



Intro to Blogging

A great way to stay relevant and keep current and potential customers informed is through the use of a blog.

The word 'blog' comes from a shortened expression 'web log.' A blog looks similar to a website, typically informal, and encourages readers to interact via comments and discussion.

Most of the blog structures feature a vertical style, which displays user entries with the most recent post at the top. Blogs are generally free to use. Several platforms exist including Google's Blogger and WordPress.

Lots of content structure, color, fonts, and many more features can be customized to create a style that is consistent with a business brand or company.

For businesses, blogging has the potential to inform and recruit customers through an interactive, behind-the-scenes look at how a product or service is made, delivered and used by consumers.

A general rule of thumb is: **The more inviting the blog, the more likely customers will follow and interact.**

Consider the Trends

- About 128 million people in the U.S. read blogs daily
- 23% of total Internet usage time is devoted to social networks and blogs
- 81% of online customers in the US trust information and advice from blogs
- Business owners who blog have 97% more links to their site on other web pages, directories and sites
- 92% of business owners who blog daily have acquired a new customer
- Business owners who blog more than twenty times per month get five times more traffic than those who blog four times a month

Quick Tip

What makes a successful blogger? According to SocialMediaExaminer.com, a person needs five traits: 1) Dreamer; 2) Good storyteller; 3) Teacher; 4) Persuader; and 5) Curator. Further, a successful blogger needs to have a borderline obsession with a topic, must have a clear target audience, and needs a marathon, not a sprinter's mindset. Blogging is tough work, but the benefits can be significant for a business owner who is passionate about his/her business and takes the time to tell the story of his/her business. Want to learn more tips? Read: <http://basicblogtips.com/12-steps-successful-blogger.html>

Things to Know

Blogs are easy to design

- There are many platforms on the Internet that host blogs for free
- Many platforms provide templates that can be modified to fit specifications with just a click of the mouse
- Blogs are dynamic; they can be changed and modified at any time, even after they are launched

Content is king

- Content must be fresh, and interesting
- Posts should be professionally written and tell an interesting story
- Add pictures and videos to improve the overall quality of a blog
- Blog often; fresh content is key to keeping a fresh connection with followers

Blogging can bring your business new customers

- It is simple and can be done entirely in-house
- It is quick and easy, just type desired content and publish to the blog
- Small businesses that blog get 126% more leads than businesses who do not blog

Blogging takes time and effort, but the payoff for small business owners who blog has been documented to be worth it time and time again. With a little bit of creativity and critical thinking about the business' projected market and goals for the future, a blog has the potential to recruit and keep valuable customers.

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Grow Your Blog Audience

- Learn which bloggers are doing the best; study what they do well
- Connect with those bloggers who have similar interests, which will expand your audience network
- Promote your blog; invest some resources to promote your blog on social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Instagram.

Monitor Analytics to Improve

- Use free analytical tracking like Google Analytics to consider visitor information and trends
- Some platforms such as WordPress also provide analytics within its system
- Study the patterns. When are people commenting and viewing blog posts? Which type of blog post attracts the most interactions? Use analytics to study this information and unlock more opportunities to grow your blog

About the Author

James Barnes, Assistant Extension Professor, Mississippi State University

Dr. James Barnes joined the Department of Agricultural Economics at Mississippi State University after serving for seven years as an Extension economist with the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center and Director of the Louisiana Center for Rural Initiatives. Dr. Barnes' Extension and research work focuses on the economics and management of social media in business, broadband technology adoption in rural places, rural health care, and regional economic development. Since joining MSU, Dr. Barnes has launched the **Mississippi Bricks to Clicks Entrepreneurship Extension Program** aimed at helping business owners understand how to leverage a Facebook network for business profits



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A behind-the-scenes WordPress View

WordPress is one of the most popular and easy to use platforms in the market. In fact, WordPress continues to dominate the marketplace. According to Royal.Pingdome.com, WordPress blogs accounted for 52% of the top 100 blogs in 2013 and now has over 65 million active blogs. Part of the growth in its popularity is the ease of managing content and connecting to social media platforms. Here is a brief screenshot tour of a WordPress blog including some important views from inside the blog: dashboard; posting; connecting to social media; and blog statistics.

The dashboard view (figure 1) shows the entire set of options to post and share content. The control panel is located to the left of the page once a user logs in. From top to bottom, a user can post content, share content, and the number of times a blog post is viewed. To the right, a user can make a quick blog post or click on the Stats section to learn about views, trends, and more. A closer look reveals the Post section on the dashboard (figure 2). A user can see all posts made within the blog, authorship, categories, tags, the date and time for each post, and Stats. This simple dashboard layout makes blogging simple and easy within WordPress.

