



HOW TO WRITE ENGAGING BLOG POSTS AND GROW YOUR ONLINE AUDIENCE

Contents

Introduction	1
<i>What is a Blog?</i>	1
<i>The blogging potential</i>	2
How to Write a Blog Post: The Basic Rules	3
<i>Think about your audience</i>	3
<i>Choosing a blog post topic</i>	3
<i>How to create a killer blog post title</i>	5
<i>Creating your opening</i>	7
<i>Adding extra layers to your blog post</i>	10
<i>Adding a call-to-action (CTA)</i>	11
Giving Your Blog Posts Variety	15
Getting More SEO Juice from Blog Posts	17
Fast and Easy Blog Post Editing	19
How to Never Run out of Ideas for Blog Posts	21
It's Not All about SEO – How to Promote Your Blog	23
Be A Great Blog Writer	25

Introduction

There is often a lot of confusion with regards to articles and blog posts, with many companies and individuals inadvertently using the former to populate their blogs. While there are many elements that cross over between article writing and blog writing and vice versa, they are two different beasts.

The thing about blogging is that it is one of the keys to successful marketing in a world that is increasingly dependent upon online activity. You have probably heard about the importance of SEO (search engine optimisation) and how it impacts your online visibility. Blogging should be an integral part of your SEO strategy, and if you don't post regularly you can guarantee your SEO will collapse. Websites that have well managed, active blogs populated by well written posts attract more visitors, retain them onsite for longer, and have higher subscription numbers and sales. It really is as simple as that, and why the demand for expert blog writers is so high.

A great blog post can't be created within a few minutes. They really do take a lot of hard work. However, once you understand the elements involved, how to put them together, and then what to *do* with the post, you'll not only be able to write great posts, but help clients to get the most mileage from them.

It took me a while to learn the art and science behind writing great blog posts, but now they provide some of the most lucrative of my writing jobs. One of my Australian clients had his blog (for which I provide all content and upload that content, too) named as the most relevant and best blog in its industry sector by one of the major players in the space; and not just in Australia, but also across the whole Asia-Pacific region. That same blog has also been the main driver behind my client's bulging subscriber list and order book.

It's clear how powerful a blog can be when it is managed competently and populated with well written and regular posts. Once you have buttoned-down the blog-writing technique, you'll find your work becomes invaluable to clients. Knowing how to make the most of a blog also gives you an opportunity to gain extra work uploading the posts to the website and then managing the marketing of those posts (and we'll look at a simple technique to post to social media accounts later in the eBook).

I'm splitting this eBook into two parts: The first deals with content creation – the nuts and bolts of how to craft a great blog post and get great SEO value from it; the second part deals with uploading your blog post and augmenting its SEO qualities, and what to do to get even more marketing juice from a blog. First, though, I want to better define a blog and discuss one of the biggest impacts on the way you write: the target audience.

What is a Blog?

Blogs (short for 'web logs') were the first real form of user generated, interactive content. Originally conceived as a kind of online diary, they allow the blogger to share ideas, thoughts, opinions, etc. with readers. More than this, though, they encourage a two-way communication process. Readers can leave comments on a blog post, and share with their friends through social media outlets. A blog can be 'reblogged' and reposted, extending its

reach further.

When the first blogs hit the Internet, they did exactly what they said on the tin: diarised a person's minutes, hours, days, and life. Slowly, the blog has evolved into what we understand it to be today: an opportunity to engage an audience, promote oneself, goods and services. Blogs are used by individuals and businesses to showcase products, skills, and abilities. A business without a blog is a business failing to harness its true potential.

The beauty of blogging is that anyone can do it. The opportunity of blogging – for the freelance writer, entrepreneurial author, or a small, medium, or large business – is that very few know how to write a blog that will engage the intended audience and keep them coming back for more. Even fewer know how then to market their blog to its best potential.

The blogging potential

A little while back I conducted an experiment. Using one of my own websites – which, at that time, was getting an average of two hits a day – I began putting into practice just a few of the techniques you'll be reading about as you work your way through this eBook. I posted three blogs each week on the same days and at the same time. Within four months that site was averaging nearly 2,000 hits per month, and the growth rate had been exponential. Visitors were staying on the site longer, and exploring it deeper. Then I stopped blogging. Within two months visitor numbers had collapsed and they were right back where they had started.

The potential is obvious: get blogging right and you'll put yourself in front of a huge audience. And, unlike most forms of marketing, that audience is targeted: they actually want to know about you, your service, and your product. That means a bigger hit rate on sales, with a superior return on investment. This is powerful stuff to explain to a client; but results don't come overnight. They take time, effort, and investment, whether it is for your own blog or you are writing blogs for a client.

Blogs have evolved tremendously since they first became a reality. Of course, there are still those that want to share every minute detail about their day. More commonly, though, blogs are used as a medium to connect with like-minded people and provide hints, tips, and tricks about a hobby or interest. They are used by businesses and individuals to engage an audience, grow mailing lists, and (indirectly) sell goods and services. News, views, opinions, information, and advice are all sought-after themes in thousands of topic areas.

Whether you are an author looking to promote your work, a small business selling widgets, or a freelance writer working for a client, the ability to craft a great blog post, and then upload and promote, is an essential skill in the modern marketplace.

The place to start, of course, is learning how to write a blog post.

How to Write a Blog Post: The Basic Rules

Think about your audience

The first thing you have to remember when crafting a blog post is the intended audience for whom you're writing. The whole idea is to engage people in the conversation, to get them thinking, and ultimately to do what you want them to do. By their very nature, blogs should be conversational and interactive (though this interaction can be on various levels, as we'll see later).

