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How to Blog Your Way to Small-Business Success

It seems like everyone has a blog these days—but most business owners don't. They should

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It might seem like everyone has a Web presence—a blog or a Facebook page—but that certainly isn't true for small-business owners. Only about 41 percent have their own interactive websites, according to a 2008 [survey](#) by small-business advisory service Warrillow & Co. So, if folks can't even manage the E-commerce basics, a blog is probably low on their priority list.

To some business owners, blogging can seem less worthwhile than a website because of some bloggers' reputation for being self-absorbed and trivial. "I associated [blogs] with pretentiousness and blowhards," says Justin Kenagy, an Atlanta-based cofounder of Onyx Consulting, a computer services firm with 15 employees.

But Kenagy's tune changed once he actually gave blogging a shot and began updating [his own](#) last year. He quickly found it a great way to drive Internet traffic to his business's Web page and get more people to notice Onyx. Blog-generating services like Typepad or Wordpress automatically format blogs in such a way that search engines can pick up on words and phrases. And, of course, the more you update, the better chance you have of turning your blog into a must-read site. For those reasons, "a blog gives a small-business owner the ability to show up much higher in the Google rankings than any kind of static website," says John Jantsch, a blogger since 2002 and author of the [Duct Tape Marketing](#) Blog.

Getting Google hits can be a marketing plan in and of itself, simply because so many potential customers turn to Google before anything else when looking for a service. "Small businesses are starting to understand that people don't come to your main Web page. They ask Google," says Chris Brogan, who has blogged since 1999. His [blog](#), about social media and business, is in blog tracker's Technorati top 200 on the Web.

But blogging can be a time sinkhole. Joel Libava, a Cleveland entrepreneur who runs his own franchise consulting business, started [the Franchise King](#) blog four years ago. He says that only in the past year has he noticed a big impact from his blog writing. All that typing finally paid off. "As opposed to going out to seek franchise candidates, I found that they seek me now," Libava says.

So how does a busy small-business owner make sure the valuable time or she spends blogging isn't going to waste?

1) **Be a reader of blogs.** Blogging has its own unique language that is different from other forms of writing. To understand how to speak that language yourself, it helps to regularly follow at least a few other blogs. Find blogs in your areas of interest by searching for them with Technorati or Google Blog Search. Becoming a fan of blogs paid off for Libava because it gave him plenty of places to post comments—which directed people to his blog.

2) **Don't stress about it too much.** Even though being a successful blogger takes work, trying to do too much can be almost as bad as never updating your blog. "I see a lot of people struggle that they have to write 700-word feature articles," explains Jantsch. "A lot of people who have that mentality never get down to writing the thing." Jantsch recommends short, breezy, and conversational posts. He thinks that posting three to five times a week is adequate.

3) **Don't do adspeak.** Even if you're blogging to promote your business, you can't seem like you are only interested in promoting yourself. That is a big turnoff in the blogosphere. A better way to approach blogging, Brogan recommends, is to give the readers what they want: useful, specialized information that comes from your own experience. Business owners who deal with practical issues every day are in a unique position of knowledge to write top-10-style "how-to" lists. That format often gets a lot of attention on the Web.

4) **Tell a story without ranting.** Many blogs on the Internet have a personal diary-like quality to them, where the author keeps a daily track of what's going on in his or her life. It can be good to add a personal touch to your blog about your business topic because it humanizes you and might make the reader more interested in your business. But don't overdo it. Long rants about personal subjects will get in the way of conveying the

information that makes you sound like a credible source—which is why most business people start blogging in the first place. "Let people know enough about you to connect," recommends Jantsch.

5) **Keep it simple with search engine optimization.** That's the term for getting the most out of Google searches for your site. There are countless ways to figure out how to make your blog more search-engine friendly. But trying to know everything about it is almost a second job. "That's probably something that it wouldn't be in the best interests for a small-business owner to know how to do inside out," says Brogan. Just do the few things that matter the most for search engines. A biggie is prominently using phrases that will cater to the potential customers searching for you. "I guarantee that people in town are going online first to find products and services," Jantsch says. So if you're blogging about plumbing and you are based in Buffalo, don't just blog about "drain clogs": Write about "drain clogs" and "Buffalo." Another easy thing to do is to insert links to other pages in your posts, which also makes Google searches more likely to find you.

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