen bloggers with relatively small or medium-sized blogs do extremely well with affiliate sales, simply because they have such an active and engaged audience who will happily buy almost any product they happen to talk about.

How well you do on affiliate sales on your site will depend somewhat on your niche—some genres clearly lend themselves to more sales than others—but also on how well you incorporate your own genuine interests and recommendations into your authentic content.

Major Affiliate Options

There are no shortage of affiliate networks and programs to choose from; these days almost every company selling a product offers some sort of affiliate program to entice bloggers to sell their products. Some are much better than others, so a big part of successful affiliate advertising means picking the networks with the most lucrative programs that are also a great fit for your particular blog niche.

Here is a fairly comprehensive (but not all-inclusive) list of the various ad-network options:

Amazon

The payout for Amazon sales—ranging from 4–8.5 percent depending on how much you sell—is actually fairly low compared to many other affiliate programs. Even so, affiliate sales through Amazon can be incredibly lucrative for several reasons. First, almost anyone who shops online is already familiar with Amazon, has shopped there before, and has an account set up and ready to go. Second, Amazon's user-friendly affiliate interface allows you to deep-link—link directly to any page, category, or product on their site—which gives you the opportunity to easily link to any product you just happen to be mentioning in a given post. Third, Amazon's 24-hour cookies (as well as the fact that they sell everything under the sun) means that someone could feasibly click a link through your site for a book you recommend and end up buying a \$600 bathtub. And yes, that has actually happened to me!

The main downside to Amazon—other than the low commission rate—is that because of new online commerce tax laws in certain states, they have discontinued their affiliate program in several states including Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota,

North Carolina, and Rhode Island. If you happen to live in one of those states you are currently ineligible to become an Amazon associate. (Amazon is currently lobbying for nationwide legislation that, if passed, could open up those states to affiliate sales once again.)

Furthermore, I know of several bloggers in the frugal/deal/coupon niche who have been removed from the program or forced to accept an even lower commission rate because they sold too many free or low-priced items. This is something to be aware of if your blog falls within the frugal/deal/coupon niche and you are frequently promoting ultra-low-priced items.

Affiliate Networks

Affiliate networks provide access to a variety of companies in one interface. As a general rule you will still need to apply to each particular program separately, but using several programs within one network means needing to use only one login and getting only one large check at the end of the month instead of several smaller ones.

It doesn't hurt to sign up for all the various affiliate networks, just to have that step out of the way, but again, you will need to know which individual companies within that network you plan to promote so that you can know who to apply to.

The easiest way to find out whether a company you would like to promote or link to has an affiliate program (and which network it is with) is to visit that company's website, then search down at the bottom. There will often be an "affiliates" link or a "company information" link that will lead to the correct network. If you are already signed up with that network, it is just a matter of logging in and applying to the individual program.



Here are a few of the most well-known major networks you may want to apply to:

Commission Junction: CJ is one of the largest affiliate networks out there, especially after Google Affiliate Network closed down in 2013. Their interface is easy to use and does allow you to search for specific products in order to deep link, though not necessarily as conveniently as Amazon. This function also tends to vary by affiliate.

Rakuten Linkshare: Another very large affiliate program; allows for deep linking with many of their brands through their unique Bento Box tool, as well as directly on their interface.

Share A Sale: A fairly large network; not quite as many well-known brands and companies as Linkshare or CJ, but still lots to choose from.

PepperJam: A smaller network, again with not quite as many well-known brands but some good niche programs. Known for being helpful to new associates.

Affiliate Window: This network was originally based out of the UK but now works with several well-known US brands.

eJunkie: A smaller network that helps individual sellers—particularly of e-books—sell online. This is a great network to be part of if you plan to promote other bloggers' e-books on your site.

Simple (and Non-Sales-Pitchy) Ways to Increase Affiliate Sales

I don't know about you, but affiliate income makes me a little uncomfortable sometimes. Perhaps it is just the fact that I primarily write about living well for less money, but I just don't like the idea of telling my readers to buy things they don't need, and I certainly don't want my blog to turn into one big sales pitch.

Regardless of what you write about, I doubt you do either.

As I've watched my affiliate sales steadily creep up over the past year, I've tried to pay close attention to what items my readers are buying and why. Ultimately I've discovered that there are some very simple ways to increase affiliate sales—while aiding your readers in the process—without feeling like a used car salesman.

Produce awesome content.

Shocking, I know, but the simple fact is that the more readers you have, the more opportunities you will have to increase your affiliate sales. Thus, the more awesome and compelling your content, the more likely you are to experience viral growth. Your post should always be about sharing something of value with your readers first, then everything else second. Any affiliate links you include should be relevant and useful, enhancing the post and providing a convenient way for the reader to put into practice the advice.

Share links for things you actually use (and places you actually shop).

What things do you love and use every single day? What products do you like so much that you tell your friends about them? Those are the things you should be promoting and linking to within your awesome content, not just once but every single time you happen to talk about them within the context of a blog post.

I have found that mentioning—even just in passing—a book I really loved or a product that helped me or changed my life can actually be a much more powerful sales tool than actively trying to convince my readers to buy something. I am simply sharing useful information that has benefitted me and will (hopefully) enrich their lives as well.

I link to Amazon a lot in my posts, but I have also been an avid Amazon shopper and Amazon Prime member for many years, since long before I even knew what a blog was. It is usually the first place I go to look for almost anything, so linking to it within my posts feels like a natural extension of how I would normally shop.

Link to hard-to-find ingredients or supplies for recipes and DIY posts.

As we've already discovered in previous chapters, your goal for every single post will be viral traffic through sharing on Pinterest and other social media avenues. If you take the time to create a mind-blowing DIY project or an amazing recipe, at least some of the people who discover your post will want to recreate it. Providing helpful links to sources for the necessary ingredients or supplies—particularly the ones that are hard to find—is both a service to your reader and a great way to include affiliate links.

As a general rule, I will let my readers know where I sourced something for a project regardless of whether that source has

an affiliate link. However, if I bought something at a local store, I will say that, but then include an affiliate link to a similar item on Amazon or another affiliate network.

Pay attention to what your readers are buying.

Knowing what type of things your readers ignore and which things they purchase in large quantities can be incredibly helpful for knowing what sort of things to link to in the future. It can also give you a clue to what your readers are truly interested in, which can help determine future post ideas.

For instance, over the years I have discovered that my own readers really *love* organizing books. They seemingly can't get enough of them, and I consistently sell dozens and dozens of them every month. This tells me that any post about organizing would probably be a big hit with my readers, and that any relevant affiliate links within those organizing posts will probably do well.

Create a shopping guide or review list.

While not every post can or should be a list of products for your readers to buy, occasionally providing a list of recommended products—particularly ones you have already vetted—can actually be very helpful and a fantastic source for affiliate sales.

For example, the past three Valentine's Days I have done a post called "Be My Frugal Valentine: 15 Gifts Under \$15." It always does really well. More recently, I did a review post of my own family's ten favorite board games for children ages 3–8. It included a description of each game based on our own experience, as well as a grade rating for both parents and kids. That post has done very well on Pinterest as well as on Google and other search engines, which has resulted in a steady flow of sales of the recommended games.

Make sure your links are relevant.

The more relevant the affiliate links are to the content of your post and to the interests of your readers, the more effective they will be. Both the list-type posts I just mentioned have done very well on my site because my readers are both interested in saving money and comprised largely of moms. That exact same list of games probably wouldn't perform well on a photography blog geared towards men, just like a link for an expensive DSLR camera doesn't do well on my site.

Affiliate links should be completely contextual, and, when possible, relevant to the problem you are trying to help your reader solve in your post. Thus, if your post is offering tips on how to organize your closet, providing a link to the hangers you recommend is a perfect fit.

Repurpose old content.

If your site already has quite a bit of content, one of the best things you can do is go back and reformat some of your most popular posts to give them new life on Pinterest. Add new Pinterest-friendly images or graphics, then update the content and add new contextual affiliate links wherever it is appropriate.

Share specials and deals.