If you have your audience as your number one priority, then your blog will grow. So let's look at this concept in a little more detail.

According to [Internet Live Stats](#), there are over 1.2 billion websites in the world (of which nearly 20% are built using the WordPress platform). This is a five-fold increase from the number in 2010. That's a lot of websites. Mind you, there are around 2.8 billion Internet users, too, with percentages of population using the Internet highest in the North America and Europe. Coming up fast in Internet user numbers are China and India, both huge countries with a high percentage of English speakers. The point I'm making here is that there is huge competition for online audience, but that the online audience itself is huge.

The trick is to ensure your blog posts attract an audience, that you understand who your targets are, what makes them tick, and the language they are going to best respond to. You'll need to produce empathetic content that is sympathetic to their expectations of your website. Do this, and then make sure that the content is also written with SEO elements that help your audience find your site, and you'll be writing great audience-engaging blogs.

I'm going to make an assumption here, which is that you know your intended audience (and if you're writing blogs for a client, that you will have had the discussion with him or her about the audience for whom you're writing). We're now going to walk through the elements that make a great, engaging blog post, starting with the topic for your post.

Choosing a blog post topic

This may seem an easy thing to choose, but believe me it's more difficult than you might suspect. When starting to work with a client, it's probable that you'll be given the topic to work to. You may even be given keywords and the blog post title. However, knowing how to select your topic will stand you in good stead for when that client relationship moves on to the ultimate level: when the client puts you on autopilot and trusts you with the responsibility of providing content and managing the blog without contact.

The first step to topic selection is the understanding of how topic differs to theme. Think about an author's blog, for example. The author may write books in a general category: let's say non-fiction. Within this, their books (or articles, etc.) may fit into a genre (theme). Let's say this is true crime. The next step on the blog ladder is selecting the topic of a blog post. This process of deciding upon topic is a fluid measurement: the topic might come anywhere down the line of category, theme, and topic. For example, drill down the following list:

- Sport

- Soccer
- Europe
- Premier League
- Teams
- Defenders

Or, perhaps:

- Retail
- High Street
- Clothes
- Women's Fashion
- Evening Wear

As you can see, theme might come anywhere in any list and the topic could be anything – there are a million things you could write about, on any subject. So what is needed is a strategy for topic selection, and after this a title creation method (because title is yet another step down the ladder, drilling further into specifics).

The topic selection strategy

Here's a simple strategy you should use with every blog post you create:

1. Decide on the goal

Every blog you write and post to the web should be posted for a reason. Do you want to create a mailing list, generate leads, or sell a product? Perhaps you want to increased awareness of a subject, or increase your visibility as an expert in your area of specialisation?

2. Help your blog attract traffic

Look at site statistics, and research other blogs on the same theme. Look for popular blog posts (perhaps those with the most comments, for example). Trending news and celebrity gossip can attract a lot of hits, but these are very much 'of the moment'. They have their place and can work incredibly well as 'dynamic content', but they won't sustain a regular flow of traffic (unless, of course, you are writing for a news provider).

So that brings us to SEO. When your blog post is optimised for search engines, its rank rises on those search engines. This means it is more easily found by your target audience, and not only today and tomorrow (as per dynamic content) but all the while it remains on site and relevant to your target audience. So, a blog post needs to be SEO friendly, and this begins with its topic. (As you work through the next few sections, I'll be giving you more

information about making your blog post SEO friendly.)

You'll need to do a little research on possible topics ([Google Keyword Planner](#) is a great, free resource to undertake keyword research). Let's say your target audience is interested in reading thrillers. If there are a credible number of searches around the phrase 'good thrillers to read', then there's an opportunity to create content that is both SEO friendly and audience engaging.

How to create a killer blog post title

Having decided on the topic of your post we'll now move onto the title, which might be just about the most important part of your blog post and can certainly make or break it in regards of audience engagement. Your title is the most powerful few words in an entire blog: they are what prompt the reader to read your blog. Without a strong title, your post will never get to satisfy its objective.

Why titles matter

We've already established that a great blog post title can do wonders for your blog: in fact, if you're really lucky, it could help send it viral. That's because blog post titles are all over the Internet:

- In search results
- RSS feeds
- Social media sites
- Website archive pages
- Links from other websites and blogs

The title might be the only thing a web surfer sees. That means it is the only thing the surfer uses to make a decision on whether to visit the blog and read. Write a boring title, or one that is confusing, and you shove visitor numbers down the toilet!

So, now that I've got your attention and firmly cemented in your mind the importance of a title, let's be clear of the goal your title should seek to achieve:

“To turn potential readers into readers of the first line of your content.”

That's it. It serves no other purpose whatsoever.

When crafting a blog title, there are several techniques that can be used. You won't be able to use them all simultaneously; but that's no bad thing – after all, you want titles to be as varied as you'll want your content to be. One tip here, though, is to **take your time** over your title. It's not always necessary to work from the title, though a working title always helps. It may be that your final title takes shape as you write. It may even turn out that you only finalise your title upon a final review of your blog post.

Seven blog title strategies that pull readers in

Different title strategies work in different circumstances, so it pays to have a number of titling strategies at hand. Here are seven that I've found cover all possible situations that will come your way. A great title works like the bait on an angler's hook: if the bait is enticing enough, no fish will be able to resist.

