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Chapter 1: “I Thought Blogs Were on Their Way Out”

Starting an online business? A wise word of caution and advice for you:

Don’t overlook blogs and blogging.

At one time, blogs were considered the cutting edge of social media, but of late they’ve become almost blasé. After all, everyone’s doing it. Because everyone’s doing it, can blogging really be all that effective? How can one blog make a difference in a vast ocean of blogs on the Internet?

Statistics show there are 70 million WordPress blogs worldwide.¹ Notice that’s WordPress blogs only, which doesn’t take into account other blog platforms such as Blogger. Seventy million is a lot of blogs!

Such statistics can be discouraging. You may be thinking, “What’s the use? Anything I submit will just get lost among so many others.” If this describes your opinion of blogs, you may be missing an integral component of your online business-building toolkit. It’s not a matter of your blog competing

with millions of others; it's a matter of understanding how a blog site can work in your favor to increase your online exposure, build your personal brand, and grow your business.

Blogs are Unique

Keep in mind that blogs are quite unique in that they differ from your web site, your newsletters, bulk emails, and discussion forums. A blog can reach out to prospective clients and communicate with them in a friendly voice that is distinctively yours.

Blogs Provide Unique Content Which is the Heart of Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

In order to be successful, online entrepreneurs must be seen. If your business URL shows up on page four or five of a search-engine search, it's lost to the world. One of the best methods to increase ranking is to have your business name, your business site, your business entity enhanced

with *unique content*. (In this case unique content simply means it's not made up of blocks of cookie-cutter information.) While this content can refer to the website itself, one of the more effective means of adding unique content is through regular, consistent blogging.

Early on in the social media era, the practice of “stuffing” websites and blogs with duplicate content and keywords was rampant. The idea was to try to trick the search engines in order to gain those high rankings. But those days are over.

An increase in ever-developing technology means that today’s search engines are too sophisticated to be fooled. This is a good thing because it weeded out those who wanted to take the shortcut – the easy way – to online recognition. It cleared the way for those whose intent is to build an authentic business presence. Hopefully, that includes you!

Blogs Increase SEO Ranking for Your Business Website

The technique of partnering a blog with a business website will always be a winner for an online business. Because a well-written, well-maintained blog is always changing and growing, it serves as a catalyst for increased SEO ranking.

Another technique for increase ranking is to feature targeted keywords within your blogs. These specific keywords will be the few keywords which visitors search out to ultimately reach your blog. The more targeted your keywords, the greater your chance of high rankings.

Blogs Can Capture Contact Information and Build a Following

Most blog platforms (more about specific blog platform choices later) allow the capability of a *web form* to be placed on your blog page. If a visitor is interested in a particular business offer, they are invited to leave contact information in order to receive the offer. (Such as a free informational e-book.)

As visitors leave contact information, you are now building a contact list.

The larger, more targeted your contact list, the more receptive will be your following. When you contact them with a special sale, or new products, these followers are much more likely to purchase from you.

Blogs Can Be Monetized

There are many ways in which a blog can be monetized. If you were thinking of your blog only as a way to get your information out to the public – start thinking outside that narrow box.

As you create a wide audience in your particular niche, it is possible that a sponsor might be interested in your following. That sponsor would then underwrite the blog expenses. Many companies have done this to build brand awareness and promote their products.

Ads can be included on your blog. These might include text links, banner ads, or promotions for affiliate programs. Affiliate programs might include Google AdSense, Amazon Associates, eBay Affiliates and Pay-Per-Post. As a blogger, you can sell your own electronic products such as e-books and special reports. There are also opportunities to make money by reviewing products, events, and other businesses.

Blogs Enhance Online Presence; Establish You as *Expert* in Your Niche

Blogs can be an amazing catalyst for showcasing you and your information. It matters little what niche you are in, providing consistent unique, value-laden content in your blog will draw visitors to your site and build your following. Because you are providing information people are looking for, you will become established as the go-to person in your particular niche.

Archives

The matter of archives on your site at first may seem inconsequential; however, it's quite an amazing feature. A feature that will serve you well. As

your posts become dated, your site is designed to remove them from the home page and into the archives. Instead of you updating dozens of pages every time you add new posts, your platform does the work for you. Each new post is added to the top of the home page, the oldest one moves off and the archives are rearranged.