Sharing a hot deal or limited-time sale on an item you already know is relevant to your readers can also be a great way to increase affiliate sales. For instance, if you have a photography site and you see that Amazon is offering half off on all Nikon cameras, sharing that information with your readers would be extremely well received. Again, knowing what your readers want is key to successful affiliate sales, whether it is a hot deal or not.

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Chapter 8 Action Plan: Increase Your Affiliate Sales

- Foster a relationship of trust and authenticity with your readers so that they value your opinion and recommendations.
- Do not recommend products you wouldn't use or don't genuinely like.
- Apply to Amazon (if available in your area) and other relevant affiliate networks.
- Increase your sales without feeling like a used car salesman:
 - o Produce awesome content, then fit relevant affiliate links into that content.
 - o Link to any products you love or use.
 - o Link to hard-to-find ingredients or supplies in your recipe and DIY posts.
 - o Pay attention to what your readers buy and are interested in.
 - o Create a recommendation list.
 - o Use relevant links.
 - o Repurpose old but popular content.

Chapter 9:

Profit through Private Advertising

Of all the different facets of blogging, I can honestly say that none has been more overwhelming and nerve-wracking to me than the thought of trying to get companies to pay for private advertising on my blog. I read book after book about SEO, was more than happy to take photography classes to improve my images, and had no problem writing about things I was interested in. I could even slap up some ad network ads and insert affiliate links as needed, but when it came to trying to deal directly with brands, I had no idea where to even start.

After completing a couple of product reviews and sponsored posts early on in my blogging career, I realized that I really had no interest in writing in exchange for free products. Furthermore, I didn't feel that writing a sales-pitchy post about a company, just because they were paying me to, was in line with the rest of my content. I more or less stopped reading any emails from brands and decided that sponsored content and private advertising just wasn't for me.

Of course, over the years, and only after many discussions with other blogger friends, I finally realized that it was possible to work with brands in an authentic way. Slowly I began seeking brand relationships that would allow me to stay true to my readers and

content and to not feel like I was “selling out.” Ultimately, through trial and error, I was able to find a good balance that feels right for my audience.

While profit through brand relationships used to account for 15–20 percent of my monthly income, it currently accounts for roughly 5 percent. This is not a huge percentage, but I have found that I am most comfortable accepting only those opportunities that feel like a natural fit for my brand and my core values.

Defining Your Own Brand Strategy

I firmly believe that the key to success in working with brands is creating a clearly defined brand strategy, as well as being very intentional about maintaining your own voice and integrity. It definitely takes a lot of time and thought to develop a clear strategy, but ultimately it will allow you to give your absolute best both to your readers and the brands you are working with.

I would recommend that any blogger who has reached the point of wanting to work directly with brands take the time to outline a specific strategy with clear-cut goals and guidelines. Even if your traffic isn't yet particularly high, do this as soon as you can, before you find yourself in a questionable position. Having a clear-cut strategy already in place makes decision making simple.

The first step is determining, in a perfect world, what a brand relationship would look like on your blog. Do you envision private sidebar advertising and nothing else? Would you prefer to review products or become a spokesperson for a single product you really love? Do you just love to write and want to find a way to incorporate content-based advertising within your posts? Do you have a strong YouTube presence and want to make videos showing the products you are representing? Write down all the

ways in which you could conceivably offer private advertising on your website in an authentic and innovative way.

On *Living Well Spending Less*, after pondering many different options, I ultimately decided to begin offering something called underwritten posts, rather than traditional sponsored posts, an idea I got from another blogger friend. An underwritten post is different than a sponsored post in that the post itself is not necessarily about the product or service being promoted. Instead, I write a high-quality content piece, just like I would write for any other post, but on a topic agreed upon by the brand. At the bottom of the post there is a box explaining that the post was underwritten or sponsored by XYZ company, with a paragraph introducing the company or product.

This post was written as part of the Allstate Influencer Program and sponsored by Allstate. All opinions are mine. As the nation's largest publicly held insurance company, Allstate is dedicated not only to protecting what matters most—but to guiding people to live the Good Life, every day.



In addition to the underwritten posts, I also began offering the option of a monthly featured site sponsorship, an opportunity that is limited to one sponsor per month. I have also limited the availability of this sponsorship to brands and companies that I feel are in line with the family-friendly values of my blog and readers. A sponsorship on LWSL includes a company introduction post at the beginning of the month and a month-long premium sidebar ad, as well as an underwritten post published sometime during the month.

A third offering is a simple sidebar ad, which requires very little effort on my part to maintain. On my own site this is not a significant source of income, but I know of several bloggers who use private sidebar ads as their main income source. These can be managed through services such as Passionfruitads.com or Adproval.com, which will actually allow potential advertisers to sign up, pay, and upload their ad before you give the final approval.

As my blog and email lists have grown and my social media presence has increased, I have also developed a few more a la carte options for advertisers, such as an ad in my weekly e-newsletter, promotion of exclusive coupon codes, and participation in my annual "Favorite Things" giveaway.

Once you've determined the ways in which you would be willing to work with brands and private advertisers, your second step is defining your limits. What type of companies and products are you willing to promote, and which ones will you not consider under any circumstances? How many ads will you offer on your sidebar? How many underwritten or sponsored posts are you willing to publish each month? Will you allow your advertisers editorial control? Will you include social media promotion with your sponsored content?

Again, knowing ahead of time what you will and will not do makes negotiating and decision making much easier. Now that I have a clearly defined policy, I actually really enjoy writing underwritten posts. It is fun to get new topic ideas, and I think it ultimately makes me a better writer because it forces me to step outside my comfort zone. I also know that if something really isn't a good fit for my blog, I can just say no, and I do say no more than I say yes. Limiting the quantity also helps create more demand, which ultimately gives me more control over what type of private advertising I will allow.

The final step in developing your brand strategy is setting your ad rates. Unfortunately there is no clear standard for determining the going rate for blog advertising. I have looked far and wide, and I have found pricing that runs the gamut from incredibly cheap to ridiculously overpriced. Obviously what you can charge for advertising will depend a lot on how much traffic your website receives, but ultimately you need to ask yourself what is it worth to you to write a post on behalf of a brand or to take up ad space on your sidebar?

When I first started offering private ad offerings on my site I purposely set my rates high in relation to my traffic, and I'm glad I did. It wasn't worth it to me to work for less, and I think having that standard saved me from making some questionable decisions. I think as a general rule of thumb, you can charge what the market will allow. If you have so many offers that you can't possibly accept them all, you are probably charging too little. On the other hand, if you can't land a single gig, you are probably charging too much. In that case you will need to either lower your prices or wait until your traffic increases.

Approaching Advertisers with Confidence

The biggest advantage of creating a clearly defined brand strategy is that it will almost automatically allow you to approach advertisers with a lot more confidence. There is no need for you to be timid because you already know exactly what you are willing to offer in terms of sponsored content and how much you are willing to accept as payment. This is about 95 percent of the battle!

Being secure in your own brand and what your blog has to offer is extremely important when it comes to attracting potential advertisers. You need to be willing to sell yourself and your platform in a succinct and engaging way. Perfecting your “elevator

pitch” —your own personal thirty-second introduction to what your blog is all about—will give you a strong place to start.

If you've already done the work of picking an awesome theme and creating an organized structure with clear categories and subcategories (which we talked about in the first and second chapters), creating an elevator pitch and knowing how to describe your blog should actually be pretty easy. If you can't succinctly describe it in less than thirty seconds, you probably need to go back and narrow your focus.

Creating a Solid Advertising Kit

Once you've determined both how you want to work with brands and how you will sell your site to potential advertisers, you will need to put that information together in an attractive media or advertising kit. I have seen advertising kits done in a variety of ways, ranging from a super simple, single-page design to an elaborate multipage booklet.

I have formatted my own advertising kit several different ways over the years, and I have found that a simple, easy-to-read, one-page design has been most effective.



www.LivingWellSpendingLess.com

advertising kit

About Living Well Spending Less

LivingWellSpendingLess.com is the online destination for those seeking "the adventure of finding the Good Life on a budget." Living Well Spending Less features household tips, money-saving and financial advice, party ideas, DIY projects, & recipes, as well as articles on parenting, time management, and more.