1. Be beneficial

All potential readers have a need; if your title promises that your blog post will satisfy that need, then a visitor is almost guaranteed. Let the title show that the blog will solve the problem that the potential reader has. 'How to' and 'five ways' type titles have been proven to be real audience winners (notice the title at the start of this section, 'Seven blog title strategies that pull readers in').

Remember to keep the title simple and as concise as possible – don't cause any confusion, and clearly communicate the benefit. Your title should jump out of the screen and slap the potential reader round the face, screaming, 'click on me!'. If a surfer has a need that you promise to satisfy, they'll click on a post with this title.

2. Be controversial

Blog post titles that promise content to get someone's back up, begging for a reaction, are also worth considering. Here you are asking for opinions, promising your own (or that of the client), and engendering debate. The post must deliver on the promise of its title, and you should be prepared to receive some strong reactions. (Practice with friends on Facebook and in different subjects.)

3. Be questioning

This is a great title strategy to prompt readers to click and read your blog and leave a comment, particularly if the question is asked of the reader (i.e. Do **you** know what to do if your car breaks down in a snowstorm?). This title strategy works because the reader is receptive to engaging with you at the time they click on the title and read your blog.

4. Be personal

Blogs are conversational by their very nature, and what better way to achieve this than personalising the title. Of course, using the word 'you' immediately gives a sense of targeting the reader, but you could also add in other descriptive words and combine with other title strategies (for example, 'Do you know the top 5 ways a writer can blast through a blog post?').

5. Be a keyword junkie

Putting a keyword in a title attracts the attention of those looking for specific content. They also help to increase the longevity of a blog post, and increase the search page ranking. This strategy combined with the beneficial title strategy can produce real killer titles. Ensure you use keywords that relate to the content of your blog post (great when writing about

products, companies, or services because they are some of the most searched for words and phrases on the web). Oh, and while we're talking about keywords in titles, try to use them as close to the start of your title as possible.

6. Be a poster of power words

To paraphrase George Orwell, some words are more equal than others. There are power words that really resonate with readers (though they have to be used wisely because they can also be a turn-off). Whatever power words you decide to use (if you use them), make certain that your blog post lives up to its promise. Here are a few:

'free' – something for nothing can be an offer too good to refuse

'discover' – people love to learn

'secret' – something that isn't widely known is a draw: we all like to know something that others don't, right?

'easy' – anything that makes our life easier is a good thing

'quick' – we're all pushed for time, so ways to do things quickly are tempting

7. Be funny

This is risky, but, when it works, it works well. We all like to laugh. It can also be difficult to write a funny title that is well optimised for search engines.

One final thing: try to keep your title short and sweet. Oh, and no full stops at the end of titles! In the next part of this book, I discuss title tags a little more as a way of marketing your blog. For now, let's leave the title and move on to the first line of actual content.

Creating your opening

Once your title has persuaded a potential reader to click on it and find out what the blog post is all about, you've got approximately half a dozen lines to really grab their attention and make them want more. Get the title wrong and your blog may never get the chance to be read; get the opening wrong and all that work you put into the title will have been wasted.

Seven strategies that will make your opening lines sparkle

Just as different titles work in different situations and circumstances, so too do your opening lines. They have to match the tone of your title, and carry on its promise. In exactly the same way as your title should be engaging and stimulating, so, too, must those first few lines. Here are seven ways to create opening lines that produce the goods your readers want.

1. Identify that need

I know it seems like repetition of a title choice strategy, but that simply shows how important this strategy is. There's no need to solve the need in these first few lines, but

reassert and explain more fully what the need is. Perhaps establish what might happen if the need isn't addressed or the benefits when it is, and entice the reader to continue further into your blog by promising to provide the solution by the end of the blog.

2. Using questions to their best effect

Posing questions work in a variety of situations and with a variety of readers. There are two questioning techniques that work well. The first of these is to ask a question that leaves the reader with no option but to answer the way you want them to. The second is to ask a question that leaves the reader hanging, and forces them to read more to find the answer.

Asking a single answer question ('Do you want to learn the secret to creating effective blog titles?') achieves a number of things:

- It tells the reader what the blog post is about
- It tells the reader you'll help solve a problem/need
- It creates need to read on, a buy-in which forces the reader to continue

These types of questions can also be asked throughout a blog post, leading the reader through a series of different problems around a central topic and providing the solutions in the final paragraphs.

The second type of question will give a sense of fascination, creating a desire within the reader to discover the answer. Think of questions such as, 'What do David Beckham and the Archbishop of Canterbury have in common?' or, 'How did my blog go from 0 to 25,000 followers?'

3. Use surprise

Saying something unexpected to the reader, making a statement that surprises them, is also a good way of attracting visitors, though if used too often the technique loses its effectiveness. A surprising opener could be about anything: something personal, which seems off topic, for example. A client of mine is a consultant in corporate change management and innovation strategies. One of the blogs I wrote for him started out by talking about the challenge of losing weight, sticking to the routine of going to the gym, and altering diet to achieve goals. When first reading, the surprise opening seems way off topic, so it's important you link back to the subject matter and create a link (which may be equally surprising).

The surprise opening is great to stop stagnation among readers. It makes people sit up and take notice, proving to be a useful hook to pull them into the blog.

4. Tell a story

The surprise opening can be combined with storytelling, or simply use a story as a stand-alone. If writing for a business-type blog, this type of opening is highly important. Usually a story about a company, or a person, or how a product came to market... the list is endless.

