

Blogs

Columbia Encyclopedia definition: “blog, short for web log, an online, regularly updated journal or newsletter that is readily accessible to the general public by virtue of being posted on a website. Blogs typically report and comment on topics of interest to the author, and are usually written and posted using software specifically designed to facilitate blogging; they include hyperlinks to other website and, often, photos, video clips, etc. The most recent entry by the blogger is posted at the beginning of the blog, with earlier entries following in reverse chronological order; comments and other responses to the blog by readers are often posted after each entry.”

Blog Advantages

- Blogs are a great medium for your customers and prospects to get to know you and your services better.
- When you post information to a blog the blog software automates the process of updating your website with the new information and archiving old content; simplifying the chore of keeping your website fresh and relevant.
- Blogs can automatically announce (ping) to the world whenever new content is added. Again, this automated process simplifies the all-important (and normally time consuming) promotion process.
- Through the use of syndication methods your blog postings (writings) can be monitored easily by fans of your services/writing.
- Blogs provide a wonderful platform for readers to interact with you by leaving comments.
- Due to the highly social and interactive nature of blogs it is possible that links will begin to appear to your posts from other websites. This can increase your website’s link popularity and will only happen if you write engaging and source-worthy content.

Blog Software

Blog software is both free and commercial and plentiful. That said, here is a fairly [comprehensive list](#) and a [blog software comparison chart](#) which provides further detail. There are two types of Blogger; one is the hosted solution (using Google’s servers) called Blog*Spot and the other is a personally hosted solution where updates and archives are automatically posted within your own website. The Blog*Spot solution is not recommended because, like TypePad (#4 below), all of the content and links will not be as influential because they are not hosted on your own website. There will be some benefit because your blog is likely to link to your main website profusely; however, it is best to integrate the Blogger blog within your own website.

Here are the top 4 better known solutions:

1. [Blogger by Google \(Free\) www.blogger.com](#)
2. [WordPress \(Free\) www.wordpress.com](#)
3. [Movable Type \(Paid\) www.movabletype.org](#)
4. [Typepad \(Paid\) www.typepad.com](#)

Blog Considerations

Having your Webmaster install a blog solution is generally not a difficult task although you will have consider the best method to integrate a blog within your website’s existing structure. Here are some of the more important considerations that relate to usability and search engine rankings:

- Carefully name your blog: Your blog is both an extension of your company’s brand and its marketing goals.

Consider this when researching the name of the blog.

Start your research by noting the names of your competitor's blogs; you may find a pattern of keywords emerging. Also review the various search frequencies for blog related keywords in your industry. Using a tool such as [Keyword Discovery](#) or [Wordtracker](#) you can get some perspective on the popularity of various phrases.

Research which keywords will allow you to brand your blog in a manner that provides maximum exposure. After all, anyone who links to your blog is likely going to use your title and those linked keywords are a great boon to related rankings.

- Decide on a simple path: Your blog should be located at a space in your website that is simple to remember and navigate to. For example [www.yourcompany.com/blog/](#) is often adopted because it is the easiest to remember.
- Add the blog into your site's navigation: Are you planning on your blog being a large draw to your website? If so, you should consider where you are going to integrate links to your blog within the main navigation of your website. Remember that your blog is meant to create a readership over time and providing easy access to the blog is a crucial step.

Tip: Make sure to evaluate the placement of the navigation links over time using your website statistics. It may very well be that your statistics show your blog has become the main driver of traffic to your website. If this is the case then experiment with your navigation by making the link to your blog even more prominent on your home page and see how it affects sales; this may yield higher readership, better ROI and longer time spent by visitors on the site.

IMPORTANT: I recommend starting your blog with a positive attitude; expect it to become a permanent addition to your online marketing strategy. This will require you to plan spending the time to make your blog work for you. After all, successful blogs require extraordinary commitment because the only way to draw regular readers is to provide quality content on a regular basis. If you are not sure you can handle this extra time then reconsider creating one for the moment or hire someone who can.

Avoiding Duplicate Content Issues on Blogs

When a new posting is created in your blog the system will automatically create two types of archives. One will be an archive by date (by month or week) and the other will be a categorical archive. Categories or 'labels' as they are called on Blogger allow visitors to find your postings under certain topics you specify.

These automated archival options provide excellent options for users to find information; however, they also give the search engines far too many versions of the same article. Search engines are not fond of duplicate content; it adds unnecessary bulk to their databases, drains valuable processing time and it can appear like SPAM.

So how can you minimize duplicate content issues on a blog? Use your Robots.txt file to block sections of your blog from search engine spiders so the same content is not indexed repeatedly through different arenas.

Begin by cutting back the greatest offender: either the date archives or the labels/categories. Two viable

options are presented below:

Option 1: Block spiders from categories since they are the most duplicate-ridden sections of your blog. After all, if you apply three categories to a single posting you will end up with at least three versions of the same article within your blog. If, however, you choose to block categories and only enable date-driven archives then you only have a single version of your article located in the blog over the long term which is far more desirable.

Once the categories have been blocked you will have only 3 duplicates of your article when the complete article is initially posted and ultimately, only one, once the article leaves the blog home page and feed.

