

Even in the Blogosphere, the FUD Factor Abounds. Bloggin' Ain't For Everyone

By Kathy Klotz-Guest, MA, MBA

As a professional marketer and humor expert, I read more blogs that I can count. Many of them are good and funny (which I love!). Most, however, are useless and I don't come back.

Also as a small business owner, I am constantly bombarded with the same messages: Grow your business through blogging! Secrets to blogging success! Blog to Increase Your Sales! Blog this, blog that, blah, blah!, blah! It conjures memories of Charlie Brown's teacher whose only enunciated words were always the same grunts Charlie tuned out anyway. All he (and we) heard was: "wah, wah, wah." Ugh!!!!

It gets worse. At two recent small business luncheons I attended, marketers were "pushing" the need for small business blogging using buzzwords, and many of them didn't even know what blogging is. In my ear and in my email box, the marketing mantra shoved in my face by other marketers and business consultants (who should know better about professional strategic best practices, by the way!) is clear: blog or die!

This is the classic FUD approach: selling Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt. Great way to exponentially grow the amount of bad content already prevalent in the blogosphere today.

Enough already! If your small business is dying, as a professional marketer, I'm pretty willing to bet lack of blogging is not your core problem. Really. I'd look into cash flow first.

And each of these "jump on the bandwagon" messages has violated the most important principle of marketing – value through differentiation. I have read a dozen of these blogs in the last few days and most of them were badly written also-rans. Not exactly the most credible sources of information on differentiation. Sorry folks. As my idol Nick Lowe sang, "You gotta be cruel to be kind."

Don't get me wrong - I love *great* blogs. The issue is that blogs are not for every one or every small business. While I agree there are many benefits to blogging, there are many reasons why small businesses may not be able to fully leverage the blogosphere. In fact, a handful of my smaller clients are absolutely convinced they need blogs because of all the attention it has received lately. These clients, by the way, also admit they don't know what blogging is, where to start, and how to sustain a great blog. If you can't execute on the promise of a blog, you're not helping your business out. You're just wasting resources.

That's the key to a successful blog – sustainability. Can small businesses create great blogs? Absolutely. But it requires time, dedication, education, consistency, planning, and other resources that may be in short supply for very small businesses. So before you run off and start your blog and create the latest buzz - RSS feeds - because some marketer told you "you gotta have it," there are some important principles to consider. Yes, blogs can increase your visibility, but only if you:

- Have something of value to say or comment on
- Can produce some original content or at least comment on others' ideas intelligently
- Are linked to other great, high-quality, and highly visited blogs

- Provide a unique point of view on substantive issues: no one cares about your dog "Muffy" and what you ate for breakfast. There is content and there is drive. Blogs need the former. No one needs the latter.
- Provide useful, valuable resources as part of your blog aggregation
- Get enough traffic on your site or blog to make it worthwhile

But creating great blogs requires dedicated resources small businesses may not have. While not all blog content must be original, the author's point of view (POV) must be. Are you up to speed on other industry blogs? Are you aware of what's happening currently that is relevant for your market so that you can refer to, aggregate, or comment on it? Do you have time to educate yourself and stay up to date on the latest developments that are relevant for your intended audience (so that you can offer value)?

Serious blogging with impact requires a knowledge base and time. Great blogs also need:

- Consistency and frequency - regular blogging is a time investment
- Knowledge and opinions
- A unique point of view that positions you as an expert – a personality and voice
- Dedicated time regularly to express thought leadership in a significant, impactful way
- Time spent frequently reading and commenting on other blogs
- Knowledge of content management and some understanding of search engine optimization (SEO) so you can increase your rankings – and be found
- A management plan for maintenance and growth over the long-run

Check Out the Facts

A small business should research the blogs that are leaders in its market and industry. See what it takes to run a successful blog. If you still decide that you need a blog for your business, create a plan that allows for sustainable development and growth. Ask the following:

- How many resources do you need (people, time, money)?
- Will blogging take you away from revenue-generating activities?
- What are your bandwidth constraints?
- Do you have enough to say to keep the blog interesting over time?
- Do you have access to other writers, networks, blogrolls, etc., for links and content?

Other Ways to Get the Benefits of Blogging

So you have done your research and you decide starting your own blog isn't right for you – at this point in time anyway. You can still glean many benefits from regular contributions to other blogs that are key for your market or industry.

- Consider writing an article for a well-trafficked, well-indexed (in search engines such as Google), respected blogzine every 1-2 weeks for starters and do more as you have time. This will get your name out there. It will also give you time to develop valuable thought leadership when you have time, and without having to invest heavily in hosting and maintenance resources.
- Comment on other blog posts. Well-crafted, insightful responses to topics that are relevant to your users position you as an expert and create interesting dialogues.
- Read widely and focus narrowly. Read many great blogs to understand what is going on in your industry but only comment on events, articles, posts, etc., where you can add

value. Commenting on everything will not increase your visibility or reinforce your image as an expert in a particular field. Define your expertise narrowly and go deep.

The keys to any visibility, however, whether it is through your own blog or contributions to other blogs are consistency, frequency, and an insightful POV, or “blogitude” as I call it. Never be afraid to put a stake in the ground with an opinion, no matter how controversial you think it may be. That’s part of the dialogue you can generate.

On that note, happy blogging... or not! Whatever is RIGHT for you.

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