Stories bring your blog posts to life, and prompt the reader to relate to their need and make a connection between this and the tips and tricks you are writing about, or a product or service you are selling. Stories can be true or fictional. They can be short (how about Ernest Hemingway's reputedly favourite ever story, 'For Sale: Baby Shoes. Never Worn. '), or longer – though perhaps no more than a couple of paragraphs.

You can use personal stories that seem off topic, and then illustrate the point you wish to make. Using stories like this can draw in a new type of reader, and also serve to encourage engagement (people love sharing stories and comparing similar experiences).

5. **Make a promise that can't be refused**

Okay, so you've heard of the offer that can't be refused (immortalised by Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*, of course). This is similar. Perhaps an opening line such as **'After reading this you'll know the secret to giving up smoking' or 'I've been looking almost forever for the best cup of coffee in the world, and now I'm going to show you how to make it'**.

These are perfect first line openings: they set the tone of the blog post, and tell the reader exactly what they will get if they read on. These one-liners get straight to the point. Practice a few, and start to think of some: write them down and then create a blog around the promise (always ensuring it's on topic, of course).

A different approach – not quite making a promise, but along the same theme – is to open with a line about an achievement of yours. For example: **'Wow! I just logged on and saw my last post got 5,000 visitors overnight'**. If you do use this tactic, though, make sure you are telling the truth and can corroborate, otherwise you'll lose all credibility with your audience.

6. **Open with controversy**

Everyone likes a little controversy, something that makes them stop and think. It might be an opinion you have about a product, company, or societal issue. This is where you get to state your views and be true to your values. But be warned: if you're too controversial you might lose some points with current followers. On the other hand, you could get a few comments whizzing around cyberspace.

7. **Start with a quote and/or use statistics**

If you've got a great quote up your sleeve, you can get incredible juice from it. It has to be relevant, of course, but if it contains a keyword or two and is attributable to someone famous, then you could be onto a winner. This type of opening can easily communicate your authority and knowledge of a subject.

Adding to credibility could be the use of statistics (and these can be great to add in external links, too). If you know your stuff and are fully engaged with your subject... don't be afraid to show it. Good research techniques will serve you well when including statistics and data from external sources.

Again, with statistics ensure they are relevant to the topic and blog post you are writing. For example, if the blog title is 'Five Strategies to Ensure Your Change Project is Successful', you

might start with a line such as, ‘According to research conducted in last year’s Towers Watson study, 70% of all organisational change projects fail.’

As you can see, there is a huge variety of ways in which a blog post can be opened and the reader persuaded to continue reading to where you want them to get to: your call to action. Before we get there, though, let’s talk about creating a little extra zing to your blog post.

Adding extra layers to your blog post

To really make your blog post stand out from the crowd you’ll need to give it an extra bit of sparkle. I call this ‘adding extra layers’. I got the phrase from my daughter, who has a sense of fashion that includes layering and adding a little extra something to make the main item jump out. Now I’m by no means a fashion guru (ask anyone that knows me and they’ll confirm this), but it is certainly a technique that can change an otherwise plain blog into something special.

I’ve already mentioned some of these techniques in this eBook. Using examples, stories, and analogies, for example, help you to connect on a personal and meaningful basis. Adding quotes, statistics, and opinions also adds depth. Using examples to highlight how a theory, principle, or procedure that you are writing about has been successful in practice increases a blog’s effectiveness. Readers see what you’re writing about in action and get closer to implementing your call to action. Here are three other ways to add those extra layers that will gilt-edge your blog post.

1. Recommend other reading

This is a great technique, which also evidences expertise and interest in the subject you’re writing about. It may be that you suggest a particular book, perhaps including an attributed quote from the book, a report, or another online resource. There are two ways of making recommendations: inside the post, or at the end of the post as a recommended list of further reading. Remember to use hyperlinks, and don’t forget that your suggestions can be both internal and external links (to content elsewhere on the web or on the site for which you are writing). Don’t forget, though: any further reading you recommend must add value to the content.

2. Write a series

Writing a two-part (or more) series is a good way to encourage people to return to the blog. Set the scene in the first post, and at the end promise to follow up with further information or the solution to the problem you’ve written about. This technique adds momentum to your blog, and gives further opportunities for internal linking and social media posting (see later).

Often, when reviewing the post you have just completed, you’ll think of follow-up posts, or content that can be written. Make notes and keep a record of these (together with the original post details (title, date, etc.) to make it easier to write a follow-up and correctly link.

3. Add in readers’ comments

Readers love to know that you take notice of what they think and say. What better way to do this than by using their words in your blog posts? Not only do you let current readers know that you care about them, but new readers see this too: and they may also want their fifteen minutes of fame. There are several ways to make your readers famous in your blog's circle, including:

- **Place comments from previous posts.** This could be from previous posts on the same topic, or you may even find comments that beg for the writing of a new blog post.
- **Bring in comments from social media accounts.** You may have a large social media following, or be attempting to grow one. LinkedIn groups (and Q&As on the network) can be cited within a blog post, and linked both ways (to and from social media accounts). Discussions on social media can be used to add that extra layer, too, by bringing in different points of view and generating more interaction.
- **Ask for comments.** Ask your readers for their thoughts: you can even do this ahead of time. If you have a blogging diary or timetable (a good idea and something explored a little later), you could pose questions in blogs days or weeks in advance, and then use several comments to augment a later post.
- **Use Skype and instant messaging to interview someone.** The world is a smaller place than ever before, and using a journalistic approach to someone might get just the quote you're after. Identify a person with expertise in the area you're writing about, and email them with a specific question. Don't forget to let them know you may want to share their thoughts with your followers.
- **Get your readers to act on your tips.** If you've written a 'how to' blog, then set readers a task to do and follow up on your advice, and ask them to tell you the results they achieved: a great way to increase participation rates.