Your archives are then organized for easy indexing by search engines. You can specify how you want them organized – by month or week – whatever works best for your site.

Blog or Website?

As an online business person, you may think that since you have an active and effective website that that is enough. At one time that may have been true, but no longer. The more social media takes hold of the business culture, the more avenues are needed to connect with potential clients.

A website tends to be somewhat formal, with the contents often stuck in one position. Even websites that are updated on a regular basis usually involve only minimal changes. Add to that the fact that if you retain a web designer, website updates can get costly.

Your blog on the other hand will be more chatty, more informal, more open to interaction with followers. The level of control is in your hands. Theme, colors, and background can all be changed quickly and easily. Every time new material is added, which may be two or more times a week, the SEO ranking improve.

Another question that comes up is the choice between a discussion forum and a blog site. After all, discussion forums invite interaction. Here again, the difference lies in the tone and style. A discussion forum is rather like a central bulletin board where voices, thoughts, and ideas are coming in from every direction. The forum cannot live without the outside input.

A blog is controlled by the author and can get along quite well without comments or input. While feedback is desired and preferred, it is not vital to the life of the blog. The other, and most significant difference, is that the author's personality and voice comes through the blog loud and clear. Not true with a discussion forum.

This overview not only shows the many advantages of creating and maintaining a blog site, but also how blogs compare to a website and a discussion forum. These facts should work to convince you that blogging is anything but blasé. Blogging truly is one of the most effective, and least costly, ways to effectively build a successful online business. If you've now made the decision to move forward to create and maintain your own blog site, let's take a look at the next step.

Chapter 2: “What Kind of Blog Will Work Best for My Business?”

The first step after you've decided to begin your blog is to choose your platform. The two most popular are Blogger and WordPress.

Blogger

Blogger is owned by Google and it's free. That's two big advantages at the outset. Because it's Google-backed, you will seldom if ever experience down time or hosting problems with Blogger. Yet another advantage is the fact that a Blogger account is almost impossible to be hacked. That measure of safety is reassuring to many. And last but not least in the list of Blogger advantages, posts published on blogger are indexed quickly simply because Google owns it.

Because it's free and is so easy to use, Blogger is one of the best ways for a beginner to get started and get the feel of being an authentic blogger. You can be up and running in a matter of minutes.

WordPress

Because WordPress offers two different choices newbies find it somewhat confusing. However, when you take a closer look, it's really straightforward

WordPress.com

WordPress.com is a free service much like Blogger. Because it's free and because there are only a few bells and whistles, it makes everything quite simple. You are never concerned about upkeep, storage or maintenance. On the down side, you take what is offered. Your choice of themes and options is limited to what is made available to those who want a free blog platform. Because you are not the owner of your blog (you are more like a renter or a borrower of the blog), this means you have limited control.

WordPress.org

With WordPress.org you can install it independently on any hosted website in addition to using it on the WordPress website. Now you have complete control of the bells and whistles available that you choose to install. This includes a large selection of themes (layout and background images), as well as plugins.

You own it and therefore have complete control (this is why it is called a *self-hosted blog* since you manage it yourself). Another great advantage is your ability to use your own domain. By using your own domain you will more effectively build your brand.

The only downside is that WordPress.org comes with a fee and you are now responsible for upkeep, storage and maintenance.

Blog Hosting

If you choose to go with WordPress.org, you will need a web host. If you already have a website, it's possible to use the same host for both your website and the blog site.

Some hosting services present different types of packages, each with its own price and different range of benefits. Prices may range from \$4.25 a month to over \$40 a month. That's a pretty wide range of cost, which is due in part to the features included within each plan. Some hosting companies offer low rates simply to grow their brand.

If your blog will be using multimedia such as photo albums or audio, you will need a platform that supports such features.

What's Out There?

You may want to invest the time to study other blog sites before building your own. Get an idea of what's out there; what's working and what's not. The more blogs you read, the more you will grasp the different styles and subject matter out there.

Additionally, you will want to outline your objectives and clearly determine the desired outcome of your blog site. When you know for sure what you are trying to accomplish, the direction to take will be much clearer.