LWSL readers are primarily women ages 25-55, college educated with a household income of \$75,000 or more who are actively searching for new & better ways to manage their time, finances, household duties, & family life.

Monthly Reach	
Unique Visitors:	1.2 million+
Pageviews:	2.5 million+
Subscribers:	37,000+
Facebook:	340,000+
Twitter:	4,000+
Pinterest:	85,000+
YouTube:	6,000+
Global Alexa Rating	16,943
US Alexa Rating	3,890

Meet Ruth



Ruth Soukup is a writer, entrepreneur, & mom of two. She is the author of the bestselling ebook, *How to Blog for Profit (Without Selling Your Soul)* and the founder of Living Well Spending Less, one of the most popular frugal lifestyle blogs on the web, receiving more than 1.2 million unique visitors and 2.4 million page views each month.

She appears regularly on WINK News as a money-saving expert, writes a feature column for Harbor Style magazine, and has been a contributing writer for P&G's Home Made Simple and P&G Everyday websites. Her next book, *Living Well Spending Less: 12 Secrets of the Good Life* (Zondervan) is scheduled for release in January 2015.

Ruth has also appeared on The Daily Buzz and been featured in various news publications, including Women's Day, Redbook, ALL YOU, & The Chicago Tribune.

Opportunities Available:

(Featured Monthly Sponsor)

This value package will ensure your business receives maximum exposure in front of Ruth's highly engaged and loyal audience.

It begins with a sponsor introduction post at the beginning of the month, which can include a product giveaway or exclusive promotion code, if desired. The package also includes a premium 300x250 sidebar ad receiving over 3.6 million page views, ongoing Facebook & Pinterest promotion, weekly newsletter recognition, as well as a guaranteed spot in the annual LWSL Favorite Things giveaway.

Opportunity limited to one featured sponsorship per month.

(Underwritten Post or Series)

Purchasing an underwritten post or series gives your business the opportunity to sponsor an in-depth post written by Ruth that LWSL readers love. These posts receive continuing attention on Facebook & Pinterest, and are optimized for great search engine results.

Ruth will suggest possible post ideas within a topic, including ideas for Pinterest-friendly graphics and other value-added content. She will then write the post in her unique voice, and the post will go live on the agreed upon date.

Opportunity limited to 3 underwritten posts per month.

(Sidebar Sponsorship)

The LWSL "Lovely Sponsors" section features 125x125 button ads or 300x140 banner ads. Ads can be purchased for 1 month or 3 month blocks.

Opportunities for giveaways, eNewsletter promotion, and social media promotion are also available. Please contact us for more details.

contact: advertising@livingwellspendingless.com with ad inquiries or questions

Depending on your own blog niche, traffic statistics, and opportunities available, what works best for you may be very different, and there does not seem to be any industry standard for the "right" way to format a media kit. In any case, here is what a standard advertising kit should include:

- **Blog description.** Include a brief description of your blog, including the general theme and what sort of posts you write, as well as information about reader demographics.
- **Traffic statistics.** Be sure to include numbers for monthly unique visitors, monthly page views, email subscribers, social media followers (including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Google+, and Instagram, if applicable), and third-party metrics such as your Alexa rating, Technorati rank, Klout score, or Google page rank.
- **Opportunities available.** Describe to potential advertisers the various ways in which you are willing to work with them. Include the benefits of each, as well as pricing info.
- **Photo and author biography.** Include a current, professional head shot as well as a professional biography listing your qualifications and accomplishments.
- **Contact information.** Consider setting up a specific email address just for advertising requests.
- **References or testimonials.** A few sentences from previous advertisers about their experience working with you can be a nice touch if you have additional space.

Use headings, titles, subtitles, and bullet points to make sure your media kit is easy to read and easily scanned by potential advertisers. Resist the temptation to include too much information, and break up any large sections of text with spaces, color blocks, and boxes.

In addition to a paper or PDF advertising kit, it is a good idea to create an advertising page on your blog to capture any potential advertisers. It should include some of the same information as your media kit, but leave off anything you would prefer not to be made public knowledge, such as your ad rates.

My own advertising page (<http://www.livingwellspendingless.com/about/pr-advertising-info/>) includes my bio and site

information (including traffic statistics), a brief description of opportunities available, and testimonials from brands I have worked with. It also highlights my media experience and includes a clip from my appearance on *The Daily Buzz*.

Finding Potential Advertisers

With a newly defined brand strategy in place and a killer advertising kit to go with it, you are ready to begin approaching brands and building relationships with potential advertisers, a process that sounds much scarier than it really is.

So where do you find potential advertisers?

The simple answer is that potential advertisers are pretty much everywhere. Many bloggers use social-media agencies such as Clever Girls, Pollinate, Social Spark, and Yoked, just to name a few. The campaigns offered through this type of social-media agency are generally quite specific and well-defined, usually requiring their blogger members to apply to be considered for a particular campaign. While there is nothing wrong with obtaining brand relationships through an agency, I personally have found that the perimeters they normally provide are not usually in line with my own brand strategy.

While I have no doubt there are many additional ways of finding brands to work with directly, I have had the most luck finding advertisers in three specific ways.

1. Blog Conferences

Attending blogger conferences, particularly major conferences with a large number of sponsors, is a great way to connect with brands who you already know are interested in partnering with bloggers, at least in some capacity. That said, the larger the

conference, the more blogs and bloggers you will be competing against to stand out.

Because blogging is still such a new form of media, I have found that most brands and companies don't have a clear plan for how they want to advertise online or work with bloggers. This is where having a clearly defined brand strategy and eye-popping advertising kit will really set you apart.

Depending on the conference and the number of sponsors, it can sometimes be overwhelming to even know which brands to approach. My own strategy is to check the sponsor list before attending, then make a list of all the brands I feel would be a good fit for my blog or that I would be interested in working with.

For the brands I want to work with the most, I will sometimes even jot down a few ideas for underwritten posts on a post-it note that I attach to my advertising kit. Once at the conference, I focus my time and attention on the handful of brands I really want to work with, taking the time to connect with the lead PR person to talk about some of my specific ideas.

2. Pitching Back

The longer you are blogging, the more conferences you attend, and the more directories you are added to, the more PR pitches you will receive. Nine times out of ten, these PR emails will be complete garbage.

However, before you automatically delete all PR emails, pay attention to the source. Is the company who is sending the email one you would actually like to work with? If so, consider instead sending a carefully worded pitch-back email. Paired with a great media kit, I have found that a pitch-back email is one of the best ways to find advertisers.

While my email response will vary somewhat depending on the company, in general it looks something like this:

Dear [name],

Thank you so much for your interest in advertising at Living Well Spending Less. While I don't offer product reviews or traditional sponsored posts at this time, I do have several options for authentic, content-based advertising that I feel are even better. I am attaching a media kit with additional details, as well as my current ad rates and traffic statistics. Please let me know if you have any questions, or if you would like to see examples of previous underwritten posts.

Thanks again,

Ruth

If I have a specific idea for an underwritten post or series, I might mention that as well. Amazingly enough, this quick, polite, and very direct approach is incredibly effective. In fact, on my own site, I estimate that 75 percent of my brand relationships came from responding to a PR pitch.

3. Unsolicited Pitches

Very occasionally, if there is a particular company I really like or am interested in working with for a specific reason, I will send an unsolicited pitch. I have found that the best approach is a polite email briefly introducing yourself and your blog and outlining your idea or proposal. It is best to keep the initial email very brief, then go into more detail if the company shows interest or asks for more information.

An example of an unsolicited pitch might look something like this:

Dear [name],

My name is Ruth Soukup, and I write a personal finance blog called Living Well Spending Less, which currently receives over 1 million unique visitors per month. I am a huge fan of [your product], and I would love to partner with your company on an upcoming post about [subject]. I'd love to set up a time to chat more about it if you are interested. Is there a time that works best for you?

Thanks so much,

Ruth

General tips for Building Solid Brand Relationships

Regardless of where you find your potential advertisers, there are a few best practices that will help you make sure you build solid, lasting brand relationships, as well as help you maintain your integrity and credibility with your readers.

