

PROPOSAL FOR

**BLOGGING EXPERTISE: THE ESSENTIAL
GUIDE FOR CONSULTANTS**

BY SARAH LEWIS

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OVERVIEW

Blogging is big. Within a few short years, blogging has established itself as a trend with the potential to change the way people do business. Increasingly, consumers look for information and advice online, and savvy businesses are using blogs to reach these savvy customers.

Among businesses, those who stand to gain the most from blogging are consultants. It's crucial for these experts to demonstrate their knowledge in a credible way, and blogging is the perfect tool. *Blogging Expertise: the Essential Guide for Consultants* walks consultants through the process of getting started with blogging and making their new blogs successful in a competitive environment.

Blogging Expertise is an eminently practical book. In contrast to the many popular books about blogging concepts or the handful that cover the nitty-gritty details, this book helps consultants actually start blogging.

Blogging Expertise guides readers through the myriad options available and past the confusion that afflicts most new bloggers. Instead of theorizing, the book takes them step-by-step through the essential tasks in a logical progression, explaining everything they need to know without overwhelming them with trivial information.

It's easy to understand why this "quick start" approach will appeal to time-crunched consulting professionals. Once they've finished *Blogging Expertise*, they'll not only know what really matters to *them* about blogging, they'll have successful blogs of their own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Lewis has built a thriving business over the last three years helping entrepreneurs and small businesses get started with blogging. A prolific blogger herself since 2001, she understands what it takes to start and grow a successful blog.

Sarah's consulting business, also called Blogging Expertise, proves the effectiveness of the concepts in her book, since its growth is almost entirely the result of its blog. The business is not advertised and gains new clients solely through the blog and word of mouth. Sarah's consulting business is a great example of the kind of success Sarah will help *Blogging Expertise* readers achieve.

Sarah's background is in web development, so she thoroughly understands the technical aspects of blogging, but she's also a strong communicator who is known for making complex concepts accessible for non-technical people. Her clients typify the target audience for *Blogging Expertise*. Working with them has given Sarah the specific experience that enabled her to test and refine the concepts, scope, and approach of this much-needed book.

MARKETS FOR THE BOOK

The primary market for *Blogging Expertise* is consultants. Consulting industry revenues were approximately \$125 billion in 2004, and the industry is expected to grow by 60 percent between 2004 and 2014, a significantly higher rate than the 14 percent growth projected for all industries.

According to 2004 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are roughly 1,035,000 consultants in the United States. About 25% of that number is self-employed and therefore especially likely to be interested in a book that outlines an easy and affordable method for promotion. Very few consultants have started blogs at this point, leaving a huge number who are very likely to be interested, if they only understand what to do, how to do it, and where to start.

Beyond consultants, *Blogging Expertise* will also appeal strongly to other experts, including authors, coaches, and personal trainers. These varied markets have several key similarities that make them likely to purchase *Blogging Expertise*:

- In an increasingly competitive environment, it is crucial that they differentiate themselves from their competition.
- Demonstrating their expertise and credibility to their potential clients is central to attracting new business.
- In many cases, these experts find themselves repeating the same information over and over to each new client. They'd like to be able to spend less time on this kind of tedious task and focus on doing their core work.

These markets also represent a very promising potential audience for spin-off books targeted toward specific professions.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The market is ripe for good books about blogging, and several excellent ones have recently appeared and sold well. Each is significantly different from *Blogging Expertise* in scope and market. This section analyzes a sampling of what's available and of interest to the public and demonstrates how *Blogging Expertise* fills market needs left unaddressed by existing books.

***Clear Blogging* by Bob Walsh (Apress, 2007, 351 pp. \$24.99)**

Author Bob Walsh put together this comprehensive resource for bloggers and would-be bloggers of all stripes by gathering advice from, and conducting interviews with, many successful bloggers. The result is a broad general resource that appeals to readers who like to know all the details before they get started.

Blogging Expertise, on the other hand, provides a practical “quick start” for those who simply want to know what they need to do *today* to create a successful blog. The more approachable length of *Blogging Expertise* will attract time-crunched professionals. *Blogging Expertise's* clear focus on consultants will be a strong differentiator in its market.

***The Rough Guide to Blogging* by Jonathan Yang (Penguin Rough Guides, 2006, 200 pp., \$12.99)**

This unintimidating book provides a good overview of what blogging is as well as a look at blogging's short history, but it is directed more toward those who want to learn *about* blogging than those who actually want to *do* it.

Blogging Expertise will be about the same length, but will be much more prescriptive and will address its readers' specific needs rather than being a general resource for anyone wondering what a blog is.

***Publish & Prosper: Blogging for your Business* by DL Byron and Steve Broback (New Riders, 2006, 188 pp., \$21.99)**

The authors are experienced bloggers and have written an excellent guide to business blogging. Their book has a more general audience than *Blogging Expertise*, which will encourage consultants to choose the latter, but it does many things right: it's small enough to seem manageable, it uses friendly, informal language, and it explains the various aspects of successful blogging.