Adding a call-to-action (CTA)

If you blog without an end goal, then you really are blogging for no reason: simply put, you are wasting your time and that of your readers. Yes, it may be great to be able to say, "I have 10,000 visitors to my blog every day," but you need to ask yourself what those visitors actually do for you.

Think of yourself as a high street store. If all you have is a bunch of people coming in, wandering around and browsing before walking out empty-handed, then you have very little to show for your efforts. You'll have put time and money into creating a shop window that pulls the punters in. You'll be doing the same on a daily basis to update and maintain your store inside and out; but every day you'll open an empty cash register. What do all these people who come and spend time inspecting your goods for sale do, if they are not buying from you? Well, quite simply, they are getting free information, insights, and ideas, and then going somewhere else and spending their money. Your store has become no more than a shop window for others!

Now, it may be that you want to raise awareness of an issue or increase knowledge in a

particular subject area. It may be that you use your website as a cheap advertising conduit. It could be that you provide a whole bunch of free content and monetise your site in other ways.

The truth is that the vast majority of visitors to your blog will be passive. They won't comment. They won't participate in online polls. They won't sign up to your newsletter, or subscribe to your blog. But if you don't ask, you will never know. These requests for your audience to **do something** are known as calls-to-action.

Why use calls-to-action?

Whether your website is purely for fun or has a business purpose, you should have some objectives solidified in your mind before you begin writing your blogs. If you build a house, you'll want electricity to provide you with light, heat, and power for all those appliances you use. The switch on the wall is how you call that electricity into action.

Without that switch on the wall (the call-to-action), the electricity (your online audience) will never fuel your appliances (your objectives). So, the first thing to do is to write down your objectives **before you start writing**. For example, let's say that you want to sell more copies of your book. You might decide to add in a call-to-action, which prompts readers to click and buy. There is nothing wrong with this, and you may well find you achieve a few sales. However, when you come to publish your next book, you've got to go through the whole process again. This is why so many calls-to-action concentrate on creating a list of email addresses of people who are known to be interested in what you have to say and the goods or products you want to offer.

Whenever you offer readers a free subscription to your newsletter, or blog, or a downloadable eBook, you have the opportunity to collect their email address. And from there you have the opportunity for target marketing at the people who will be most receptive to your product, service, or ideas.

If you are clear in your objectives and write your blogs with these in mind, then you will add calls-to-action that help you achieve these objectives. In other words, know what action you want your readers to take before you place your call-to-action, and before you even start writing your blog post.

Tips to make your calls-to-action work

It is a misconception that a blog post should be accompanied by only one call-to-action and that it should be placed at the end of the blog. You could place several calls-to-action, perhaps prompting the reader to do different things, though I would suggest no more than three. Here are 10 more call-to-action tips that will help you get the most marketing juice from your blogs.

1. Use a bold and bright end-of-post call-to-action

The best type of call-to-action to use at the end of a post is a clickable button. Let the button explain simply what the reader will get when they leave their email address. Be careful of the word 'subscribe' – many people associate it with paying for something.

2. Make your call-to-action a win/win

Never be nervous of asking readers to do something, such as comment or ask a question. Make sure you benefit from their action, with an upside for both the reader and you.

3. Keep the request simple

Never make things complicated. The more easily and quickly an action can be taken, the higher the possibility of that action being taken.

4. Be clear about your call-to-action

This builds on the point above, but is about how you communicate what you want readers to do. Before posting, stop and think about how you are asking your readers to do something. If the call-to-action is complicated, then break it into steps. Think about the driving instructor asking their learner driver to make a manoeuvre. The request could be: "Carry on driving past the bins on the left, and through by where you see the island in the middle of the road. Then stay in the left-hand lane and drive through the traffic lights before taking the left-hand turn forty metres further on." Or might the instructor say, "Take the next turning on the left"?

5. Use subtle mid-post calls-to-action

You will use internal and external links throughout your post, because people are shown to be more likely to click on these links as their sense of purpose and expectations are formed while reading. It is the same with more subtle calls-to-action, placed within blog posts. This could, for example, be a link to a contact page placed within brackets.

6. Make your call-to-action pop out of the screen

We use bold typeface, subtitles, bullet points, and any number of other formatting tricks to draw the reader's attention to something. It's the same with calls-to-action. Try putting them directly under a heading, or next to an image (or even as a clickable link within the image), or put them in bold text, or with a coloured background or border around the call-to-action.

7. Vary your calls-to-action

If all of your posts include the same call-to-action, it won't be too long before your readers start skipping over them. Make them a little different, with a different outcome for the reader ('subscribe to my blog,' 'get my newsletter free,' 'receive my free eBook,' etc.). Oh, and even though I'm a big call-to-action advocate, you don't need to have a call-to-action in every single post.

8. Give the reader an added incentive to take action

Some calls-to-action will already have an incentive, such as the 'subscribe to my newsletter for free' type. But an incentive where one doesn't already exist could be what tips the scales in your favour. For example, if you want readers to leave a comment then offer a free eBook to whoever does so.