Be aware that there are almost as many types of blogs as there are bloggers who create them. They range anywhere from moms describing their day, to politics, to philosophy, to historical trivia, and on and on the list goes. For this book, we're focusing in on blogs that are designed to enhance and grow your business.

Avenues for Blog Research

Blog *ecosystems* are sites that are used to monitor millions of blogs every minute. At one time there were several such sites; however the load became so gigantic that many have shut down. At this time one that is still standing is <http://technorati.com/>

Another area to use for research are blog search engines and directories.

These include:

Blogwise (www.blogwise.com)

Blogarama (www.blogarama.com)

Globe of Blogs (www.globeofblogs.com)

It's a simple matter to register your blog site with any one of these directories. It's just another way to increase exposure on the Internet.

Your blog site will have what's known as a *blogroll*. This is your own list of your favorite blogs and web sites. When you land on a blog that you like check out *their* blogroll. This practice could lead you to other complementary sites and give you more creative ideas.

Whatever route you chose for research, it will not be wasted time. Soon you'll be well versed in what's out there, and in turn you'll have a better idea of what you want in your own blog site.

Your Niche

What is the niche to which your business is connected? Who is your target audience? What does this audience want in the way of information? Are they back-to-the-earth people who want to know how to grow a backyard organic garden? Are they avid golfers who want to improve their game? Are they quilters who are in search of patterns and new quilting ideas? Are

they affiliate marketers who desperately need someone to lead them through the minefields of scams?

No matter what the niche, no matter what line of business, you can create a blog that will draw your targeted audience to you and the products you offer.

Personal Blog

People who enjoy writing, who enjoy storytelling and chronicling of events are the ones most likely to write a personal blog. This type of person may or may not have a business to promote. Can a personal blog work to enhance a business? Indeed it can.

Case in point, a veterinarian began a blog to share with his clients events from his childhood – how he built his own aviary as a teenager. He went on to tell of his years in college and vet school, and the trials of his early years in practice.

This series of blogs presented a side of this practitioner that made him more real to his clients. He knew from the outset that he didn't want to write solely about the medical problems of the animals he treated – although he did include informational blogs as well.

Because people do business with people they *know*, *like* and *trust*, it never hurts to weave personal insights and musings in with the business blogs.

A word of caution – balance is of primary importance here. While visitors want to get to know you, they will become quickly bored with insignificant details of your personal life. Use discretion.

Business Blog

Business blogs can include tips, techniques, how-to's, and behind-the-scenes information about your particular field. What is it about your products or services that are unique? How do your products and services benefit your clients? Because you're familiar with your line of business, you

will know what your followers are looking for. It's up to you to provide exactly that.

Technical

Your business may be about such things as online software, day trading, creating web designs, introducing the latest mobile apps and the like. The world of tech-y blogs is growing by leaps and bounds. This may be more the flavor of where you fit and what you have to offer. By staying on the cutting edge of what's happening in the tech world, you can build a sizeable audience of targeted followers. As a result, your online business will grow.

What Will I Write About?

While your blog may begin with a number of lively posts about you, your business, your niche or industry and so on, after a time that initial thrust can reduce to a mere trickle. There are a couple of remedies for gleaning fresh ideas.

Let's say your niche is in day trading, or the Forex. Visit a press release site such as PRWeb and run a search on Forex. There you will uncover a wide variety of newsy tidbits, any one of which will make a great blog.

Using this same niche idea, yet another strategy is to run a Google search for "Forex blogs," or "day trading blogs." Within seconds you are connected to others in your niche that may have inside information of which you were not aware. If you want to deepen the search use the keywords "best Forex blogs." What will come up is a top ten list – or even a top five list – of what are considered to be the best in that niche. Here again, you have not only fresh information, but many potential contacts.

With the entire Web at your fingertips, and your imagination to help, you will never be short of ideas for blogs.

Now you understand that once you've decided to become a blogger, you first must choose your platform, and then you must choose the type of blog you will write. Starting with the right foundation and moving in the right direction will save time and eliminate frustration further on down the road.