- **Be honest.** Do not promote a brand you don't actually support or believe in, and do not tell a potential advertiser you use or like their product when you don't. Be honest also about your blog traffic and statistics. It is always better to undersell and overperform than the other way around.
- **Be polite.** Regardless of whether you are dealing with potential advertisers in person at a blog conference or via email, good manners are essential. Say please and thank you and respond courteously, regardless of the circumstances.

- **Be clear.** Make sure you are extremely clear about what your post or advertisement will and will not include. Give examples of previous sponsored or underwritten posts so that the company knows exactly what to expect. Get everything in writing, and do not sign a contract that you haven't read or don't agree with.
- **Be professional.** Even if you write a very personal blog, it is important to be professional when it comes to your business. Be careful about grammar and spelling, and do not use slang or abbreviations. In person, dress nicely and conduct yourself in a professional manner as well.

Ultimately, whether or not you choose to monetize by working directly with brands or advertisers is a decision that has to be weighed against the amount of time required to establish relationships, as well as the opportunities available for your niche.

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Chapter 9 Action Plan: Develop a Private Advertising Strategy

- Take the time to define your own brand strategy. How do you envision yourself working with brands? What are you willing to do? What won't you do?
- Create and practice your thirty-second "elevator pitch."
- Create a solid advertising kit.
- Find potential advertisers by attending blog conferences, pitching back, and directly contacting companies you'd like to work with.
- Maintain solid brand relationships by making every effort to be honest, polite, clear, and professional.

Chapter 10:

Profit through Selling Your Own Products

The true beauty of blogging for profit is that the sky is the limit when it comes to monetization. If you've managed to build a significant Internet presence, chances are you can make money on that presence somehow. The trick is finding the right fit for your talents and audience.

If you write a blog about fashion and style, you might be hard-pressed to sell an e-book about shopping with coupons, even if that is one of your other passions. On the other hand, if you happened to write an e-book about the *Seven Secrets to Style*, it would probably go gangbusters.

This is not to say that you cannot use your blog platform as a launching pad to branch out into other areas—depending on the niche and your area of expertise, this could actually be quite possible. It just means that your own audience will most likely be interested in products or services related to your main blog topic.

A few months ago I heard Dan Miller of 48days.com speak at a conference, and he explained that his policy is that anytime readers ask the same question three times, he creates a product to fill that need. This is genius! The truth is that there are almost as many opportunities for making money from your talents or

products as there are subjects to write about, and what's more, your readers are probably already asking for them!

What this means is that if you are interested in creating a product to sell, you need to *start by listening*. What are your readers asking for? What can't they get enough of? What are the questions you are answering over and over again? Figure it out and create the product that will *fill that need*.

It would be almost impossible for me to go into great detail about all of the products you can create, and I think it is important to note that your "product" is not always necessarily an object, but can also be your talent or service. In this chapter I will very briefly list some of the main ways I've seen bloggers generate income from selling goods and services, and, whenever possible, include sources for you to do a little more research.

E-books

Depending on your blog niche or area of expertise, publishing a popular e-book can be a fantastic source of additional income, and I strongly believe that **every blogger should have an e-book!** Even if you are not interested in monetizing through ad networks, affiliate links, or through working with brands, creating an e-book from your existing content is a must!

Look at it this way: If your content is good enough for people to read on a blog, and people are interested in reading it on your blog, then people will also be interested in reading your content in e-book format. Your e-book does not have to totally reinvent the wheel or be completely new content. On the contrary, you can create a great e-book using repurposed and reworked content that you have already created. For instance, have you done a fantastic series on your blog that was well received by your readership? Take that content, rework it just a bit, and create an e-book from it.

I personally have loved the ease of self-publishing available through Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP). Amazon is the most powerful retailer in the world, especially when it comes to books, and they have made it really easy for authors to publish. Amazon also runs a wonderful print division called Create Space, which allows you to self-publish hard-copy versions of your book at a very reasonable price.

If you are more interested in creating a PDF version of your e-book, affiliate companies such as eJunkie allow authors to set up their own affiliate program, which in turn encourages other bloggers to profit by selling the book on their own sites.

Amy Lynn Andrews of www.BloggingwithAmy.com has written a fantastic series on her blog called *How to Write an Ebook*. It covers every single step of the self-publishing process and goes into far more detail than I could in this small section. Check it out here:

<http://bloggingwithamy.com/how-to-write-an-ebook-the-guide/>

Classes

Do you share on your blog some area of expertise that you could also share in a hands-on workshop or online class? Teaching an in-person class at a local venue is a great way to build word-of-mouth blog traffic, while offering an online class allows a greater number of people to participate. Class topics could range from coupon workshops to classes on decorating, photography, cooking, meal planning, crafting, and more.

For more technical information about setting up your own online course, you may want to check out *Teach Online: Design Your First Online Course* by Jeannette Cates.

Products

Products sold on your blog could range from branded t-shirts, coffee mugs, and bumper stickers (like those sold at Momastery or Woulda Coulda Shoulda), to handmade products like purses, headbands, and jewelry. It could also include a link to your Etsy shop, or on online store selling some other type of product, such as Stampin' Up, Thirty-One Gifts, Pampered Chef, etc.

For tips on selling handmade products online, you may want to check out *Handmade Marketplace* by Kari Chapin or *Handmade to Sell* by Kelly Rand.

Services

Depending on your blog niche, services sold on your blog could range from consulting, decorating services, organizing or cleaning services, web design, photography, catering or baking, and more. The simple fact is that if you are good enough to write about something and have people want to read what you write, you are probably also good enough to also offer it as a service. In fact, many service providers start a blog for the sole purpose of gaining clients.

Freelance Writing

If you started blogging because you truly enjoy and excel at the writing process, freelance writing for other blogs and publications is a great way to earn additional income as well as to build valuable experience and credibility within the writing world. This can include writing for print publications such as newspapers and magazines, as well as for larger websites or blogs.

If you are interested in freelance writing as a blogger, you may want to read *The Art of Freelance Blogging* by Kevin Muldoon or *The Birth of a Freelance Blogger* by Ruan Oosthuizen.

The following articles also have some great information about freelance writing as a blogger:

<http://www.problogger.net/archives/2011/05/27/why-bloggers-should-also-be-freelance-writers/>

<http://freelanceswitch.com/freelance-writing/how-to-become-a-freelance-blog-writer/>

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Chapter 10 Action Plan: Profit through Selling Your Own Products

- Begin thinking “outside the box” in terms of how to make money on your blog.
- Determine what your audience is asking for, and create a product to fill that need.
- Consider whether your content or subject matter lends itself to creating an e-book, teaching an e-course, or doing some sort of consulting work.
- Consider selling branded or handmade products.
- Consider seeking out freelance writing gigs to earn additional income.

Chapter 11:

Work Smarter, Not Harder

There are only 24 hours in a day. By this point you might be wondering how you, one person with kids, or a job, or a whole life outside of the blogging world could possibly be expected to do everything mentioned in this book.

The simple answer is this: You can't.

If you try to do everything mentioned in the previous ten chapters all at once you will either make yourself crazy, drive those around you crazy, or completely burn out before you even start. You might even manage to do all three. In any case, it won't get you very far.

When it really comes down to it, professional blogging for profit is a marathon, not a sprint. You have to be in it for the long haul and to keep telling yourself that the work put in on the front end will pay off eventually. If you try to rush it you may be setting yourself up to crash and burn. You also have to be strong enough to not listen to the people who don't get it, who tell you blogging is just a waste of time.

That said, there are lots of ways to work smarter in order to maximize your efficiency and get more done in less time. You may still not be able to do it all, but you will be able to do a lot more than you think.

Stay Organized

Between post ideas, income from thirty-seven different sources, important contacts, traffic statistics, social media, photos, craft supplies, recipes, schedules, deadlines, expenses, and everything else blogging related, staying organized can easily become totally overwhelming. There is just so much to keep track of!

Over the years I've tried many different planners, calendars, Google docs, and spreadsheets to stay organized. Ultimately I found what worked best for me was creating my own customized printable blog planner. It allows me to set both long-term and short-term goals, as well as manage my daily to-do list, schedule, editorial calendar, brainstorming sessions, monthly expenses, login info, traffic statistics, and contacts.