9. Reel your readers in

Construct your blog post so that it leads readers to a natural conclusion: they must act! Ensure that the call-to-action and the blog post relate to each other (there really is no point in posting about the need to maintain correct tyre pressures with a call-to-action to sign up for your free eBook about how to cut electricity bills). Consider leading your reader through a journey in your blog post and describe how life would be better after the action is taken, or worse if the action isn't taken (especially good for big calls-to-action and if your blog post includes real life stories).

10. Experiment and record results

Putting a call-to-action in your blog post can be difficult. Here may be a tendency to sell too hard, or to be too subtle. Don't think of it as trying to get your reader to do something they might not otherwise do. Your call-to-action should provide a benefit to your reader. Calls-to-action are best positioned somewhere between a hard sell and over subtle: try different techniques, different ways of asking readers to take action, different wordings and different positions in your blog post. Find out what works best for your style and your readers, and you'll find your results continually improve.

Giving Your Blog Posts Variety

Now that you have a greater understanding of the basics behind writing engaging blog posts, you'll probably want to get stuck into writing. Before you do, however, put yourself in the shoes of potential readers. If served sausage and mash every day, a person would soon get bored of eating. Variety is the spice of life, and with blogs it is no different. The reader has no obligation to click on a link to a blog post, nor to read when they get there.

You have to grab the reader from the title and keep them entertained and wanting more from the beginning to the end of a blog post. This need to entertain (and inform) also holds true from post to post. You'll need to employ different styles of blog post to add in the variety that your reader craves. Here are eight styles that will achieve this aim. (These blog post styles are described more fully in my One-Hour Workbook *How To Write Great Articles First Time, Every Time*, in which I also discuss the difference between articles and blogs.)

The straightforward blog post

This is the easiest of blog posts to write, and will be one of the most common types you use. Quite simply, the abstract sets up the article with the main body explaining the points required before the conclusion ties it all together.

The evolution blog post

The evolution blog post is perfect when discussing the history of a company, industry, product, sport... in fact, almost anything. The main body may include what changes have occurred through the period being reviewed (for example, 'the last 20 years' or 'since the turn of the century'), as well as the reasons for those changes. This style of post will contain a lot of facts, and so it is important that you research fully and double-check dates, places, and people. This is a great type of blog post to show an in-depth knowledge of a subject.

The review blog post

A review blog post analyses and evaluates. The review could be of a book, a car, a movie, or any product, industry, company, restaurant, etc. The list of reviews that can be written is almost endless. Most reviews will be written from an unbiased point of view, and in a formal manner. However, sometimes a more informal approach is requested, particularly where a more subjective point of view is called for (movies, music, and cars, for example). If the review is a comparison, then remember that each product must be compared on a like-for-like basis.

The features blog post

Some clients will need the features of a product or service described. A feature is simply a character that makes the service or product what it is. When writing a features blog post you should never give opinions because then it becomes a review. However, you should still make it positive.

The benefits blog post

The benefits post helps to draw the reader to using a product or service (though it could also be written about a state of mind, exercise regime, and so on). It points out the outcomes the reader will receive from the product or service written about. Benefits are received because of specific and unique features. Benefits might be pertinent to the individual or a group of people, the environment, economy, business sector, etc. The blog post may also highlight ways to achieve benefits.

The interview blog post

The interview blog post provides answers to questions that the audience might want to ask. These questions should be posed to a relevant person – a known expert in the subject area, or someone who has benefitted from a product or service, for example. This type of post is a fantastic way to express someone’s point of view, experiences, or opinions. Any number of questions might be asked, but typically it is best to use between six and twelve: too few questions and the post will lack substance, and too many makes the post more difficult to ‘stick with’.

A tip when writing this type of post is always to send it for approval to the interviewee before you post on the blog. This is particularly necessary where you have paraphrased answers to questions posed.

The negative and positive effects blog post

This type of blog post describes the negative or positive points of an event, product, service, or industry. It might be purely about the effects themselves, or, like the example below, it may introduce tips to avoid negative effects/benefit from positive effects (‘5 ways to...’ ‘7 tips to...’ are great titles to encourage website hits). A good technique with this type of post is to include a story of an actual event to which the reader can relate. The basic outline becomes:

- Introduction
- Story
- Tips
- Thoughts (from an expert, or your client, perhaps)
- Conclusion

This type of article gives exceptional potential to link through to the story post, providing extra SEO possibilities.

The Pitfalls Article

Pitfalls, dangers, or common mistakes make great blog post themes. Posts can be structured so as to describe the pitfall and then explain avoidance strategies, position the writer as the expert the reader requires, or the product as the answer to the reader’s needs. Another benefit of writing this type of post is that titling lends itself to attracting website visitors.

Getting More SEO Juice from Blog Posts

Have you ever clicked through a few blogs and thought to yourself how some just *look* better than others? This isn't simply for aesthetic purposes, but can add a whole load more SEO juice. We've already discussed using keywords and how important they are in titles, but you should also attempt to use them at least once in sub-headings in your post.

When you enter a post into a blog, you'll be able to use different heading styles. Only use Heading 1 (H1 tag) once per post, and at the top. Other header tags (H2 to H5) can be used multiple times, helping to break your page up – and with keywords used in these tags also helping for search engines to find your content.

Here are other SEO methods you should use in your posts:

Add an image (or two, or more)

This can make people apprehensive, but if you know how to use images properly it is pretty easy (and you get to make your posts look great, too). Here are a few things to do to get the best from adding images:

- Use a .jpeg for high quality images such as photos, and a .png for other graphics
- Save the file with a name that describes the graphic, using hyphens between words (think keywords!)
- When adding to a blog, include an alt. text (think keywords again)
- Create great images with subtitles, in a variety of different styles – email me and I'll send you a great image template which enables you to do this in seconds

Be careful when using images, though, because you don't want to get into copyright issues. There are plenty of sites that you can source images from, paying only a small price to be able to use them, and also several sites that offer copyright and royalty free images (one of my favourites is www.morguefile.com).

