

Better business blogging



So here I am, late 2009 and we're still talking about blogging. Many might just roll their eyes at the thought, but there are still some valuable lessons to be learned — mistakes made at the very beginning can be with you until the very end. Wayne Smallman founder of web design, development and internet marketing consultancy Octane Interactive explains further.

Getting a blog “on the cheap” is the first kind of gotcha that can bite hardest. We all know who Google are, and many of us will know about their Blogger blogging service. It’s free, it’s simple to use and a lot of the hassles of day-to-day publishing management are handled for you. WordPress is arguably one of the best free blogging services there is, and just like Google’s Blogger, they too offer a hosted blogging system, but with many more features to control and customize your blog.

However, this simplicity has a caveat; if you want to move onto something more serious and professional at a later date, you’ll either need to get your hands dirty, or pay someone to get theirs dirty for you.

Dirty in what way? Well blogging is often all about link equity; the value, in terms of search engine visibility, of having lots of links to your articles. Links are essentially the web equivalent of an endorsement or a referral by someone. When someone links to one of your articles, they're more likely to be doing so because they value what you wrote. Move your blog location, and you lose all of those endorsements.

Now let’s say your marketing team have decided that they want more control over your company blog. Typically, that means moving the blog onto your own domain. But in doing so, you’re stepping away from the one you’ve already got and the search engine visibility it has achieved. Dilemma.

On the plus side, you can export all of your articles from both Blogger and WordPress to your new self-hosted WordPress blog. That way, you lose none of your hard work. However, unless you’d gone to the trouble of having your own web address associated with your freely hosted blog, you may lose almost all of the link equity you may have acquired.

For these reasons, it's worth considering having your blog on your own domain from day one — and there are further benefits. With a self-hosted blog, you have more control over what it looks like. Many has been the time when I've visited a company website, clicked to view the blog, and hit a visual speed bump, which doesn't exactly extol professionalism. Worse still, such blogs often use a default design template, which looks very basic and clearly shows a lack of finish.

Arguably the most important reason to be in control of your own blog is the prospect of combining it with your company website (should you have one), to create a much greater target for the search engines to find. The likes of Google and Bing love "content churn" — a regular stream of new articles.

To the search engines, this means regular activity and a commitment to writing. Also, each time you write about your chosen subject, you use more words and phrases that are specific to your industry or field. This in turn gives the search engines more to work with, enabling them to get a better, more accurate fix on what you do. And once people begin linking to those articles, the search engines will interpret those links as endorsements, assigning greater value to your blog which should ultimately increase the traffic to other pages on the main website.

And thinking further about your company website and how a link is an endorsement, there's a good chance that you have product and / or service pages. This is good. In fact, it's excellent. I'm assuming you value your products and services, right? During the course of writing articles for your blog, at some point, you're bound to make reference to those products and services. In those instances, I would recommend you link to them. This too is an endorsement, and you're also pointing a visitor towards a possible goal funnel (the visitor performs some kind of action, such as a purchase, a download, adding a review, contacting your sales team etc).

All this might all sound like a lot of work, but in reality, it's all a question of planning: first, write your articles, then secondly, go back through and add the links at a later date. I would also recommend adding a list of links to related articles, too. But this is down to personal choice.

With a little planning and some forethought, creating and managing your company blog needn't be a hassle or a burden. And by avoiding the aforementioned common mistakes from the outset, you'll be making a clean start, instead of having to get your hands dirty.

Wayne Smallman is the founder of web design, development and internet marketing consultancy Octane Interactive and the man behind the popular Blah, Blah! Technology blog, a focal point for his passion for technology, and a hallmark of his business mentality, writing style, and adeptness at making complex technology issues approachable and accessible.