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THE SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL BLOGS AND SUCCESSFUL BLOGGERS

YOU'VE READ THEM and been dazzled by them: blogs that attract huge followings of passionate and highly engaged readers. What sets these blogs apart from other blogs? What do successful bloggers do differently than other bloggers? And what can magazine blogs learn from the top bloggers and blogs?

FOCUS

Focus is key when it comes to blogging. A blog shouldn't try to be all things to all people. It should stick to its content niche and do its best to attract and retain its ideal reader. The most successful blogs are those that stake a claim to a particular content niche. They become known for being the place to go for insider information on that particular topic.

Tip: Help first-time visitors to your blog to figure out what your blog is all about by defining your blog's focus and mandate in its tagline (the line of text that typically appears under the header of your blog) and by introducing the people behind the blog (to establish credibility).

QUALITY CONTENT

Successful blogs are distinguished by consistently excellent content. Top-quality writing. Great photos. Amazing videos. Insider information. Thought-provoking ideas. The bloggers who create content for these blogs put their readers first by:

- Ensuring that the reader will benefit from each post
- Helping the reader to find other useful content by linking to other relevant, top-quality editorial
- Making it easy for readers to distinguish between advertorial and editorial, just as you would do in your main publication
- Resisting the temptation to bury readers in SPAM (an occasional product pitch is fine, but you don't want your blog to become known as your magazine brand's spammy sidekick)

Why settle for good when your blog could be great? Ana-

lyze your blog statistics (page views, links to page) to find out which types of content your readers like best:

- Which types of posts attract the most readers?
- Which are shared the most often?
- Which tend to spark the most conversations (via blog comments or social media)?

Tip: Linking to great content isn't merely a way to attract and retain blog readers: it's also a way to score points with the search engines. Search engines reward websites that link to top-calibre, relevant content.

CONSISTENCY

Posting consistently is very important. Establish a blogging schedule and stick to that schedule. Aim to post often but not too often. Odds are yours isn't the only blog your readers read. On the other hand, you don't want to post so infrequently that your readers forget about your blog altogether. If you're not sure how often is too often for your particular group of blog readers, survey them to find out whether the number of posts you're publishing each week is too many, too few, or just right.

Tip: If you're tempted to publish a half-dozen blog posts in a single day, consider banking some of the posts with less time-sensitive content for your busier or less inspired days.

WEB-FRIENDLY

When you're writing a blog post, remember that you're writing for the web. That means writing headlines that grab readers' attention without being so cryptic that readers have to guess what the post is about. It also means chunking your text, writing in short paragraphs, and using bullets and checklists, where appropriate. Include sharing tools (addthis, sharethis) so that readers who enjoy a particular post can post it to their favourite social media platforms quickly and easily.

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Tip: Don't overlook the importance of discoverability. There is a huge (and ever-growing) amount of content available online. To make it easier for your posts to be found by search engines, tag each blog post with highly descriptive content tags and be sure to tag your images in an equally descriptive manner (example: crawling-baby.jpg as opposed to image001.jpg).

STYLE

Blogging is meant to be personal. Give your readers the opportunity to get to know the person—or people—behind the blog.

Tip: Don't be afraid to admit it if you make a mistake. Your readers will appreciate your honesty. Also, be sure to say thank you and to acknowledge credit when credit is due. Niceties count a lot in the world of social media.

COMMUNITY

It takes a village to build a blog. As you prepare to launch your blog, pause to consider who will be the members of your blogging village—the people (and/or publications) who will read and comment on your blog and whose

blogs you will read and comment on in return. Create an email list for your blog so that you don't have to rely exclusively on RSS feeds or posts to social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to bring readers back to your blog. Instead, ask readers who have enjoyed reading your posts to sign up to be notified by email about future posts to your blog. Be prepared to make a long-term commitment to your blog. A blog audience isn't built overnight. It also takes time to find your blog's voice and to really zero in on your niche. But persistence can and does pay off.

Tip: Look for opportunities to get to know your readers. Not only will this allow you to have a clear picture in your head of your ideal reader when you sit down to write a blog post. It will also provide you with opportunities to forge relationships that go beyond the blog.

BLOGS ABOUT BLOGGING

10,000 Words (mediabistro.com/10000words)

JaneFriedman.com

Prologger.net

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