Finally, think about where you want the image to appear on the screen when adding to your post, and try to ensure that you also add a thumbnail when adding to your post (this is a function on your blog application).

About sentences, paragraphs, and white space

Okay, there's no need to go into reams of detail here. You need your blog to look good and read easy, so use:

- Short sentences
- Short paragraphs
- White space between paragraphs

Add internal and external links

Add internal and external links to blog posts wherever you see fit. Don't flood a post with these links, but make each one relevant and value-adding. Internal links could be to blog categories, archives, landing pages, contact pages, other posts, etc. Adding these links doesn't only make the blog easier for search engines to find, it also increases its value to readers and the time they spend on your site. You are giving them an easy way to find the information they wish to find, and ensuring they understand the value of visiting your site. External links do a similar job; but don't link to direct competitors. Instead, look for links to data, research, and other material that supports your blog post.

Many SEO companies suggest using keywords within link text, though there is evidence that Google is moving away from searching on this criterion because it has led to poorly crafted blogs.

Use categories

Having mentioned categories above, it's best to explain what these are. Creating categories on your site makes it easier for readers to navigate and find what they are looking for – and similarly for search engines. You'll need to set up categories on your website, and then you simply assign each blog post to a category.

Use bullet points and numbered lists

Readers love bulleted and numbered lists. They make it easier to spot important points, and help with the look of a blog post. The jury is constantly out on whether bullet points actually help with SEO, but they certainly don't harm.

Create a great meta-description

The meta-description of a blog post is the couple of lines of text that surfers see under a blog post title when they are searching the web for content. You need to be creative with the meta-description: it's one of the most important parts of a blog post, as it not only tells the reader what to expect but also alerts search engines. For these reasons it's important to use your keywords within the meta-description. Be warned, though: you only have 160 characters to word a perfect meta-description.

A warning about using keywords

When using keywords, always make sure that your blog post reads naturally and that keywords have not been forced into the text. Also, be wary of how many keywords and what saturation you employ. Two or three keywords per blog post will usually suffice, with a saturation of around 1% to 1.25% (around 5 or 6 times per 500 words).

Fast and Easy Blog Post Editing

Editing will add the final polish to your work, and in most cases an independent editor is the way to go: he or she will be impartial and offer a second set of eyes. It is incredibly difficult to edit your own work – you’re simply too close to it, tending to scan what you have written and not give it the level of attention necessary. You miss typos and spelling errors.

The biggest problem for bloggers is the cost of employing an independent editor. Generally speaking, the shorter the piece the more comparatively expensive editing costs might be. So it is left to the blog post writer to edit his or her own posts. My eBook, *Self-Editing The Easy Way*, details the self-editing process in much more detail than the space allows here. However, here is an easy five-step process that will help to iron out the creases from your blog writing:

1. Step back

Once you’ve written a blog post, put it to one side and leave it alone for a few hours, or even a day or two. This allows you to have a fresher look at it when you do finally get back to it. If you use a blog diary, then you’ll know what you want to write about in advance. You could even write a few blogs one day and then edit them another.

2. Does it say what you mean it to say?

This is where you need to step inside your readers’ minds. Remember, your readers may be novices at the subject that you are writing about. Make sure your blog flows with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It should progress naturally from introduction to conclusion.

Check that the message you want to convey is clear, and that it draws the reader in and maintains their interest throughout.

3. Get out the red pen

Now it’s time to put on your proofreader’s hat. Check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and use everyday language. Pay particular attention to:

- Using contractions (use ‘I’ll’ rather than ‘I will’)
- Using words that you would normally use (if you would use ‘bugbear’ instead of ‘worry’ in your natural language, then use it). Remember, blogs are usually informal
- Proper use of apostrophes
- Homonyms – words that sound like others. Common misspellings include they’re/there/their; to/too/two; and so on

4. Get rid of the unnecessary

Remove words and phrases that really shouldn’t be included. Like ‘really’ in the last

sentence. Remove everything you can without destroying the meaning of your post. Remove words such as 'that' and 'the'. Watch out, also, for repetition of words that make your work sound clunky. Finally, try to avoid using clichés.

5. Read your blog out loud

You might feel daft reading your work out loud, but it really does help pick up those last little mistakes. It gives you extra focus on each sentence and each word and phrase within each sentence.

Don't ever add a post to your blog without giving it a complete once over. It's amazing how much you'll pick up.

How to Never Run out of Ideas for Blog Posts

To get the best value from your blog, you'll need to post regularly. Some of my clients – after a period of bedding in and getting to know each other, me learning their subject and the style and tone they want to convey – simply have me blog for them as I see fit. They're confident that the blog posts I produce will do exactly what they want them to.

Whether it's your own blog or that of another you are writing for, it can be hard to have a constant stream of ideas and material to write about. This is where planning comes into its own. Think of it like doing the weekly shopping: if you have a weekly meal plan, then you'll be able to make list that will ensure your cupboards are never empty when you go to them.

Of course, there may be some hot topic or item of news – perhaps a new product released or a piece of software that would make your readers' lives easier – that would lend itself to being blogged about 'off-the-cuff'. But this is usually the exception that proves the rule.

