



How to Make Your Corporate Blog a Lead Generation Machine

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Chapter 1

THE BENEFITS OF BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS



I was inspired to write this ebook by some of the common questions I am often asked by small and medium-sized business owners. See if any of these questions sound familiar to you:

- What is the advantage of a corporate blog?
- Everyone's blogging these days, how can my company possibly stand out?
- Can't I just hire some PR student to write my blog for me?
- How can my business generate leads by blogging?
- Why would anyone care about what I have to say?
- I have a business to run, how can I make time for blogging?

Why Blog?

Let's start by talking about why you may want to consider a corporate blog as an important part of your marketing strategy.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you in a business that needs to generate leads?
- Do you need to build brand recognition, brand loyalty and market share?
- Do you want to establish your organization as a thought leader or go-to resource in your industry?
- Do your customers and potential customers need more information to effectively use your product or service?
- Are you seeing a decline in your results from traditional advertising?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, then you will want to take a serious look at the benefits a corporate blog could bring to your business. Blogging is not for every company. Many launch a blog without a clear vision and mandate, proper planning, resource allocation or thought-out marketing strategy. Sooner or later (likely sooner) these blogs typically fall by the wayside.

A corporate blog is a major commitment. A successful blog needs a reason to exist. It must respond to a need your target audience has for specific information. To succeed and have a meaningful voice, it must have a well thought out strategy and marketing plan as well as a feasible tactical execution plan. It cannot hope to sur-

vive by draining already overloaded colleagues who you hope can fit in a blog post on their lunch break.

Also remember that a blog is only one part of a content marketing strategy. Using appropriate social media platforms and newsletters to distribute your content is critical to success. You essentially become a publisher, producing content that is not only interesting to your audience but also varied in format. Like ebooks, whitepapers, webinars, podcasts, virtual conferences; the list goes on.

The ROI on Corporate Blogging

If it sounds like an awful lot of work, you're right, it is. But the rewards of your efforts can be reaped; here's what I've experienced:

Lead generation: *check*. If your blog consistently posts fresh, relevant content that is of interest to your target audience many will be motivated to sign up for your newsletter or blog. Several thousand people may opt in to receive your content. More on how to nurture those leads in a later chapter.

Building brand recognition and loyalty: *check, check*. Your audience will freely share your useful and valued content, getting your name out there and gaining new exposure for your brand. Enthusiastic advocates of your content and brand evangelists will emerge, spreading the word. People will check out your product or service because they trust and admire your content.

Thought leader and go-to resource: yes, you really do have the opportunity to achieve this position in your industry. Maintain quality, consistency and stay true to your blog mission. Your audience will start coming to you for advice and sending others your way. For one corporate blog I conceived, planned and implemented, we actually surveyed our target audience and asked them what they needed to learn about, then committed to answering their questions on the blog.

There is research you should conduct before deciding whether you should propose a corporate blog for your organization. We'll take a look at that next.

Chapter 2

TO BLOG OR NOT TO BLOG...



If you are seriously considering a corporate blog as part of your inbound marketing strategy, your next step before calling in the designers and deciding who is going to write for this thing, is to do your research. Done properly, your research should tell you whether a blog makes sense for your company or not. It should also tell you what you should and should not do with your blog in order for it to be a success.

I have developed Content Marketing strategies for a number of different clients and I would like to share my approach to research with you in this post.

First of all, clearly identify your target audience. If your company is B2C your audience may be broader than B2B, but you still need to be specific about who you want to reach with your blog content. Your target audience may be representative of your current customer/consumer base or a new market segment you want to attract.

The next step is to find out what they want from a content perspective. The best way to find this out is to ask. A good old-fashioned survey works well.

Ask the Right Questions

I recommend setting up an online survey using a tool like Survey Monkey or Zoomerang; there are several other options but be sure to select one that enables your branding, is easy to use and has a good reporting tool. Use all possible channels to distribute your survey: email, your website, social media and through partners. You can always offer some sort of incentive to increase your response rate; I have found that prize draws for free products or services and gift certificates work very well. Shamelessly promote your survey including the incentive offer.

Here are some key questions I suggest asking:

- Would you be interested in following a new blog on <subject> or <list of subjects>? *If no, ask them to advise what subject matter interests them more.*
- Do you currently follow any blogs on <subject> or <list of subjects>? Please list which ones.
- What sort of information is missing from posts you currently read on <subject>?
- Please rank your interest level in each of these topics (*Provide list of topics relevant to subject matter*)
- What type of content delivery formats do you prefer? Check all that apply (ie newsletter, RSS feed, email)
- What newsletters do you currently subscribe to?