While this type of planner would probably not work for everyone, for me it has been the key to both my sanity and my productivity.

It includes:



LONG TERM BLOGGING GOALS
{things I want to do by: }

5 major goals I want to accomplish:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

5 site improvements I want to make:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

INCOME & TRAFFIC GOALS:

gross monthly income:
monthly unique visitors:
email subscribers:
monthly page views:
pinterest:
facebook:
twitter:
instagram:
google +:
alexa ranking:

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Long-Term Goals

Setting long-term goals helps take you out of the day-to-day busywork of just trying to stay on top of the next blog post or social media engagement and focus on the bigger picture. What do you hope to accomplish as a blogger? What is your end game? Where do you see yourself in one, five, or even ten years? It is pretty amazing how much more you can accomplish when you approach your daily task list with the perspective of how it will help you reach your long-term goals. It makes prioritizing and separating the essential from the time fillers much, much easier.

My long-term goal page includes five major goals and five improvement goals for the website itself, as well as specific goals for income, blog traffic, and social media statistics. While it would be very easy for me to set more than five, I purposely limited the number in order to keep my long-term goals easy to remember and (at least somewhat) realistic. I have my long-term goal page as the first page of my planner, and I refer to it daily. It is such great motivation and definitely helps me focus!



YEAR AT A GLANCE

january

february

march

april

may

june

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Year at a Glance

My blog planner includes a year-at-a-glance page that can help me keep perspective on the bigger picture. I use this for writing down big events, monthly themes, underwritten posts, blog conferences, vacations, and so on.



MONTHLY BLOGGING GOALS
{month: }

5 things I want to accomplish this month:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

3 site improvements I want to make:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

3 people or brands I want to connect with:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

INCOME & TRAFFIC GOALS:

gross monthly income:
monthly unique visitors:
monthly page views:
rss/email subscribers:
pinterest followers:
facebook followers:
twitter followers:
instagram followers:
google+:
alexa ranking:

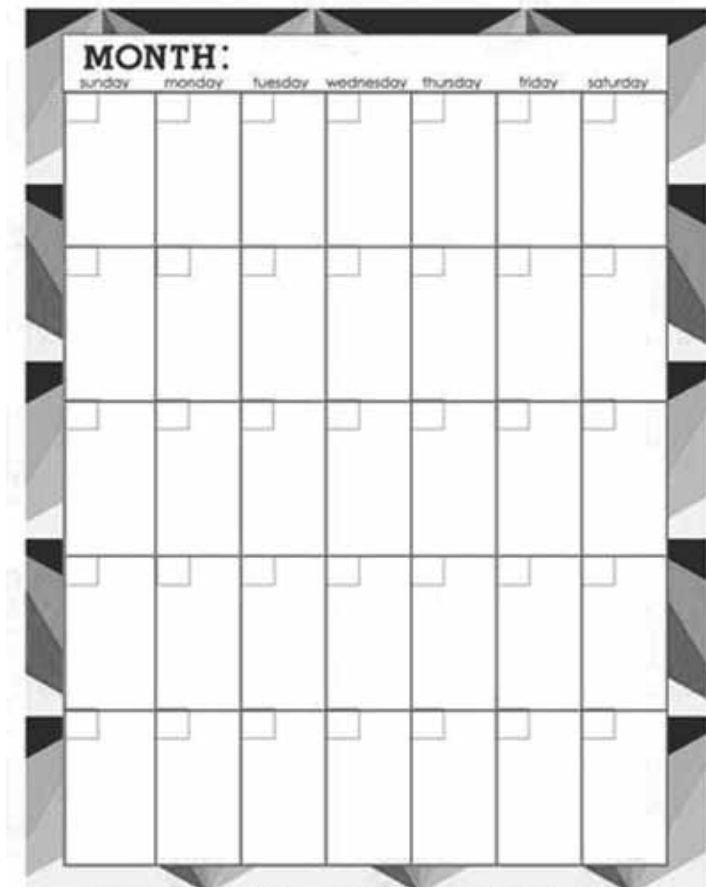
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Monthly Goals

Monthly goals are the medium-term goals that help break down long-term goals into manageable chunks and help focus my

priorities. I start by determining five major things I want to accomplish in a given month, then I also select three small site improvements I want to make. Because success in blogging has a lot to do with interpersonal connections, I also try to identify three people or brands I would like to reach out to.

The final section on my monthly goal sheet includes specific traffic and income goals. This allows me to have some measure of success, especially if I happen to be focusing on a particular metric in a given month, such as increasing my Facebook presence or growing my Instagram numbers.



MONTH:

sunday	monday	tuesday	wednesday	thursday	friday	saturday

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Monthly Calendar

Each monthly section has a monthly calendar that allows me to track appointments and phone calls, as well as see my whole editorial calendar for the month.



WEEKLY POST PLANNER
{week of: } }

post one:

Things to do this week:

post two:

post three:

notable moments!

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Weekly Post-Planning Pages

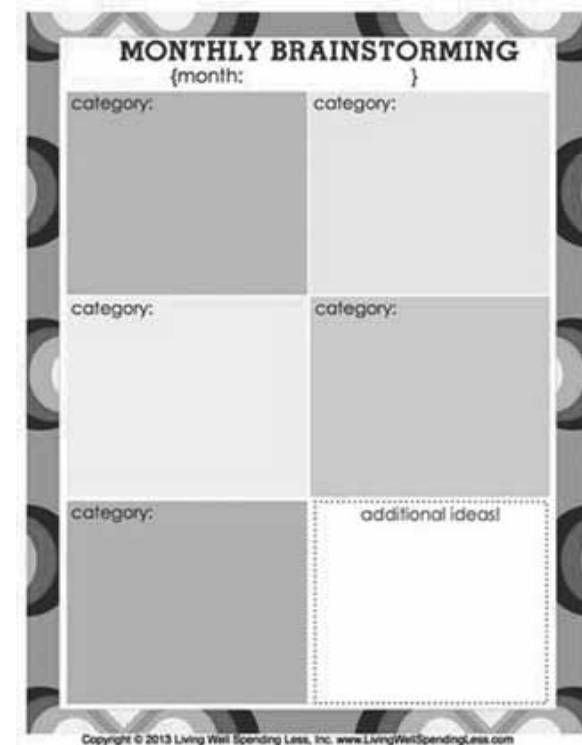
The weekly post-planning pages help me plan the details of each week's three major posts. I start by writing the post title, then make a short checklist of what steps I will have to complete to finish that post.

For instance, the steps for a recipe post might include the following:

1. Make recipe and take photos.
2. Upload and sort photos.
3. Edit photos.
4. Write post copy.
5. Insert photos into post.
6. Publish and promote post.

Because I will often be working on multiple posts simultaneously, this helps me keep better track of the individual progress for each post, since I can cross out items as I finish them.

The post-planning page also includes a weekly task list of the things I really need to get done that week. I will usually try to include a few things that help meet my monthly goals, as well as the ongoing day-to-day tasks such as email, Pinterest marketing, etc.



MONTHLY BRAINSTORMING
{month: } }

category:

category:

category:

category:

category:

additional ideas!

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Brainstorming Page

As I mentioned in chapter 2, I will usually schedule a brainstorming session for myself at least once a month to come up with new post ideas. On each of the five designated squares I will write down one subject category, then spend forty-five minutes to an hour thinking of as many new post ideas as I can for those subjects. There is also an “additional ideas” box for any ideas I happen to think of that don’t fit within the five categories.

MONTHLY STAT TRACKER
{month: }

INCOME
ad network income:
affiliate income:
private advertising income:
freelance writing income:
direct sales income:
other income:

TOTAL INCOME:

TRAFFIC
total monthly visits:
unique monthly visitors:
page views:
average page views per visit:
average visit duration:

RANKINGS & SOCIAL MEDIA
google page rank:
global alexa rating:
US alexa rating
pinterest:
facebook:
twitter:
you tube:
instagram:
google+:
other:

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Monthly Stat Tracker

This helps me keep track of my monthly income and blog statistics at the end of each month. While I think it is good to measure your progress each month, it is also important to not become obsessed with statistics. Tracking them once a month is generally a good rule of thumb.