Some topics are easier to plan for than others. For example, one of my clients is a greetings card company. At the beginning of the year I work through the calendar and write down which special days there are over the following 12 months, and how these coincide with the client's required blog flow. I know weeks in advance what I'm going to write! However, this isn't always possible. Here's a simple three-step process to ensure you always have a stream of ideas:

1. Set-up a list of possible topics

Sit down and begin brainstorming ideas for your blog. Remember, the blog's purpose is to showcase your knowledge, ability, and skill. It's about you talking to and engaging with your audience. Think about what they want to know, and you'll be well on the way to creating a list of topics to blog about:

- Have you had questions from people, either online or otherwise? Make a list of these, perhaps in a diary or notebook, or on an excel spreadsheet, and consider sharing answers
- Discover what others are talking about by spending a few minutes each day searching the Internet in your field, reading trade magazines, and watching the news and related television programmes. Watch on social media accounts such as Twitter and Facebook, too.
- Think about your own diary. What do you have coming up over the next few weeks, months, or the following year? If in business, do you have any product or service releases coming up? If you're an author, when is your next publication date? Are you travelling anywhere, meeting customers, readers, or doing other things that you can reveal in your blog that would be interesting and beneficial for your audience to read?

Okay, by now you should have a pretty long list of potential topics to write about. Some questions could spread over a couple of blogs posts (or even more, like a mini series).

2. Edit your list of topics

Work through your list and reduce to the best two-dozen topics. When doing this, think about how often you've been asked a particular question, or about a particular topic. Does it line up with upcoming internal events, such as a book or product launch?

Now, split these topics into categories. For example, if you're blogging about food, then you might have categories such as meat dishes, vegetarian dishes, microwave meals, and simple snacks. If you have 24 topics, you should have six topics in each of these four categories.

You've now got enough material to blog twice each month while ensuring your blogs are fresh and varied throughout the year.

3. Diarise your content

Now, write each blog topic in your diary. Make sure that you have diarised for a few days before you want to publish, to give yourself time to edit and perfect.

This method I've outlined above will provide you with enough ideas and content matter for two blog posts per month for a year. Simply increase the list of topics and you'll increase the posts you diarise to write.

As my blogging experiment showed, if you stop blogging, you quickly lose your audience. Creating a blogging diary is the best way to ensure you maintain your blog and add new content on a regular basis. If you find that you're beginning to run out of ideas, simply repeat this blog diary process. You can customise as you see fit – going through the process once each month, every six months, or as often as needed.

It's Not All about SEO – How to Promote Your Blog

I've spoken so much about keywords and SEO that you could be forgiven for thinking that, once you've written a great post and ensured it has been perfected for SEO purposes, it would simply be a matter of posting and waiting for thousands of readers to visit your blog and act on your call-to-action. That couldn't be further from the truth. There's plenty more work to be done, especially in a world that is so connected by social media.

Coming up with the idea for your blog post is like conception. Writing your blog post is like the gestation period, and when you've unleashed your blog post onto your site it is simply its birth. Now is the time to nurture it and help it grow. You need to nudge your post in the right direction, encouraging it out into the big, bad world and helping it to meet the people you know would benefit from reading it.

I'm not going to go into great detail about each of the methods outlined below, but you'll find all of them useful to getting your blog more widely read.

- **Social media**

Set up social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and others, and use automated tools such as www.hootsuite.com to push your posts to these accounts. Don't limit social media posts to your blog posts, though; take a few minutes each day to get involved by posting out personal messages, too. You'll need to build a list of followers, and this takes time (add in a 'follow' button for Facebook and Twitter on your blog).

Also, look for Tweets and Facebook conversations and groups that you can become involved with and comment on.

- **Social bookmarking**

If you've ever sent a friend a link to a website that you thought would be of interest to them, you've participated in social bookmarking. A social bookmarking website is a tagging website that helps people find your content, like an intelligent search engine. A list of 50 social bookmarking sites that might be good for your blog can be found by [clicking on this link](#).

- **Post on other blogs and forums**

Like becoming involved in social media conversations, seeking out relevant blogs and forums to comment on raises your profile and begins to get you noticed. Don't overdo this, though, and tread carefully when you do. Whatever comments you leave must be relevant and add value; do any less than this and you'll earn a reputation as a spammer. Introduce a link back to your blog or website by saying something like 'I've written more about this at....'

You could always email the other person (blogger) first and request permission to leave a link. You never know, you might find some cross-capitalisation potential.

Apart from these three methods, there are other ways to promote your blog, too:

- Write a press release and post via a press release site, such as PRWeb. Some of these press release sites are free, though most will charge
- Write a regular piece for your local newspaper, and place your blog address on every article
- Use an article marketing service, perhaps writing free articles for sites that allow you to link back to your site

Be A Great Blog Writer

Blogging is a key ingredient in today's business world. The reason so many people and writers fail with their blogs, spending hours writing blog posts and then seeing no return on investment, is simply that they don't know how to craft a post that will engage an audience and encourage the reader to act upon a call-to-action. Their style is wrong for their target market, or they pay no heed to keywording, and then fail to follow up with marketing their posts.

This eBook has concentrated on writing great blog posts, but also given an introduction to marketing and publicising a blog. Whether you are the blog owner or a freelance writer looking to increase your business in this area, following the methods and strategies detailed in these pages will push you to the front of the crowd. A blog post takes time and experience to craft expertly, and dedication to promote. If you can get these elements right, and then keep up with an ever-changing SEO environment, your blog writing will always be in demand.