- How frequently do you want to see new content?
- What type of content formats do you prefer? (ie video, podcast, blog post, webinars etc)
- Are you participating on any social networks? Please check all that apply.
- How frequently do you share content of interest to you on social networks?
- Do you have your own blog?

Survey Says...

The results of the survey will give you direction for moving forward, or not. You will know whether your target audience is interested in your blog concept, or not. Is there a substantial market out there for your blog? You can check out competitive blogs survey respondents are following and decide if you can supply content that better meets their needs. You can decide if you have or can outsource the capabilities to deliver content in the format they want on the topics they are most interested in. You will see if your readers are active on line and likely to help promote your blog by sharing content.

Effective Content Marketing requires a superior understanding of the specific information needs of your audience. Consumers and B2B clients expect content that provides value to their lives and are “turned off” by generic messaging. By taking the time to understand your audience’s specific interests, you likely have a great business opportunity with a corporate blog as long as you can deliver.

In the next chapter, let’s take a look at the key considerations when planning out your corporate blog.

Chapter 3

THE MASTER PLAN



Don't start emailing potential authors or dreaming up blog post topics just yet. Take a deep breath, sit down at your computer and start the hard work of drawing up a detailed plan before you do anything else. A well-thought out plan will save you a lot of potential headaches later.

Below are some of the questions you will need to answer and elements you will want to consider:

The Purpose of Your Blog

What is the purpose of your blog; it's mission? Clearly articulate this in one sentence: the "elevator pitch". It is important to have extreme clarity on the goal of the blog, as it will act as your guiding light for what you will and won't publish. Write the draft copy for your "About" page, which should set the tone and expectations for your readers and contributors.

What is the vision you have for your corporate blog? What do you envision will happen as a result of your blog's existence? It needs to really reflect who you are as a company; your brand personality; what your organization believes in and what it stands for.

Here is an example of the mission and vision I crafted for [The Lab blog](#):

"Welcome to The Lab. Our mission is to give artists like you what you really need to grow your freelance careers – information and advice from the best experts in the industry. The answers to your burning questions."

"It's our vision that The Lab will become *the* place for artists to find resources that show you how to build the business of your dreams, one that's both inspiring and profitable. We're passionate about artist marketing and are committed to bringing you the very best information available, anywhere."

Your Content Marketing Objectives

Why are you recommending that you go down this road? What will the company gain as a result? You've already thought this through (*see Chapter One*) but include your business goals in the plan. Some typical examples of corporate blog goals:

Inbound lead generation and nurturing

Gain new customers

Retain current customers and build loyalty

Build brand awareness

Become a thought-leader in your industry

Test new product or service ideas

Improve search engine ranking and increase website traffic

Differentiate your organization from the competition

Your Content Marketing Strategies

Once you have established your big picture goals for your company blog, the next step is to think through your strategies for:

Blog design, format, layout and required elements

Content (subject matter, topics, delivery formats, post frequency)

Contributors and blog management including resource and training requirements

Editorial approach and process, blogging guidelines

Marketing (how will you promote the blog and build it's following? How does the blog fit into the bigger picture of your overall marketing plan and integrate with other elements?)

Then it's on to the fun stuff. Once this is all figured out, you will need to determine how much all of this is going to cost and prepare a budget. And most importantly how are you going to measure the success of the blog? What are the key performance metrics and how are you going to track these?

Now let's dig a little deeper into planning your business blog strategies.

Chapter 4

7 STEPS TO PLANNING YOUR CORPORATE BLOG



We've all seen many business blogs that begin with the best of intentions; publishing regular well-written posts that gradually start decreasing in frequency and then just fizzle out, often within a relatively short period of time. *What's the secret to ensuring that this doesn't happen to your blog?* It's simple: proper detailed planning up front. Let's explore all the elements to address in your plan to maximize your opportunity for success:

The Commitment

First of all, be clear with yourself and all other stakeholders that a corporate blog is a major commitment, not one to be taken lightly. **Bottom-line, there is a lot of day-to-work to make your business blog a continued success.** All involved should agree upfront that the company has the resources to maintain the commitment. Once agreed, proceed to The Plan.