[illegible]

Monthly Expense Tracker

A handy spot to write down any blog-related expenses.

CONNECTIONS
{conference/event: }

COMPANY:
contact name:
email/phone:
notes:

COMPANY:
contact name:
email/phone:
notes:

COMPANY:
contact name:
email/phone:
notes:

COMPANY:
contact name:
email/phone:
notes:

COMPANY:
contact name:
email/phone:
notes:

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Connection Sheets

Attending conferences is a great way to make new brand and blogger connections, but it is easy to lose track of all the important business cards (and other important information you want to remember from a particular conversation). I use these sheets to write down the contact information of the brands I felt I had a good connection with so that I am able to follow up later.

Notes

A few blank pages for notes come in very handy sometimes!

Putting It All Together

If you are interested in making a planner of your own, you can get free access to all the printable pages on my website here: <http://bit.ly/LWSLBlogPlanner>

You can then print out the pages that you want to use. I printed mine back-to-back, with the order as follows:

- Page 1: Cover (cardstock, laminated)
- Page 2: Daily Checklist (back of cover, laminated)
- Page 3: Long-Term Blogging Goals
- Pages 4, 5: Year at a Glance (page 5 was on cardstock)
- Page 6: Monthly Calendar (on cardstock)
- Page 7: Monthly Blogging Goals
- Pages 8, 9, 10, 11, 12: Weekly Post Planner
- Page 13: Monthly Stat Tracker
- Page 14: Monthly Brainstorming
- Page 15: Monthly Expense Tracker (on cardstock)
- **Repeat pages 6–15 for as many months as you want your planner to cover**
- Page 16: Log-In Tracker
- Page 17: Notes and Ideas
- Page 18, 19, 20, 21, 22: Connections
- Page 23: Notes and Ideas (cardstock, laminated)
- Page 24: Back cover (laminated)

I printed the front and back covers on heavy cardstock, then laminated them in order to make it more durable. I also printed the monthly calendar pages on cardstock so that each month would have an easy-to-find divider page, then added tabs to

those pages to make them even easier to find. Once all my pages were printed and in order, I took the whole bundle to Staples and had it coil-bound, which cost about \$5.

If this type of planner seems like way too much work, if you prefer to do everything digitally, or if you would rather do something totally different, that is fine too! The most important thing is finding a system of staying organized that works for you.

Time Management: Do Important Things First

I read a book a few years ago that totally changed the way I approached my daily task list. It was called *Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get Things Done* by Brian Tracy. It got its name from a quote by Mark Twain, who famously once said something to the effect of “if you eat a frog for breakfast, chances are that will be the worst thing you have to do all day.” The point of the quote—and the book—was that if you start your day by tackling your hardest but most important tasks, even if you don’t do that much for the rest of the day, you will still have accomplished a lot.

In blogging, it is really, really easy to get sucked into the time-wasting vortex of social media and email. They seem so important, so urgent, but before we know it, we’ve spent the whole day reacting to other people rather than proactively reaching our own goals. In my own experience, I found that when I stopped checking email first thing in the morning, and instead focused those first few hours of my day on writing and long-term projects, my productivity skyrocketed and I was finally able to start meeting my bigger goals.

While I could probably write a whole book just on how to be more productive as a blogger, here are a few more of the time-management strategies that have helped me the most:

- **Stick to a daily routine.** The more good habits you can create when it comes to blogging and working efficiently, the easier it will be to get things done. Our brains are pretty amazing, and although it initially takes a lot of willpower to create a new habit or routine, after a few weeks that behavior starts to go on autopilot. Starting your day in the same way each morning will tell your brain that it is time to work.
- **Make a daily checklist.** My own morning routine always starts with devotions, then a cup of coffee as I plan my task list for the day. I try to list my tasks in the order that I want to accomplish them, starting with the hardest and most essential tasks to my long-term goals. I use a 4x4 Post-It pad to make my list for a couple of reasons. First, it is small enough to keep my list manageable, and second, it sticks nicely to my current weekly planning page in my blog planner.
- **Set the timer.** Giving yourself a certain amount of time to work on each task helps keep you motivated and on task. I usually just put a time in parentheses after each task on my list.
- **Take regular breaks.** Our brains can work at any given task for about 90 minutes before we start to fade and get distracted. Taking a quick 5–15 minute break to get up and stretch, drink a glass of water, or have a snack before getting back to the grind can make a huge difference.
- **Delete the unessential.** If the number of things on your to-do list is far more than you can realistically get done, or the number of emails coming in is far more than you could ever possibly respond to, it is time to start deleting. While it is tempting to try to tackle the “easy” tasks or emails first, a smarter approach is to remove anything on your list or

in your inbox that doesn't line up with your overall long-term goals. Time is precious; don't waste it on the stuff that doesn't matter.

- **Work in bulk.** I've alluded to this one already in earlier chapters, but if you tend to do a lot of the same type of posts, such as DIY projects or recipes, it is far more efficient to plan, create, and photograph multiple posts at the same time. That way you can shop once, cook or create (and make a big mess) once, then upload and sort photos once. I will generally try to do at least a month's worth of DIY projects or recipes in one day, which ends up saving me a lot of time.
- **Use canned responses.** If you get a lot of the same type of questions or emails, taking the time up front to set up canned responses in Gmail can save you a *lot* of time and energy when it comes to tackling your inbox each day.
- **Bring your inbox to (almost) zero.** Email is a lot less overwhelming if you are starting from zero each day. Get into the habit of automatically deleting all non-essential emails, then quickly responding (using canned responses as much as possible) to the rest. Using folders and rules to automatically sort your incoming emails can help a lot as well.
- **Turn off all alerts.** It is a lot easier to resist the ding of email alerts and Facebook or Skype messages if you simply can't hear them. This goes for push notifications on your phone as well!
- **Save the mindless stuff for later in the day.** Willpower and discipline are finite resources, which means we tend to have less to draw on as the day goes on. Save your easy, more mindless tasks—such as responding to email, interacting on social media, and catching up on blog reading—for the time of day when you feel the least motivated.

Find Balance

I think one of the things that is most surprising—or annoying to those who don't understand it—about blogging is how completely all-consuming it can become. It gets into your head, and it is very hard sometimes to walk away and let it go, at least for a while.

The problem, I think, is twofold. First, when it comes to blogging, there is always so much more to do than is actually humanly possible, which means you are never really “done.” Second, we are surrounded by a constant stream of technology that allows us to be “connected” 24 hours a day, making it very difficult to tune it out and turn it off.

As I tell my husband sometimes, the reality of being a blogger is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it is the best job in the world, one I can do from home in my PJs sipping a cup of coffee with my daughter in my lap. On the other hand, I am literally always at work.

It takes conscious effort as a blogger to put aside the virtual world on a regular basis in favor of the real world. Ultimately, though, being actively engaged in the real world is what will make your blogging better. In order to be real and authentic online—the qualities that will attract people to your site, grow your traffic, and earn your income—you actually have to *be* real and authentic to the people that matter most—your spouse, your kids, and your friends.

Give yourself permission to *not* get it all done. Instead, allow yourself some margin. As my very wise friend Edie of www.LifeinGraceBlog.com recently said, “Margin is the space between our schedule and ourselves, the place where we give our souls room to breathe.” Stepping back and taking a break once in a while

will give you both perspective to see the bigger picture and motivation to keep going.

Professional blogging can be fun and exciting, interesting and fulfilling, and yes, even very profitable. At the same time, it can also be dull and tedious, mind-numbing and all-consuming, and it can take *years* before you ever see any real profit from all the hours put in. In other words, blogging is not for the faint of heart. It will take more than a little persistence and determination to be successful, but at the end of the day, finding a way to do what you love while maintaining your integrity makes all that hard work worth the effort.