This book's primary drawbacks are its lack of specific "how to" details and the occasional lack of clear guidance. In fact, several readers of *Publish & Prosper* have hired Sarah Lewis to walk them through the actual implementation of the ideas proposed in the book. It often offers several options where one strong recommendation would be more helpful to the less-experienced reader, creating the "analysis paralysis" that keeps many bloggers from moving forward.

Blogging Expertise will avoid both of these shortcomings by providing specific steps for its specific audience.

***WordPress Complete* by Hasin Hayder (Packt Publishing, 2006, 289 pp., \$39.99)**

The back cover of *WordPress Complete* describes it as a beginner's guide, but the content is actually fairly advanced and would confuse and intimidate a beginning blogger. *Blogging Expertise* will also

use the free WordPress blogging software as the basis for its blogging guidelines, but will approach it in a much less technical way.

***Blogwild!* by Andy Wibbels (Portfolio, 2006, 192 pp., \$19.95)**

Blogwild! has been well received by its target audience of small business bloggers because of its easy-to-read format and clear focus on its audience's needs. However, many readers object to *Blogwild!*'s exclusive use of the commercial TypePad blogging software.

While *Blogging Expertise* will primarily use the free WordPress blogging software, great care is being taken to ensure that instructions are clear enough to be useful in other software as well, giving readers more options and flexibility to adapt the methods to their own needs and preferences.

PROMOTION PLAN

The author is committed to making *Blogging Expertise* a commercial success and expects to invest a significant portion of her advance in promotional activities.

Because online marketing is one of Sarah's areas of expertise, she will personally focus most of her efforts in this area, while hiring a PR firm to extend the promotions offline and to coordinate with the publisher.

WEBSITES

The author will use her existing website and blog (www.bloggingexpertise.com) to prominently promote the book. The site is currently frequented by the book's target audience at a rate of 3500 unique visitors per month, and that number is steadily growing.

Sarah will also work with a professional web copywriter to create several unique "landing pages." She will use pay-per-click advertisements to drive extremely targeted visitors to those landing pages and regularly optimize them for maximum book sales.

AMAZON.COM

The author will particularly promote *Blogging Expertise* on Amazon.com, both because of that store's enormous selling potential and its position as a resource for book research, even for readers who eventually purchase books elsewhere.

Sarah will work with Amazon.com to implement the Search Inside the Book feature (reported to increase sales by an average 9%) and the Buy X, Get Y pairing program. She'll also contact top

reviewers in the book's main categories and offer each a review copy, while using the various tools Amazon.com provides to connect with all readers and encourage reviews.

NEWSLETTER

Sarah will establish and promote a newsletter for the book in the months leading up to publication. She will create a complementary offer to encourage signups and will use the newsletter to generate interest, make additional promotional offers, and keep subscribers informed.

DISCOUNTS AND CONTESTS

Blogging Expertise is a natural tie-in with the author's blog consulting services, so she will use package deals and coupons to maximize book sales. Sarah will provide an autographed copy of the book to each new client and offer a substantial discount on blog installation services to those who buy it through other channels, making it essentially a "free" book for those who are interested in the services.

The author will also run several contests (promoted through the website, newsletter, and Amazon.com, as well as other blogs) with books and blog services as prizes to generate further interest in both the book and the topic.

MAGAZINE ARTICLES

The timeliness of the book topic makes it a good fit for promotion via magazine articles. In addition to making excerpts available, Sarah will write unique articles on related topics, including:

- "Consultants: get started blogging... *today!*"

- “10 secrets for a successful blog”
- “Consultants: grow your client-base with a blog” (case studies)
- “What is blogging (and what can it do for you)?”
- “Is blogging right for you?”

Sarah will submit appropriate individual articles to publications and websites that share the book’s target market, including *Consulting Magazine*, *California Management Review*, *Institute of Management Consultants Connector*, *Management Consulting News*, *RainToday.com*, *ConsultantJournal.com*, and *Consultant-News.com*. These topics would also be suitable for interviews, speaking engagements, and panel discussions.

DELIVERY AND FORMAT

Blogging Expertise will contain short, readable chapters, allowing readers to easily research a single blogging topic at a time or to follow the guide start-to-finish.

The book will contain approximately 40,000 words and 25 illustrations (submitted by the author in camera-ready format). The complete, professionally edited manuscript will be delivered November 1, 2007.

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CHAPTER SUMMARIES

INTRODUCTION TO BLOGGING

New and would-be bloggers naturally have many questions. What exactly is blogging? Why does it matter? What's the best way to start? How long will it take? What if I'm not good with computers?