The Business Blog Planning Checklist

Planning all the details upfront helps save headaches later. Here is a fairly comprehensive list of 7 key decisions to be made when planning your corporate blog:

1. Choose your blogging weapon. Make a list of what tools you need in your blog and then research comparative reviews of the top blogging platforms to determine which best fits your needs. Check out Technorati Media's [State of the Blogosphere 2011](#) as well as their 2012 series [Igniting Social Media](#) for trends. For example, some of the tools you need to look at are social sharing widgets, built-in syndication, what the commenting system is like and whether there is the ability for multiple authors to contribute.

2. Define your content strategy. Based on your blog's vision and mission, clearly define the type of content your blog will *and won't* post for your contributors. Your strategy also includes content formats and media (text, video, webinars, imagery, podcasts etc.). You may want to have "series" of posts on particular topics or use certain days of the week to publish certain types to keep your readers interested. **Also, decide on your publishing frequency, choose an editorial calendar format and create a publishing schedule with timelines for all required tasks.**

3. Individual blog or blogging collective? Will there be a single author of your blog, such as the CEO or owner of the company? If so, will the CEO/owner actually write or will you need to hire a ghostwriter? Will multiple employees participate and who? Or will you have multiple authors participating including external industry experts? Why or why not? If you are using non-employee contributors, what is your compensation policy and if so, what is your budget?

4. "Hire" your staff. Who will fill the role of editor-in-chief and publisher? This person will be responsible to maintain the vision and the mission of the blog, source contributors, have final approval of content before it is published and approve the publication schedule, as well as develop new content concepts and themes ongoing. You also need an editor to prepare the publication schedule, assign and follow up on posts, proof, edit and reply to comments. Do you have a social media specialist to promote blog content in the appropriate networks? Social media plays a big role in driving traffic to the blog so this responsibility needs to be assigned. All of these roles can be outsourced to professionals if you do not have the internal resources.

5. To comment or not to comment. Will you allow comments on your blog? You should. If you decide yes, do you want to moderate them before publishing or just allow them to automatically publish? If you decide to moderate, **set formal guidelines for response timelines and processes for dealing with negative comments.** Ideally the moderator should have PR training and know how to respond in all situations.

6. Are you getting bang for your buck? Based on your blog objectives, decide what and how you are going to measure. Does your blog have built-in reporting or will you need to use a third party utility? Schedule regular stats reviews to stay on top of trends, what's hot, what's not and number of leads and conversions. Use this information to guide decisions on content topics, authors and formats to build your blog traffic.

7. Set your guiding principles. Establish a formal document that covers target audience, positioning and tone, acceptable content formats, submission procedures, keyword generation, link policy, minimum/maximum post length etc.

Lots of stuff to figure out, but would you start a new business or launch a new product without a plan? It's far better to figure it out upfront than as you stumble along. You can always hire a professional to assist you.

Coming up next...your blog marketing plan.

Chapter 5

YOUR BUSINESS BLOG HAS A VOICE. WHO'S LISTENING?



You've completed your detailed blog planning and now you're ready to start blogging! But how will anyone know when you put up a post? Unless you have a plan for getting the word out there about your blog, the sound of crickets in cyberspace could be rather deafening!

The channels and tactics you use to promote your business blog will largely depend on your target audience. Here are some tips and ideas on how you can drive traffic to your blog, increasing the size of your audience and ultimately the number of leads you generate:

Make Your Blog Big News

- **Send a compelling blog launch announcement** to your customers and partners.
- **Create an newsletter** to promote your blog's content to your customers and prospects. Make sure you have newsletter sign-up CTA's on your website and blog, and plan to do subscriber opt-in drives periodically. Focus on ways to build your opt-in list.
- **Consider online press releases** when you have newsworthy content or celebrity guest authors.

Go Social With Your Blog

- **Decide on 1 or 2 social media platforms that will help you best reach your target audience.** My advice: Don't try to post in every social media network out there or you will may find it too time-consuming and abandon it. Consistency is key; ensure you get the word out about each new post.
- **Develop creative strategies** to get your audience to engage with and share your content.
- **Ask your contacts with large networks** to share content they find useful. Make sure you are letting your valuable contacts and industry partners know when you post new content that may be of interest to their audience. To make it easy for them, you can even provide them with suggested wording for their posts about your content.