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Chapter 11 Action Plan: Work Smarter, Not Harder

- Develop a system of staying organized, whether it be with a blog planner, series of folders, a virtual calendar, or something else. (Get my free printable blog planner here: <http://bit.ly/LWSLBlogPlanner>)
- Set concrete, quantifiable, long-term goals. Write them down!
- Improve your time management skills and do the important things first:
 - Stick to a daily routine.
 - Make a daily checklist.
 - Set the timer.
 - Take regular breaks.
 - Delete the unessential.
 - Work in bulk.
 - Used canned responses.
 - Bring your inbox to (almost) zero.
 - Turn off all alerts.
 - Save mindless stuff for later in the day.
- Work to maintain balance and find margin. Give yourself permission to not get it all done.

Chapter 12:

From Blog to Business

At some point, if you've followed the advice in this book, your blog will start earning some money. Perhaps it already is. It might start slowly at first, with just a small trickle of affiliate commissions or your very first painfully small AdSense check. You'll write an e-book that starts to build steam, or get approached by a brand to do your first paid endorsement. And before you know it, this thing that you built from nothing with your own two hands, this *blog*, will actually be generating a real income.

When that finally happens, it is a very sweet moment indeed.

And then, at some point after your blog begins generating an income, you may realize that your blog is not just a blog, it is a business. When people ask what you do for a living, you will proudly say, "I am a *blogger*!" You'll be so proud of your blogging business that it *might* not even matter to you when those same people roll their eyes with a condescending smirk and say, "Oh, a *blogger*. How *nice*!"

It won't matter—at least not too much—because you'll know what they don't, that blogging is quite possibly the best job in the world, and that the income possibilities are literally endless.

But it might sting, just a little.

The truth is that if your blog has developed to the point that it is generating an income, you are no longer just a blogger, you are an *entrepreneur*. And your blog is not a business; it is one of the *assets* of your business. It may be the biggest asset and the most significant asset, but it is only *one* of the assets. And I would dare to guess that your business probably has many other assets you may not have necessarily considered.

To take your business—and not just your blog—to the next level, you will need to have a clear idea not only of what your brand and business is about and who you are, but also where you are heading and where you want to go. In other words, you need to have a plan.

Creating a Plan for Your Business

A business plan sounds a little scary, but it is without a doubt one of the best things you will ever do for your blog and your business. In its most basic definition, a business plan is quite simply just a written statement of the current state of your business, your purpose and mission, a list of your business goals and objectives, the reasons you believe they are attainable, and a concrete plan for how you intend to achieve them.

Your business plan does not have to be long, nor does it have to be full of complicated terminology that no one understands. In fact, there might not ever be a single other person that reads it besides you. The purpose of your plan is not to impress anyone, but rather to create clarity in your own mind, not just of where your business is now, but where it is headed.

Here are a few sections you may want to include as you construct your own plan for your business.

Company Mission Statement

Your mission statement should be a succinct paragraph that sums up in 1–3 sentences what your company is trying to accomplish and what it stands for at its very core. It is something you can share with your audience or with your employees to let them know exactly what your business is about.

The best mission statements are generally clear, memorable, and relatively concise. This is not a time to use flowery language or to be vague or mysterious; on the contrary, your company mission statement should unambiguously let people know what you are trying to accomplish.

Here are a few examples:

Living Well Spending Less Inc.: The mission of Living Well Spending Less is to encourage, empower, and inspire women in their pursuit of the Good Life.

Southwest Airlines: The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit.

TED: Spreading ideas.

Habitat for Humanity International: Seeking to put God's love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, community, and hope.

Microsoft: To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential.

Google: Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

Starbucks: Our mission is to inspire and nurture the human spirit one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.

Nike: Our mission is to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world.

CVS Pharmacy: We will be the easiest pharmacy retailer for customers to use.

Harley-Davidson: We fulfill dreams through the experience of motorcycling, by providing to motorcyclists and the general public an expanding line of motorcycles and branded products in selected market segments.

Core Values

Your core values are the personal beliefs that you want your business to embody and represent. These are the values that will be shared by every member of your team, and they will be represented in all that your business does. They can be one-word values, or you can create sentences to explain these beliefs in more detail. Like your mission statement, your core values should be clear, memorable, and concise.

Here are a few examples:

Living Well Spending Less Inc.

- A belief in being good stewards of our resources
- A commitment to honesty and integrity in all that we do
- A commitment to kindness in how we treat everyone we meet
- A commitment to professionalism in our daily work
- A commitment to excellence in everything we produce
- A commitment to empowering and encouraging our audience
- A commitment to frugality and living within our means

AWeber

- Foster respect and cooperation.
- Listen to what people say about us.
- Invite feedback.
- Learn. Educate. Innovate.
- Don't take ourselves too seriously; have fun.
- Create remarkable experiences.

Barnes & Noble Booksellers

- Customer Service
- Quality
- Empathy
- Respect
- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Teamwork

Rackspace

- Fanatical support in all we do
- Results first, substance over flash
- Committed to greatness
- Full disclosure and transparency
- Passion for our work
- Treat fellow Rackers like friends and family

Google

- Focus on the user and all else will follow.
- It's best to do one thing really, really well.
- Fast is better than slow.
- Democracy on the web works.
- You don't need to be at your desk to need an answer.
- You can make money without doing evil.
- There's always more information out there.
- The need for information crosses all borders.

- You can be serious without a suit.
- Great just isn't good enough.

Target Audience

Understanding your target audience and the market you are aiming for is essential to an effective business plan. This section should include as much detailed and specific information about your blog readers or customers as possible, including age, gender, education, religious beliefs, interests, family status, income, and more. If you have multiple audiences, this should be indicated as well.

Company Assets

This is the section in which you list all of the things your business has going for it right now—all the tools in your toolbox that you can use and leverage to generate revenue and build a stronger company. Your company's top asset will most likely be your blog, but this list will also include things such as your email list, your social-media reach, and other less tangible strengths such as strong writing abilities, speaking abilities, personal expertise, a compelling story, powerful friendships, and so on.

Long-Term Business Goals

Your long-term business goals should force you to look forward at least 2–5 years. Take a step back from the nitty-gritty, day-to-day operation of running your business and try to take a look at the bigger picture for a few moments. What is it that you are trying to accomplish in your business? How will your business make a profit? Is that profit sustainable? Are there operations you could put into place now that might make a huge difference down the road? What is your exit strategy in case you decide you don't want to do this anymore?

In addition to your big-picture strategy, your long-term business goals should also include sales and growth targets, including long-term, annual-sales goals (i.e., we want to reach \$X in sales by the end of 20XX), as well as goals for the number of visitors your site receives, number of social-media followers, and number of email subscribers.

Short-Term Business Objectives

Short-term business objectives should include the main things you want to accomplish with your business in the next year. These objectives could include what products you want to create and develop, specific plans to grow your platform, or any of the other pieces you need to put in place to start working toward your long-term business goals. They should also include specific benchmarks for sales, traffic, social media, and subscribers.

Action Plan

This section of your business plan should include the specific action you plan to take to accomplish both your long-term goals and your short-term objectives. This could be a list of numbered steps that should be performed in order, or it could break down the plan month by month, into specific action items that must be done every month for the next year, along with what needs to happen in subsequent years. The more clear and specific you can be about what needs to happen when, the more able you will be able to implement your business plan in its entirety.

Build a Strong Support Team

Even with a solid business plan in place, and even if you manage to master every single time-management technique mentioned

in the previous chapter, you will probably find that you still can't do it all. Blogging is essentially a black hole of endless tasks—a reality that sometimes drives my engineer-minded husband crazy. No matter how much you get done, or how efficient you are, you are never ever really finished. Depending on how large your blog is and whether you are making enough money to justify the expense, you may want to hire help.

What your helper or helpers do will depend largely on what your blog requires, what things take up most of your time, and what you simply don't want to do. Blog helpers, real-life assistants, or virtual assistants (VAs) can do everything from writing posts to managing email and social media to negotiating with brands or managing ad space. You can also hire help to manage bookkeeping, legal issues, technical issues, and design work.

In my own business, I have a wonderful office support team that includes an administrative assistant and a copy and photo editing assistant, as well some other amazing people who assist with contractual work, including a CPA, web designer, ad revenue manager, PR team, literary agent, and attorney.