Chapter 3: “I Don’t Have Time (or Skills) to Blog”

All of this sounds fine, well and good, you may be thinking, but you simply don't have the time to write and maintain a blog site. Or you may have time, but your eyes roll back in your head at the thought of having to write *anything*, let alone two or three blogs a week.

The good news is, you can still create an effective blog site. Let's look at how that can come about.

Take Advantage of Private Label Rights (PLR) Material

Private label rights (PLR) materials refer to content that you can purchase for a nominal fee. Sites that offer such materials are abundant – simply run a search to locate the best ones. Most of these sites are indexed according to subject matter. The materials will include a wide variety of articles and e-books on many different subjects.

Because you have purchased them they now belong to you. You can edit them, combine them, add to them, and edit them for your particular niche. These can then be posted to your blog site with no need to credit anyone else. This type of service is an amazing time saver and can help you build up your blog site quickly.

These sites vary in payment options. Some are by monthly payments which include a daily maximum number of articles you can download. Others charge by packs of articles. Choose the one that will best serve your needs and get busy turning out your blogs.

Guest blogging

Another way to add to your site without much work on your part is to accept the work of guest bloggers. This is a technique that is mutually beneficial to both parties.

Your first step will be to create guidelines to keep from attracting low-quality blogs that could work against you. Your guidelines may include your right to

refuse certain submissions, topics that you will accept, taboos that you adhere to on your site, and possibly even word length. Make your guidelines fit your style of blog.

There are sites that work as a clearing house where you can find fellow bloggers who are eager to share their expertise – and their byline. One example is <http://myblogquest.com/>. When your guests' submissions appear on your site, links and backlinks are introduced to your site which work to increase rankings. Your guests will no doubt repost the link to their social media sites, which again builds your exposure.

Refer back to Chapter 2 for ideas of how to discover other highly respected bloggers in your niche. Guest blogging can be an enjoyable way to meet others within your niche and to share aspirations and information.

Contract Out the Work

If you have the resources, it's a great business tactic to hire ghostwriters to write blogs for you on a regular basis. Several sites offer a wide range of contractors who stand ready to bid on your job proposal. The top three are:

- Elance.com
- Guru.com
- Fiverr.com

Hiring outside of these types of structured environments can be a bit risky.

The three market-centers listed here will clearly present the candidates' level of expertise as well as feedback from those who have hired them previously. That way you are assured of working with an experienced writer.

The key to quickly finding the provider that fits your needs is to write a post that is clear, adding as many details as possible. If you have a strict budget

in mind, state that. Also include your desire lengths – some blogs are 1,000 words, others are as short as 250 words. Writers will bid accordingly.

Keep in mind that you can combine PLR purchases with hiring a ghostwriter. Purchase a pack of PLR articles and hire a writer to change out the content to make it more personal, adding your name, your business, and your links.

Just because you are lacking time or expertise to maintain a blog site, don't let that stop you. From the information presented in this chapter you have learned that many techniques exist to override any and all limitations.

Chapter 4: “What the Heck’s a Plugin? Do I Really Need Them?

What’s a WordPress Plugin?

In Chapter 2, the difference between WordPress.com and WordPress.org was explained. You will remember that the latter is owned by you and can be customized. This means you can utilize the full range of their wide array of what are known as *plugins*. Because of that, it makes WordPress.org the better choice of the two.

Basically, a WordPress plugin helps you to manage your blog content. For instance one of the more common plugins is Akismet which is a spam filtering service created by Automattic, the corporation behind WordPress. First released in 2005, Akismet works to filter link spam from blog comments.

While Akismet is shown as a default plugin for WordPress, steps are still required to activate it. This involves a simple walk-through shown on your WordPress dashboard.

WordPress SEO by Yoast

Yet another plugin that bears mentioning is WordPress SEO by Yoast. This is because, as has been mentioned, search engine optimization is crucial in increasing rankings. This plugin offers such helps as a snippet preview and page analysis functionality that helps you optimize your page's content, images titles, and meta descriptions. It also includes XML sitemaps, and many other optimization options. Basically, it looks at the URL, title, description, content, and more to make sure your post has a clear SEO focus.

W3 Total Cache

When thinking about SEO rankings, did you know that page speed is factored in to the equation? In other words, the longer it takes your blog page to load, the lower your ranking. A plugin called W3 Total Cache can help with this dilemma since it greatly increases page speed.

