

“What’s the Big Blog?” by Angie Pedersen



Blog blog blogety blog. The whole world is talking about blogs. Over 60 million people have started blogs, according to BlogHerald.com. And more are started every day. People use blogs to discuss politics, complain about their bosses, describe what they ate for lunch, and pretty much any other topic you can imagine. But blogs aren't just for recording the minutiae of our lives. They can also market and build buzz for your business. In fact, having a blog, and being a part of this emerging media, can give you just the marketing edge you've been looking for. If you're not blogging now, you should be.

The Basics

The term “blog” is short for “web log”, or a diary of journal entries that’s accessed online. Entries are posted using an online form that looks a lot like an email. Your post is then archived

automatically in chronological order, as well as by topic. Publishing blog entries is fast and easy, and you do not have to go through a webmaster to do it. Setting up a blog is simple, and several sites will host your blog for free. The most popular one is Blogger.com, but you can explore other options with an online search of the words “free blog”.

Blogger.com is a great way to start blogging – it assumes you are a beginner, walking you through the entire process of setting up your blog and making your first entries. No need for HTML. Andy Wibbels of EasyBakeWeblogs.com has put together an excellent primer on what a blog is, how it works, and the business benefits (http://www.easybakeweblogs.com/what_is_a_blog.php). “If you can send an email – you can publish a blog,” writes Wibbels. Once you make a number of entries, you’ll get a feel for what blogging is like, and what features you want in a blog host. Then you can check out other sites to see if a different host might fit your needs better.

The Benefits

Once you set up a blog, you basically have a website for your business. Anything you post is automatically available for customers to view, and for search engines to find. (Search engines love blogs because files are updated so frequently. This improves your business’s ranking on search engine results.) You can give customers your blog URL and list it in your newsletter. People will then be able to visit your blog to find the latest information on your business. Your customers also have the option of subscribing to RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeders to be notified every time you post a new entry to the blog. In addition, you can use Bloglet.com to send out an email with each new entry to your blog. This automatic notification keeps your name and business in front of your customers, reminding them how much they want to do business with you!

The Uses

Here are some ideas to help market your business with blogs.

- Hosting an upcoming sale or special promotion? Gather the details, post them to your blog, and let customers know when to take advantage of the discounts.

- To promote a new class, have your instructor post a specific juicy teaser about what customers will learn if they attend the class.
- To move a specific product, post a tip on how to use it, or include a picture of a completed project. Then let customers know they can get that product from you.
- To entice more teens into your store, give a teen “guest blogging” privileges, and have her post her top five favorite products each month.
- Keep your content fresh with timely announcements, such as when the new class calendar is available, or when a new instructor has been added to your staff.

You Can Also Blog about These Topics:

- Offer reminders: when retreat or class registrations start, and end; holiday countdowns; and saving items for an upcoming garage sale.
- Advise customers when products sell out, or are backordered
- Tempt customers with listings of new product arrivals.
- Report on the latest scoop from trade shows (these can even be blogged while on the road!)
- Educate your customers with links to helpful scrapbooking websites and project instructions.
- Jennifer Kyrnin, About.com’s Guide to Web Design, suggests you post a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section on your blog. These could be questions about your business, or about scrapbooking in general.
- Open a discussion: ask customers to post their favorite organizational tips in the Comments section, for instance.
- Offer a question of the week, and encourage customers to respond online.

When you put all this information at your customers’ fingertips, it places you in a position of authority. They see you as a resource. “Blogs can help position you as the expert in your field,” writes Paul Cheney, author of the “Why Blog?” Column at AllBusiness.com. “You already know a great deal about the products you sell or the services you offer. A blog gives you the opportunity to easily share that knowledge with thousands of interested people across the globe.”

The Bottom Line

While millions of people are starting blogs, both personal and professional, those who use to blogs to promote scrapbooking businesses are still very much in the minority. This allows you to stand out as an informational resource in the scrapbooking blogosphere. Jill Davis, founder of Scrapbook.com, is one such scrapbook-professional-turned-blogger. Her website offers a blog that provides customers with information about contests, new product arrivals, product reviews, and organizational tips, as well as what’s going on in Davis’ personal life. This blog helps readers stay informed of the site’s business dealings, while also allowing them to get to know Jill a bit more personally. Your blog could accomplish the same results, once you get started. Just imagine all the marketing potential! Give your business a marketing edge by starting a blog, and you too can build your own buzz.

BIO: Angie Pedersen is a freelance writer, specializing in crafts, B2B, technical writing, and social media topics. Her areas of expertise include website content, blog marketing, and media communications. Find more samples of her writing at <http://angiewrites.com>.