

Creating Blogs That Drive Traffic, Spur Conversation and Inspire Customer Loyalty

By Danielle Leitch

Well-constructed blogs can help promote group or individual thought leadership within an organization and drive readers to become loyal brand advocates. By choosing to create a new blog or revamp an existing one, you are not only establishing a platform to add relevant, fresh content to your website (which is helpful for a search engine optimization strategy), but also you are developing the potential to reach your target audience with content that they want to share. This audience engagement can spur social media conversations, word-of-mouth advertising and virality—but only if your content is interesting and discoverable.

Creating a successful blog isn't just about having expertise or writing well. It requires more fundamental, tactical research and strategy. Ultimately, your blog should demonstrate your expertise (as an individual or brand) and your corporate social responsibility while providing an appropriate platform to showcase the depth of your thought leadership. But, poor design, lack of search engine optimization strategy and considerations, and poor organization can undermine any blog.

This step-by-step guide, will detail how you can create an effective on-site blog through best practices for:

- Research and organization
- Designing with the user in mind
- Post frequency and management
- Facilitating sharing and engagement.

Pay Close Attention to Blog Categories and Tags

It's very important to maintain consistency when it comes to establishing and assigning blog categories and tags. For example, if you tag some posts #IRA and other posts #RothIRA, this could hinder users' ability to easily find the content they're searching for on your blog. It could also negatively impact your SEO efforts in a variety of ways.

This could, among other things, dilute your keyword strategy efforts and cause unintended content cannibalization and internal competition among your posts. Ideally, your category and tag strategy will be well-planned based on best practices for user experience and SEO, and it will also leave room for scalability over time.

Targeting & Research

Competitor research: Survey your competitors' landscape and know what you can do differently or similarly to make your blog provide thought leadership.

Here are some questions that will help you get started on your competitive analysis:

- What are the topics?
- What are the responses?
- Who is responding?
- What seems to work?
- What doesn't seem to work?

Keyword research: Keyword research is critical at this stage because it will help you better understand user needs. In other words, it will help you connect what information your readers need with you can provide them.

Keyword research will also help you determine blog categories, themes, topics and, occasionally, titles. You can, for example, begin with a basic search within a keyword research tool, looking for blogworthy topics, categories or themes for further investigation:

Your product or service			
financial planning			
Ad group ideas		Keyword ideas	
Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Competition	Score
financial planning tools	590	High	
journal of financial planning	590	Low	
personal financial planning	1,000	High	
financial planning worksheet	590	High	
financial plan	1,600	High	
financial planning companies	210	High	
financial planning services	260	High	
what is financial planning	720	High	
family financial planning	260	High	

In just a few minutes, you have found not only a few great potential post ideas but also a better understanding of what your audience needs and how your blog might fulfill those needs.

Design and Organization

Categories and tags: Blogs are organized primarily into categories and tags. For example, a blog post titled “5 Financial Planning Tools for Retirement” might be categorized under “Retirement” and tagged #401K, #IRA and #RetirementCalculator.

Depending on the size of your blog, it’s a good idea to create 5-10 categories that will house all of the content on your blog. Once established, you will want to provide space within your blog design to display your categories. This is because categories can act as your blog’s navigation, providing users with a way to see the kind of information they can find on your blog.

Social Media Integration

There are 2 ways to integrate social media in your blog:

Social media sharing: These capabilities provide readers an easy way to share your content with their social networks.

You can use a service like **AddThis** to quickly create custom social sharing buttons, such as:



Social channel promotion via social media plug-ins: These allow you to promote your corporate social media channels on your blog. This is perfect for readers that are encountering your brand for the first time and want to connect with you on social media. It’s also a great way for you to grow your base of followers. For example:



Content and Management

Category-level static content: Category-level static content serves two purposes:

1. Orients the reader
2. Provides a way for the search engines to understand what type of content they can find in your blog categories

Content calendars: Blogs should be updated two to four times per week, so you should create a content calendar that includes title, category, tags, keyword and resources (videos, photos, flowcharts, etc.)

If you are going to have more than one person contributing to the blog, it's a good idea to establish a set of editorial standards. This way, even though you may have many different voices contributing to the blog, it can maintain some consistency

Social sharing and reader interaction: If a subscriber responds to a post:

1. Share it.
2. Tease it.
3. Thank them for their insight.

Blogging Best Practices

Post appearance: Your blog should allow for quick scanability so that your readers can easily get the information they're searching for. To accomplish this, you can:

- Use short paragraphs and break up large blocks of text wherever possible.
- Use bullets, numbers and lists.
- Organize your posts using subheadings to help users quickly scan through the post and read the content they're most interested in.
- Use images and other multimedia to help provide a visual break.

Post optimization: You can optimize each blog post for the search engines by:

- Optimizing each for a single, highly relevant theme that is encapsulated by a

unique keyword or phrase

- Using your theme/targeted keyword in your title and description tags
- Using your targeted keyword in your multimedia alt tags
- Using your targeted keywords in your post URL

Once you establish a blog, it's important to have someone at the helm who is not only capable of producing effective blog posts but also knowledgeable about conducting keyword research and planning for the long term. Doing this will make your blog more searchable and its content more desirable for readers, driving more traffic and maintaining a loyal foundation of subscribers.

Ultimately, the most effective blogs are tended to and cared for on a regular, consistent basis with ongoing research and attention by their administrators in order to create relevant content, engage with and nurture your existing audience, and identify opportunities to expand that audience. Doing so requires ongoing topic research, listening to your audience and creating content they want to talk about in order to help spread your brand's message. **PRN**

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