Option 2: Alternative method of both operating a blog and minimizing duplicate content.

- A. All articles should appear in full format within an article section of your website, separate from your blog.
- B. When you release the new article create a teaser in the form of a snippet and post it in your blog with a link to the full article for continued reading.
- C. Use your site's robots.txt to block spiders from the date archives, feed and any other duplicate versions of pages with the exception of labels/categories.
- D. When you categorize a blog posting do it sparingly (concisely) to minimize duplicates. Since the snippet is only a portion of the core article there is little chance it will affect the main article negatively.

Blog Feeds and Syndication

Every blog comes with a web feed mechanism that automatically updates whenever you add or edit a post on your blog. The purpose of having a web feed is to notify people interested in your blog of new content as soon as it is posted. For this notification to occur, however, the interested blog reader will have to subscribe to your blog's web feed using a special "feed reader" program that continuously checks for updates to your feed.

The following is a step-by-step example of how a feed works:

- 1) A person likes your blog enough to want to be notified when you add new content.
- 2) The person clicks on your blog's web feed icon ([example](#)) and adds it to their feed/news reader (i.e. the [free Google Reader](#)).
- 3) Some time later you post a new article on your company blog ([www.yourblog.com](#))
- 4) When the new content is added your blog software automatically updates your web feed.
- 5) Some time later the person's feed/news reader identifies a change in your feed and automatically updates itself to alert the person of the new content so they can read it.

Syndication: Syndication is the act of submitting your feed to other websites that republish or announce blog postings on a regular basis. By submitting your web feed you are actively syndicating your content on another website or website(s). Syndication is an excellent way to easily diversify your readership and it is very simple to do.

Blog Optimization

When content is added to a blog it is done using a form-like interface that usually has the following fields: title, post (content), and categories. Each of these fields can be optimized using the very same tactics used on any web page during creation and do not require any HTML experience to optimize.

Just be sure to determine the best keywords to optimize each post; for fee-based research tools consider [Keyword Discovery](#) and [WordTracker](#), or you can use free tools like the [Google Adwords Keyword Tool](#). To use these tools just enter in a key word/phrase that seems to best represent the content in your website and run a search. The programs will deliver a set of related words in order of how often they are searched and this will give you crucial insight on what wording might get your posting more publicity or exposure. Once you determine the best phrase you need to use it when optimizing the following elements of the posting:

Title of the Post: Carefully craft your post title using the keywords you found most relevant and popular in relation to your article. Keep the title under 100 characters in length so it is web feed friendly.

The Posting: With luck your posting already includes incidences of the phrase that you chose to optimize. Unfortunately that is not always the case. Consequently you should review your posting again and, as long as you are not devaluing the post, you should try to insert incidences of the phrase in the copy and, if possible, within links.

Categories: if your categories are open to search engine indexing then you should pick no more than two extremely relevant categories per posting. This will minimize content duplication and ensure the content provides value to the category section when it is indexed by search engine spiders. If your categories are not open to search engine spiders then you can tag as many relevant categories as you require.

Intermediate Blog Optimization

In order to brand your blog with the same look as your website you will need to make design changes to the template; even if you just want to change the layout of the template provided with your blog software. When you are conducting these changes there are certain optimal techniques to keep in mind.

1) Post Titles Should be Permalinked: Ensure the titles for each blog posting pull double-duty as permalinks. Permalinked titles ensure that the keyword relevance in the title adds credibility to the linked page.

When you submit a blog posting your blog software will add the posting to your blog home page but at the same time it will automatically generate a single page devoted to the new posting. The posting-specific page will be at an address that never changes so if you ever want to provide someone with a permanent link to your posting you provide them with the posting's "permalink".

2) Title of the Permalink Page: If possible ensure that the title of the blog is placed at the end of the page title on your permalink page. This is important because the title tag that appears in search engine results is often the same as the title tag on the page. As a result, stating the name of your website or blog is useless if the information the users are looking for is further within the title tag. Furthermore, the first text within the title tag must concisely represent the content of the linked page for top rankings to take place; this is a crucial part of search engine ranking algorithms.

3) Provide Links to Popular Posts: If one of your posts has generated a particularly large amount of interest and the topic is not completely time sensitive consider adding a link to it from a 'most popular postings' section of your blog home page or alternatively on a separate, easily accessible (read spiderable) page within your blog. If your posting has generated significant interest it usually merits showing off to new visitors so they can see how worthwhile your blog is. In addition, by featuring your popular blog postings you will provide yet

another access point for search engines to index the content.

4) Provide Easy Access to Archives: Either your categories or your archives should be blocked to search engine spiders, making the one that is not blocked incredibly important for search engines to index regularly. Before the search engines can get to the categories or the archives however, you need to provide access. Make certain a link to your archives or categories is present on every page on your website so that search engines can easily spider and re-index new and old content.

Optimization is the easy part because creating fresh, new, and engaging content is, by far, the more difficult task. It is amazing just how much time it takes to continually find new and interesting topics to write about. Sometimes it seems like nothing is available but if you dig deep enough in your industry using resources like [Technorati](#) or [Google News](#) you will likely find a concept that sparks a new article. - *Ross Dunn*