Use Effective SEO to Drive the Right Traffic

- **Link to and reference other posts on your blog in each post**, as often as it can be naturally integrated.
- **Link to posts on other relevant industry blogs** to attract other bloggers to take a look at your site, and perhaps link back to you.
- **Leverage the Google Analytics keyword tool** to ensure that all of your posts have the right keywords that match the search criteria of your target audience.
- **Create catchy and attention grabbing titles**, and make sure they include some post-specific details. Ensure that all title tags are unique and that they are no longer than 70 characters. Page titles should be specific and contain your main keywords.
- **Meta-descriptions** should be attention grabbing and concise.
- **Focus on unique content only** as this is what Google values. Be careful that you don't post content that is too similar to what is already up on your blog.

Promote the URL and Spread the Word

- **Include the blog in your website's main navigation.** Consider banner ads and other types of messaging on your website to help drive traffic to it.
- **Use every opportunity to promote your corporate blog both on and offline.** Include it in email signatures, on your stationary, business cards and all corporate marketing and communication materials.
- **Encourage all participating authors to promote their own posts**, and make it easy for them to do so.
- **Get your employees involved and engaged.** Consider some fun contests or incentives to reward them for promoting the blog.

These are just a few ideas to get your creative juices going prior to developing a detailed marketing plan. The next chapter will focus on how you know your blog is working: We'll take a look at measuring your lead generation efforts and other key performance indicators

Chapter 6

BLOGGING FOR LEADS: HOW TO GENERATE, NURTURE AND CONVERT



In March 2012, Marketing Profs quoted the [Aberdeen Group](#) report: “Best-in-Class B2B companies generate on average 17% of their leads from social media channels, roughly *230% more marketing-generated leads than other companies* (5%), according to a new report by Aberdeen Group.”

Their findings are that although 84% of companies are using social media, *47% of “best-in-class” companies state that lead generation is their primary objective.*

And that is the main reason you should have a corporate blog, to generate leads for your business. Let’s talk about how your blog can attract inbound leads, and then how you can nurture, measure and convert these prospects into customers in this last chapter.

Generating Leads

The last chapter focused on driving traffic to your blog. How do you convert this traffic to leads? Here are just a few ways; there are several more:

- Newsletter sign-up
- Sign up for a free trial if relevant
- Sign up to receive more info on a special offer
- Sign up to receive a special whitepaper, eBook, podcast or webinar
- When applicable, promote a product or service that is relevant to the topic of a particular post with a banner ad, linking to a landing page with a sign-up form for those interested in learning more

It goes without saying that design, copy, and strategic placement are all-important elements in getting your ideal client to fill out those all-important forms. You may need to tweak and fine-tune if you aren’t seeing the results you want. I recommend refreshing the design from time to time as the human eye gets used to seeing the same visual very quickly, and then your enticing forms may no longer get noticed by repeat visitors.

Nurturing Leads

It is rare that someone will fill out a form one day and sign on as a customer the next. Sales can take the lead and follow a sales process, following up with phone-

calls and emails to try to close. This makes sense for a “hot” lead but not necessarily for a “warm” or “cold” one who is not quite ready to buy.

These inbound leads can be “nurtured” by using marketing automation or email marketing tools. Many of these have lead nurturing capabilities, which provides the ability to send out a series of follow-up emails over time triggered by form completion.

The emails should be relevant to the topic of interest or the type of form completed. For example, if someone signed up for your newsletter, you could start the series by highlighting the most popular posts on your blog, gradually and cleverly segueing into providing more information on your product or service. Some advice:

Send out a series of 8-10 emails over a period of 40-50 days, perhaps more frequently at the beginning, gradually tapering off with more time between each one.

Most of these should not be hard-hitting, in-your-face sales emails but friendly and informative with compelling facts that motivate action on the part of recipient.

Ensure that the content of these emails is relevant to your target audience based on your prior research. This is just another form of content marketing.

Each should have a call-to-action, linking to another form to move them along the pipeline or encouraging them to email or call.

To maximize the lead nurturing campaign conversion rate, the last email in the series should generally have a special limited-time offer for the recipient.

It is obviously important to ensure that these emails stop sending if the lead converts prior to the end of the campaign, make sure the platform you are using allows for this.

I would also strongly recommend following up with leads via direct mail during the nurturing phase, to introduce another touchpoint.