Keep it Simple

Other plugins are revealed when you select the “new” icon on your dashboard. When this list first appears it can become quite overwhelming. How will you ever know which ones to install and which ones to ignore? The best advice is to go slow and keep it simple.

Much will depend on whether you are building your own site, or if you have contracted with a professional to set it up. If you are doing the work on your own, definitely begin with just a few plugins. By doing a little research on

the Web, you will quickly learn from others which plugins are the most important and most beneficial. Test how they perform for you before adding others.

On the other hand if a tech person is creating your site, that person will have more insight as to which ones and how many will be necessary for your needs. But even the most knowledgeable tech person will no doubt advise you to go easy on plugins. More is not always better. While all the bells and whistles can be enticing, in the end you want only what will help build your business.

If plugins are new to you, realize the learning curve to include them is not steep. Installing plugins to make the most of your WordPress blog site is simply a matter of choosing the ones that are right for your site and then following the simple directions to install them.

Chapter 5: “How Will I Build a Following With my Blog?”

Now we come to the most important point and that is building a following.

Who wants to spend hours and hours at the keyboard creating content – or spending cash to create content for you – and no one comes to pay a visit at your site? Our lives are busy enough without spinning our wheels creating something that ends up a in the *stuck* position.

No Secret Formula

When it comes to building a following the first thing to understand is that no one (read that *no one*) holds the secret formula for blog success. That secret formula simply doesn't exist. Many various aspects go into creating a successful blog that will build a following. Some have already been discussed in this book.

The second thing to understand is that building your following is not an overnight venture. In our *instant* society, we want to see fast results, but fast results aren't always the best results. Build slowly; build effectively. Re-visit the objectives you laid out in Chapter 2. Be certain that you have the desired outcome of your blog site well in mind. What will it take to get from here to there? What are you willing to invest in time and money?

Correct Grammar and Punctuation

So writing, grammar, and language arts were not your best subjects in school; so you can never remember when to use *its* or *it's*, when to use *your* or *you're*, *when to use whose* or *who's*; do you know someone who does know? In your circle of acquaintances perhaps there is an editor, or English teacher who would agree to go over your blogs before you hit the "publish" button. While we can all agree that grammar is not always high on the priority list of web content, you still owe it to your readers and site visitors to be as professional as you possibly can. There's no excuse for careless, sloppy writing.

Build Your Online Personal Brand

It was mentioned previously that people do business with people they *know, trust* and *like*. One of the best and easiest ways to gain this trust is revealing your personality through your blog. Let your followers know who you are, where you come from, why you care about them, why you care about the subject at hand.

If you are a blog follower, stop a minute and ask yourself why it is you follow a particular blog. Realize there has to be an element of trust to cause you to spend the time and effort to follow someone. What are they offering that fills a need in your life? Now translate those qualifications over to your own blog and make them work for you.

Let who you are shine out through the information that is presented and you are well on your way to establishing yourself as a blogger *to be followed*.

Invite Guest Bloggers to Increase Exposure

Guest blogging was discussed in Chapter 3 as a way to more easily add content. This is also a great way to increase your online exposure. One part of this exchange of guest blogging is to invite others to submit blogs for your site.

The other side is to *become* a guest blogger yourself. This means all the readers of that particular blog (which for some sites may number in the thousands), have now read your blog and have become acquainted with your name and your business. Such exposure is not only free but is highly effective.

Link to Your Website and All Social Media Sites (FaceBook, Twitter, Etc.)

Yet another way to increase exposure of your blog site is to create a special link to your business website. Also vice versa – have a link on your website that features your blog site. They need to always be interactive.

Now mix in your other social media sites such as FaceBook and Twitter.

While this may appear to be a lot of busy work, these can be set up to automatically link at the time you publish the most recent blog. No extra work at all; just clicking all the right icons.

Always Provide Value-Laden Content

One would think this point about providing value-laden content would go without saying. However, as basic as it seems to be, blogs can still be found on the Internet that contains nothing but boring drivel. Instead of drawing followers, it repels them. It's such a counter-productive practice, one wonders why they even bother with a blog site at all. As mentioned previously, building slowly but effectively is the key. Quality trumps quantity every time.