Figure 1. A Snapshot of an Example WordPress Blog: Dashboard

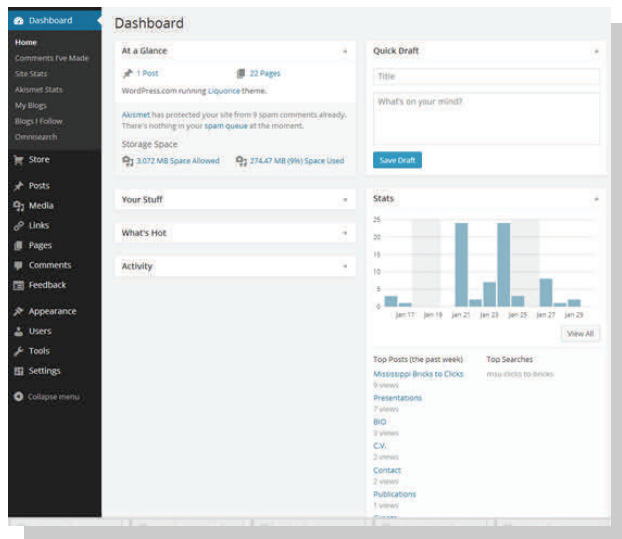
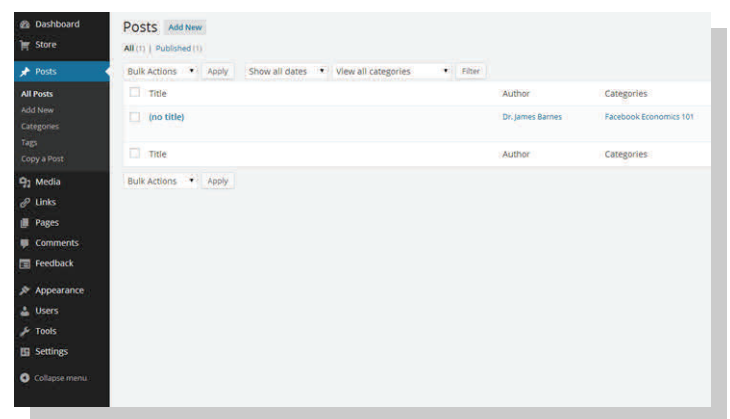
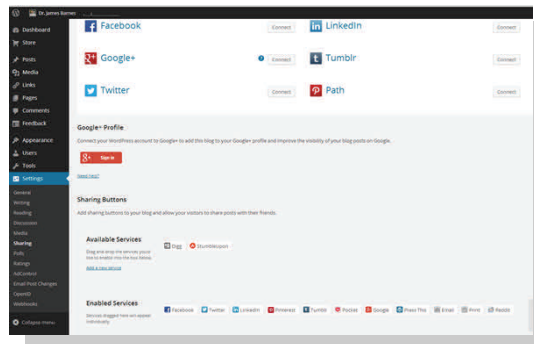


Figure 2. A Snapshot of an Example WordPress Blog: Posting



Sharing posts is simple, too. From the main dashboard (figure 1), click on Settings->Sharing and WordPress provides another dashboard for sharing content to social media platforms (figure 3). The upper section shows a user how to connect each social media account to the blog; this enables automatic posting. A user could then make a blog post and that same content would be pushed to the social media accounts enabled. The lower section shows the way each post can be shared across social media platforms. A user simply drags each sharing button (email and print options also exist) from Available Services to Enabled Services. In this example, each post made on this particular blog can be shared with everything except Digg and StumbleUpon.

Figure 3. A Snapshot of an Example WordPress Blog: Connecting to Social Media

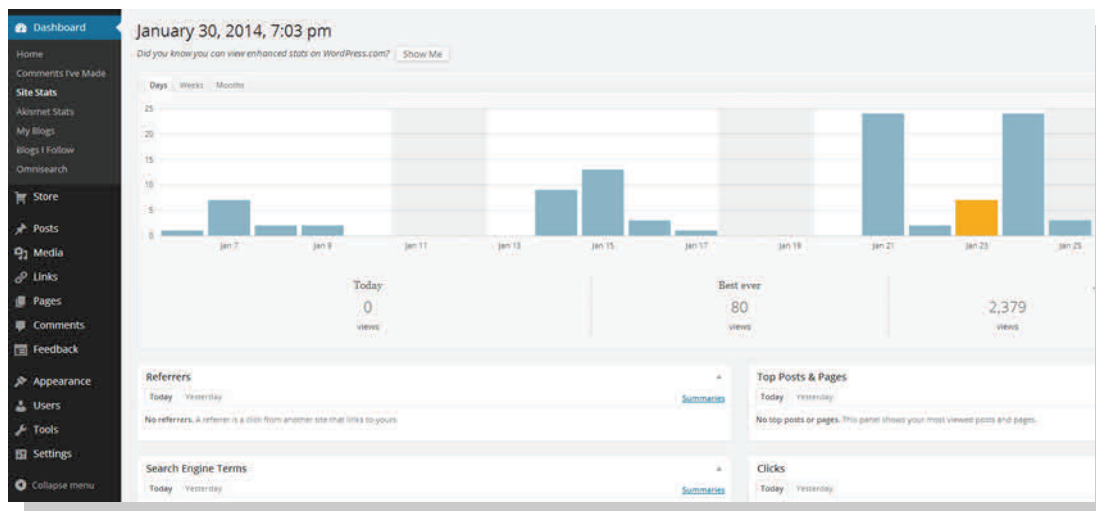


A behind-the-scenes WordPress View

Finally, users can learn more about the blog by viewing the Stats section. From the dashboard, a user would simply click on Site Stats. In this section, a user has a 30 day view of the number of blog views by day. At the top of the dashboard, a user can also select alternative views of weeks and months to see how blog views vary over time. If a user wants to learn more about an individual day, clicking on the day of interest can provide more details about the success or lack of success for blogging on a particular day. Just beneath the 30 day view are also more categories of interest for a user. WordPress keeps track of Referrers, Search Engine Terms, Top Posts & Pages, and Clicks. Selecting any one of these options provides a user with a rich set of data about his/her blog.