Measuring and Qualifying Leads

How do you know if a lead has any real value to the business? When should the sales team take over? The best way is to use a marketing automation/lead measurement tool, depending on the size of your organization and your budget. There are various options available; my experience has been with [Hubspot](#), which targets small and mid-sized businesses and is focused on in-bound leads. [Act-On](#) also caters to small and medium sized companies and as of this writing are soon to launch inbound marketing tools.

The most important measurement of a lead is engagement. How many times have they filled out a form, visited a particular page on your blog or website, downloaded a whitepaper? And how are these events to be ranked in terms of indicators that a prospect is getting ready to buy? Most lead-scoring systems measure these activities when determining whether a lead is hot, warm or cold. Hubspot and Act-On both give you the particulars of what pages were viewed, what forms were filled out, what ebooks were downloaded. This not only provides a lead score but also gives you valuable insights as to what the prospect is most interested in. Any sales call or marketing follow-up should focus on the interest that has been shown, in order to increase conversion.

If you are a small business and not quite ready for marketing automation, this is where content marketing is one of the best lead generation tactics. If you are posting content on your blog that you know is relevant to your target audience, and your target audience responds by signing up for something, you can feel fairly confident that the lead is worth following up with.

Converting Leads

The more relevant your content is to your target audience, the more they will respond. Your conversion rates will increase if your leads match the characteristics you have established for your “ideal client”, and if you did your homework on what content your target audience is most interested in. If the content is there, prospects will find it when they are doing their research.

Measuring the Overall Effectiveness of your Blog

You can track your stats using your marketing automation software, Google Analytics or there are a variety of paid services that track different metrics such as: [Mint](#), [Clicky](#), [Hittail](#), [Web-stats](#) and [Crazy Egg](#) to name a few. Here are some critical metrics to monitor ongoing:

- **Blog traffic overall** and per post: is it growing, remaining stagnant or declining?
- **Conversion rates from visitor to lead**; by event or type
- **Engagement**: comments and social sharing
- **Most (and least) popular** posts and authors
- Lead **conversion to customer**

- **Lead quality** and score
- % of leads with original lead source “blog”
- % of customers with original lead source “blog”

There may be other metrics of importance to your company. Just be sure to continuously monitor the results of your efforts and adjust your strategies and tactics as needed to maximize your results.

Blogging for Success

Let’s recap the process for a successful business blog:

- Establish **your blog objectives**. (*Chapter One*)
- **Clearly define who your “ideal client” is**, aka your target audience for the blog. You may want to work with an outside consultant to help you define this through a formalized process. Many companies I work with struggle with this important step.
- **Research the content interests** of your ideal client and establish keywords. (*Chapter Two*)
- **Develop the big picture**: purpose and objectives of the blog and your content marketing strategy based on your research. (*Chapter Three*)
- **Properly plan all aspects** of your blog implementation in detail. (*Chapter Four*)
- **Develop a marketing plan** for your blog and how you will drive traffic and generate and nurture leads. (*Chapter Five*)
- **Measure the overall effectiveness** of your blog on an ongoing basis and tweak your plans and strategy as required. (*Chapter Six*)

Bring real value and return to your organization by following the steps above.

Don’t give up! So many business blogs are abandoned due to lack of proper planning and resource allocation. Many are started on a whim. If you don’t have the resources internally, my best advice is to consult an outside expert to do it for you. Good luck!

Chapter 7

ABOUT



About Zuz Marketing

Zuz Marketing was created in 2008 to work with companies that may not have the internal resources and/or experience to develop and deploy their marketing strategy.

If you are not using online marketing channels, or not using those channels effectively, you may be losing revenue opportunities. A well-executed inbound “content marketing” strategy enables you to position yourself and your organization as experts in your industry and generate targeted leads who are legitimately seeking your services online. Your organization stands to gain powerful benefits from adopting an inbound marketing strategy as part of your overall mix and Zuz Marketing can help you achieve these.

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About Linda Whitehead

Linda Whitehead is the founder of Zuz Marketing and has extensive experience in creating and executing strategic marketing plans and developing inbound and outbound marketing programs for small and medium sized businesses across North America. She is a passionate senior marketing professional with 20+ years diverse experience in B2B and B2C marketing on both client and agency sides. She graduated with an Honours diploma in Fashion Merchandising, studied Marketing and International Marketing at York University in Toronto and is an Honours graduate of the Canadian Marketing Association’s “Advanced Marketing” certificate program.

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