The information you present should be relevant. Connect with your readers by providing them with information they can readily relate to. Beware of using outdated facts and data.

Carefully choose your content. Respect your readers and determine to offer only the best information possible on your blog. Keep them coming back for more of your unique and helpful information.

Use Polls, Surveys for Interaction

Be creative in techniques that will hold your readers on the page after they arrive. The more involved they become the more likely they will be to return. Creating a poll and then displaying the polling results is one surefire way to involve visitors. Plus, it allows them to interact with one another. They will be curious to know how others weigh in on the question(s) the poll presents.

A survey is another idea to involve a visitor. Your survey questions prove to your visitor that you are interested in that person's thoughts, ideas, and reactions. You might want to present a survey asking your visitors what they would like to see addressed in your blogs. This kind of response can be of great value to the healthy growth of your blog site. And it provides yet

another way to build the needed rapport between you and the visitors that come to your blog site.

Allow for Comments Then Answer the Comments

Most blogging platforms give you the choice of whether or not you will allow visitors to comment. Some bloggers turn this off due to fear of spam. In Chapter 4 the WordPress plugin, Akismet, was introduced. This particular plugin is great for weeding out spam, so that need no longer be an issue that might keep you from accepting comments.

Comments that appear on your blog page can be pure gold as it gives you the pulse of your readers. You learn what they are thinking about various matters. Put this information to use as you move forward.

Just as important as receiving comments is taking the time to answer them. When someone cares enough to take the time to leave a comment, they want to be recognized. Acknowledge them; answer their comments; thank them. This is exactly the interaction you are striving for so don't waste it.

Be Consistent

It's better not to start a blog at all than to start one and quit. Or to repeatedly start and stop. Lack of consistency shows you in a bad light. You come off as an unreliable, or unpredictable, person.

Set your own pace. If all you can manage are two blogs a week, then go for that as a goal. If you manage to write three or fall back to only one, that is still relatively consistent. That's better than starting off with five a week because you are exuberant and excited about getting underway – only to crash within a few weeks and the output is reduced to one or two a week. Set reasonable goals and stick with them. This will be much easier if you are contracting the writing to be done for you, but that may not be possible at the outset. You may be doing all the work yourself until you get the blog off the ground.

Whether or not you are consistent can be seen at a glance by visitors since your blog history is displayed on your blog site. The larger the archives file, the more credible you appear to be. If you begin now with creating even

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two blogs a week, think of the size of your archive file in six months to a year. Add to that a number of guest blogs and it will grow even more quickly.

Schedule Posts into the Future

If you are not familiar with the dashboard of a blog platform such as Blogger or WordPress, you may be unaware that you can schedule posts into the future. This is a wonderful feature since some weeks you may be super busy and have no time to write a blog, but the next week you could turn out eight or ten.

After you write the blog on your site, you have a choice – rather than hitting the “publish” icon, you can opt to edit the publishing time and date. Now if you have written several blogs, all can be posted to the site and scheduled days and weeks into the future. This is also great if you have contracted a freelance writer to write a set of blogs. All can be posted at once and scheduled in the weeks to come.

Write a Book

After six months to a year of writing consistent blogs full of good content, believe it or not, you will have enough material to formulate into a book.

Many bloggers have done exactly that. If you possess the writing skills, you can put it together yourself. If not return to the outsource sites mentioned previously:

- <http://elance.com>
- <http://guru.com>
- <http://fiverr.com>

Here you can post your project expressing the need for a ghostwriter to create a book from your blog posts. From there, it's easy enough these days to list your book on Amazon.com, or you can sell the book from your website or your blog site. This provides yet another way to monetize your blog. Or use your book as a giveaway incentive to attract even more followers. Writing your own book is definitely a win-win situation.

It's so easy to dismiss the thought of creating your own blog simply because it seems a daunting task to make your presence known. However, with just a few strategic techniques, you can carve out a place where you and your business will become known.

Keep in mind that your blog is more than just a place to record a few hundred of words of text a few times a week. A well-maintained blog site can build your personal brand, showcase your business, and establish you as the expert in your field.

By using the tips and how-to's shared in this book, you will be well on your way to building your business with blogs.