

Using Blogs as a Free Marketing Tool for Your Business

by Ivana Katz

I admit I stuck my head in the sand when I first heard about Blogs. It was just too hard (so I thought) - another new technology to master and I wasn't even sure of the benefits, so I ignored them for a while.

Then I attended a marketing seminar where a whole session was devoted to Blogs - how simple they were to set up and use and what unbelievable benefits they provided for a business. And the best part - most of them are free!!!!

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS A BLOG?

A blog is basically a journal that is available on the web. The activity of updating a blog is "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger." Blogs are typically updated daily or weekly using software that allows people with little or no technical background to update and maintain the blog.

WHY SHOULD I USE BLOGS FOR MY BUSINESS?

1. Communication with your customers.

Blogs provide a way for you to communicate with your customers directly. And it is a two-way communication. You can post a message on your blog and your visitors can easily respond. Staying in touch with your customers regularly means you can build long-lasting relationships and develop their trust.

2. Search Engine Marketing

Blogs give you an increased presence on major search engines, like Yahoo! and Google. If you use Blogger (Google's Blogging Tool), every message you post

creates a new page on Google so in a very short time you could have a lot of pages pointing to your website, bringing you lots of new visitors.

3. Stay Ahead of Your Competition

Blogs are still relatively new and chances are your competition does not yet use them. So you will be seen as an expert in your industry when you post your knowledge and expertise.

4. Media & Public Relations

Blogs are excellent PR tools. You can post your Media Releases and articles and have them picked up by the media.

5. Free or Low Cost

Many Blogs are free to use. Two such blogs are:
Blogger - www.blogger.com
Clearblogs - www.clearblogs.com

6. Easy to Use

If you can type and press a "Publish" button, you can use blogging software.

The software allows you to follow easy step by step guide and provides great online help.

WHAT SHOULD I PUBLISH IN MY BLOG?

1. Articles
2. Media Releases
3. Industry News
4. Photos of your products or from a tradeshow
5. Surveys - so you can get feedback from your customers
6. Testimonials
7. Instructions on how to use your products/services
8. Product Reviews
9. Interviews
10. Case Studies
11. Business and Employee Profiles
12. Links to complementary businesses
13. Frequently Asked Questions and Problem Resolutions
14. Inspirational Quotes
15. Research Findings



...and anything else that may be of interest or help to your visitors and customers.

To see what a blog looks like, go to: <http://websites4smallbusiness.blogspot.com/>

Remember you can have as many blogs as you like, so you can easily reach niche markets.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Simply sign up for a free account with Blogger, for example. Go to www.blogger.com. Then go to Getting Started in the Help Section and read it. There are lots of useful tips on how to make the most of your blog.

Once you've created a blog and added a message or two, don't forget to put a link to it from your website (if you have one).

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