Whether or not you prefer to hire in-office help or virtual help is largely a matter of personal preference. If you work from home without a dedicated office space, having someone come to your house might not work very well, and, in some cases, may be a violation of residential code restrictions. On the other hand, it can sometimes be difficult to create a close working relationship with someone who works virtually, particularly someone who will be representing you in some sort of capacity online. Over the years I have had both virtual and in-office assistants, and I have found that I definitely prefer working with assistants face-to-face rather than virtually.

If you are thinking of hiring someone to help with your blog, whether they be virtual or live, here are a few tips that will help you find the right person for the job:

- **Determine what the biggest needs are for your business.** Once you have created a plan for your business with clear goals and objectives, as well as an action plan for how to achieve those goals, it is much easier to see where your own deficiencies lie and where the most help is needed.
- For instance, in my own business I am pretty good at big-picture strategy and creating content, but not always great about following up with details. I realized early on that I could be far more effective if I hired someone super organized and meticulous to handle all the small details I tend to let slide, such as managing my schedule, email, paperwork, and bookkeeping. It's not that I am not capable of doing those things myself, but hiring someone else to do them even better than I could allows me to stay focused on the things I do best and keeps my business running smoothly. This, in turn, helps bring me closer to my goals!
- **Create a crystal-clear job description that is in line with your business objectives.** When you feel like you are drowning and desperate for help, it may seem like a waste of precious (or nonexistent) time to spend a few hours working on a job description, but this step is one of the most important things you will ever do for your business. Creating a job description forces you to evaluate exactly what kind of help you need most and what type of person would be the best fit to help you reach your goals. It also helps the person you are hiring know with certainty what the expectations of their job will be.

- **Ask for references or referrals.** Hiring a virtual assistant—even one whose time you buy in a bulk block of hours—is no different than hiring any other employee. You should always conduct an interview as well as ask for references. If you're not sure where to even start looking for help, ask around to your other blogger friends, or do a Google search to see what other bloggers have written about hiring assistants.
- **Start with a short-term project.** Test the work ethic and skill set of your new hire by starting them with a short-term project that has a definite end. Explain that you need help with a particular project for just a few weeks. That way at the end of the project you have the chance to either walk away with no hard feelings or hire them permanently.
- **Create clearly defined goals and expectations.** Have a measurable list of what you want done, what the performance expectations are, as well as your timeframe for achieving your goals. Do regular performance reviews to ensure those goals are being met.
- **Communicate regularly.** It is hard to work with someone you can't communicate with. Check in at least several times a week to be sure you are always on the same page. This is especially important for employees who work virtually. Consider setting up a chat room on Skype, or schedule regular meetings just to check in.
- **Set a budget.** Know how many hours you are willing to pay for per week, then keep track to make sure your assistant is making the most of the time you are paying for.

- **Don't be afraid to make a change.** If you don't feel that the assistant you have hired is working out for you, be willing to either talk to them about your concerns or search for someone new. Ultimately the person who works for you has to work with your style, or they will cause more stress than they alleviate.

While finding the right assistant can feel a little daunting at times, it is always worth taking the time to make sure the person you hire is a good fit for your business. A great assistant is almost always worth their weight in gold, and I have found that I have never regretted investing time, energy, and money into hiring and training the right person. On the contrary, hiring help and building a strong support team has consistently allowed me to bring my business to the next level, which ultimately pays for itself.

One Step at a Time

If you've reached the end of this book, you may be wondering how you will ever possibly complete all the tasks mentioned. How are you, as just one person, possibly supposed to simultaneously create amazing content, drive traffic, conquer social media, monetize effectively, and create a solid business plan all at one time?

The simple answer? You can't, and you won't.

You instead will have to constantly reprioritize, reevaluate, out-source when possible, and shift your focus when necessary. In other words, you need to take it one step at a time!

It often surprises people to hear that I spend about 60-70 percent of my workweek writing and editing content. And despite how much my blog and business continue to grow or how many

opportunities become available, creating amazing, compelling, bring-me-back-for-more content will always be my top priority.

The remainder of how I spend my time changes frequently, based on where my current focus and priorities are. I generally have a few specific goals each month, which I keep track of in my blog planner and I base my schedule on the 1-3 current projects or goals I am working on. In other words, I don't try to tackle everything at once!

In the midst of a busy life and schedule, when you are just barely able to keep your head above water, the thought of actually getting ahead enough to make a plan can seem like an impossible task.

Do it anyway.

You will never regret the time you take to be purposeful about your blog and your business. If you have to, get up a half hour earlier every morning and spend that time working only on your plan and your long-term goals. Those thirty minutes a day, spread over the course of a year, will add up to a very big change.

You can do it. I know you can.

And I promise it will be worth the effort!

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Chapter 12 Action Plan: Build Your Business

- Understand that your blog is not your business, it is an *asset* of your business, and that you are not a blogger, you are an *entrepreneur*.
- Create a solid plan for your business. It should include the following:
 - Company Mission Statement
 - Core Values
 - Target Audience
 - Company Assets
 - Long-Term Business Goals
 - Short-Term Business Objectives
 - Action Plan
- Consider hiring help in order to build a strong support team. Create job descriptions for necessary personnel, then work to find or train the right people to fill those positions.

Appendix

For a full list of the services or resources recommended in this book, plus a list of additional recommended blogging resources, go to:

<http://bit.ly/bloggingresources>

Elite Blog Academy

Now that you've read the book, are you ready to take your blog—and business—to the next level? Get all the tools you need for blogging success in my new comprehensive, life-changing course.

Through a powerful combination of effective videos, practical and insightful handouts, and purposeful assignments, **Elite Blog Academy** will empower, enable, and inspire you to take the specific steps necessary to transform your blog into a successful and profitable business.

In fact I am so sure these proven, field tested strategies will work for your blog, regardless of your niche and no matter your target audience, I am willing to put it in writing and offer a 200% money-back guarantee. **If you fully complete the course and have not**

seen measurable results in both your traffic and income growth I will give you *double* your money back, no questions asked.

You've literally got nothing to lose.

Find out more at www.EliteBlogAcademy.com

Glossary

Ad network-A company that sells Internet advertising space.

Affiliate network-A company that provides affiliate relationships for a variety of retailers.

Affiliate sales-Sales made through a special link that result in a commission.

Blog hop-A special blog post hosted on a website that allows other blogs to add their link, for the purpose of generating traffic to their own website.

CPM-Cost Per Mille (Thousand)

Deep link-An affiliate link that goes directly to a specific product or page.

Fill rate-The percentage of ads shown per page view.

Google DFP-Double Click for Publishers—A Google service that allows blog publishers to “stack” or “waterfall” their ads so that the ads compete against each other for the best rate.

Link party- A special blog post hosted on a website that allows other blogs to add their blog post link, for the purpose of generating traffic to their own website, usually with some sort of central theme (i.e. DIY or recipes)

Pillar Content-High quality blog posts that drive traffic

PPC-Pay Per Click—ads that are paid based on the number of clicks they receive.

Private advertising-Advertising that is negotiated directly with the advertiser, rather than through an Ad Network

SEO-Search Engine Optimization—the process of optimizing your web pages to result in increased search engine traffic.

Sponsored content-Blog posts or other content that is paid for or sponsored by advertisers.

The Fold-A term derived from newspapers, but referring to the point at which your reader has to scroll down to see more content

Waterfalling-The process of arranging ads so that the highest paying ads are shown first in order to optimize ad revenue.

About The Author

Ruth Soukup is a writer, blogger, mom of two, and the successful founder of the blog LivingWellSpendingLess.com. Since launching in 2010, Living Well Spending Less has become one of the most popular personal finance blogs on the net, receiving more than one million visitors per month. She is the author of the best-selling blogging guide How to Blog for Profit (Without Selling Your Soul), and the founder of Elite Blog Academy, an in-depth business course for bloggers and professional communicators. Her next book, Living Well, Spending Less: 12 Secrets of the Good Life (Zondervan) will be released in January 2015. For more information about Ruth or Elite Blog Academy, please visit www.EliteBlogAcademy.com