Blogging takes time and effort, but the payoff for small business owners who blog has been documented to be worth it. With a little bit of creativity and organization, a blog has the potential to recruit and keep valuable customers.

Figure 4. A Snapshot of an Example WordPress Blog: Analytics



Resources

- <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/becoming-a-blogger/>
- <http://writtent.com/blog/top-blogging-statistics-45-reasons-to-blog/>
- <http://www.transformationmarketing.com/infographic-blogging-stats/>
- <http://www.mackcollier.com/beginner-blog-analytics/>
- <http://basicblogtips.com/12-steps-successful-blogger.html>
- <http://sixrevisions.com/tools/top-free-online-blogging/>
- <http://techland.time.com/2013/08/05/the-25-best-bloggers-2013-edition/slide/jenny-lawson-the-bloggers/>
- <http://dailytekk.com/2013/01/14/the-100-best-most-interesting-blogs-and-websites-of-2013/>
- <http://royal.pingdom.com/2013/05/07/wordpress-top-100-blogs/>
- <http://thenextweb.com/apps/2013/08/16/best-blogging-services/#!t0owh>

Ten Free Blogging Services Compared (sixrevisions.com)

<http://sixrevisions.com/tools/top-free-online-blogging/>

Platform	Description	Nuts and Bolts	Unique Features	Pricing
Word-Press.com	WordPress.com (WP) is perhaps the most feature-rich blogging service out there.	It uses the popular open source web software WordPress, and offers many features in its free version — traffic stats, anti-spam filters, gorgeous themes and more.	52% of the top 100 blogs use WordPress.com. CNN's Political Ticker, People Magazine's Style Watch and Flickr also use WP.	Free (costs extra to remove ads, add a domain name, and to add storage capacity)
Blog.com	Blog.com is another popular WordPress-powered blogging platform.	Offers many beautiful premium themes in its free accounts, as well as advanced plugins. But the free service displays more ads as compared to WP.	Only 2GB storage compared to WP's 3GB.	Free (costs extra to remove ads, add a domain name, and to add storage capacity)
Google Blogger	Google Blogger is a well-known blogging service that offers access to other Google products.	Blogger comes with a Template Designer user interface that lets you tweak your blog's appearance as much as you want. Blogger makes it easy to manipulate code from sites such as PayPal, Facebook, and others.	A beginner blog environment with an easy to use interface plus full integration with Google products.	Free (no extra cost for a domain name)
TypePad Micro	TypePad Micro is another free blog-publishing service. The interface is easy to use, and bloggers can import/export content from many other blogging platforms.	Limited set of themes compared to WP, but good readability.	The free version is good for only 14 days then payment is required.	\$8.95 to \$29.95 per month
Jux	Jux is an innovative service that lets you easily share content online.	Jux lets you create your own microblogging site for sharing content. Jux templates don't have the native sidebars and other widgets that are common to most blogs. Instead, Jux provides a clean approach to blogging without ads.	Jux is heavy on visualization of content, more than WP.	Free, no upgrades necessary.

Platform	Description	Nuts and Bolts	Unique Features	Pricing
Tumblr	Tumblr is a popular and feature-packed microblogging platform.	It comes with many outstanding features such as audio blogging (for sharing your music, free custom domains, hundreds of amazing blogging themes and more. You can sync your Tumblr account with Facebook and/or Twitter so that you can update your social media feeds in a single location.	Community-powered group blogs can be developed and Tumblr offers support for many third-party apps such as Google Analytics and Feedburner.	Free with some upgrades available
Blogetery	Blogetery is a WordPress-powered online blogging service that offers a modest set of features.	Free accounts get nearly 140 themes, custom domain mapping and roughly 40 plugins to choose from.	Great tutorials, support forums, step-by-step video guides & helpful documentation.	Free, but \$3.50 per month provides additional themes, plugins, email support, 5GB of additional storage space, the ability to remove ads, etc.
LiveJournal	LiveJournal (LJ) offers blogging with a touch of social networking. You can participate in polls, create networks and interact with other LJ users alongside your blog.	Wide variety of templates, plugins/extensions are available.	LiveJournal has a unique personality in different parts of the world. In Russia LiveJournal makes up the vast majority of the blogosphere, hosting over 80 of the top 100 Russian blogs. In Singapore LiveJournal revolves around collaboratively purchasing overseas goods.	Free with features such as Friend pages, communities, powerful privacy features and more. You can become a paid member (\$3/mo) at any time to enjoy access to some additional unique features.

Source:
www.sixrevisions.com