Blogging is still a relatively new idea, and many consultants aren't aware of the huge benefits a well-done blog can provide. This section will answer your questions and help you decide if blogging is right for you.

What is blogging?

Blogging is simply an easier way of running a website. Gone (happily!) are the days of having to know code or hiring a web programmer just to change basic information on your site. You can now quickly do it yourself, and it's easier than you think.

The term "blogging" also suggests a particular style of information and writing, one that comes as a relief to many people. It's informal, personable, and interesting—a welcome contrast to most business writing.

Why blog?

See sample chapter.

Why use WordPress?

There are a huge number of options when it comes to blogging software. WordPress is an ideal choice for several reasons:

- It's both easy-to-use and powerful, making it perfect for the blogger who's just getting started but wants software that will work well for the long haul.
- It's extremely customizable, meaning you can have a unique look and exactly the features you want.
- It's community-built and community-supported, which makes it easy to find help (both free and paid) if you need it.

What skills will you need?

To blog successfully, it's helpful to have a few skills. The first one is the ability to communicate well through writing. There are ways to compensate (like working with a writing coach or an editor) if you're concerned about your writing, but the more you enjoy it, the easier the day-to-day task of blogging will be.

Along the same lines, commitment is essential. Just like anything else, blogging is sometimes more "chore" than "joy"—commitment is what takes you from enthusiastic beginner to successful, seasoned veteran.

It's also helpful to have basic marketing and computer skills. These are less essential, and you'd be surprised at just how little you can get by with, but if you already have these skills or are willing to develop them, you'll accelerate your progress toward a successful blog.

How much time will it take?

The amount of time required depends on how often you post, and there are different schools of thought about what posting frequency works best. For most consultants, I recommend posting twice a week, which is a nice balance between providing current information and finding time to write.

It's reasonable to spend about an hour per post (or two hours per week) on the writing itself, and the same amount of time marketing the blog (particularly on other blogs on the same topic) and completing all the other tasks successful bloggers do beyond simply writing, including reading blogs, participating in group projects, and networking with other bloggers.

Bottom line: one dedicated morning or afternoon a week is all you need to start and maintain a viable blog.

What about legal issues?

All bloggers should take a few simple measures to keep their blogs from getting into legal trouble. One essential step is defining a clear policy about reader comments, explaining what is not acceptable (hate speech, vulgar language, etc.) and what you'll do in those cases (delete and/or edit).

Beyond the legal issues common to any business, a few industries (like law and pharmaceuticals) are subject to much stricter standards. If you're in one of these industries, consult an attorney or an experienced blogging consultant for advice specific to your situation.

PLANNING AHEAD FOR BLOGGING SUCCESS

For most consultants, the idea of blogging creates tension between the desire to just jump in and the tendency to research everything thoroughly before taking action. It's important to strike a balance between the two and gather the critical information without getting overwhelmed or stalled.

Business goals

See sample chapter.

Blogging goals

What kind of effort and actions are needed to make your blog a success? The answers will vary by consultant. To build a blog that will be successful, it's essential to have a plan going in for the specific steps (including time spent writing and the number of comments you leave on other blogs) you will take to support long-term as well as short-term success.

Your ideal reader

In blogging, like any other aspect of life, trying to please everyone usually results in pleasing no one. Not only will keeping your ideal reader in mind help you avoid straying too far from your goals, it also makes the actual process of writing easier. Think of how much more quickly words flow when you're writing an email to a friend versus creating a formal business presentation.

Knowing your ideal reader will help with writing, choosing an overarching topic for the whole blog, and deciding on the content for each post.

Topic

Even when you know your goals and your ideal reader, choosing a topic still takes some thought. A good topic is:

- Specific and narrow enough to differentiate your blog
- Deep enough that you won't quickly run out of things to write about
- Targeted enough towards your ideal reader's needs that he or she will almost immediately recognize its relevance
- Interesting enough to you that you'll have continued passion for the subject

Identifying the most promising topics is mostly about brainstorming and then analyzing the potential of each idea. Once you do that, you'll have a topic you can run with.

Your approach

Any given topic can be handled in a variety of ways. For instance, you could take a how-to or tutorial angle, provide a detailed reference, highlight case studies, create Top-10 lists, or even use less common approaches like magazine-style quizzes.

Most successful bloggers use more than one approach, so take the time to create a short list of useful tactics that appeal to you and fit your audience.

Keywords

Establishing a list of words and phrases that mean something to your ideal reader will help in the writing process and especially in promoting your blog. These words will play a big part later on in how often new readers will discover your blog, and they'll also help you maintain your focus while blogging.

Name and URL

Using your keywords and your topic, you're ready to name your blog and decide on a location where people will be able to see it. Naming can be tricky because of the challenge of finding a name that's not already taken. It will take perseverance (and a lot of seemingly random word combinations), but the payoff of finding the perfect name for your blog is well worth the effort.

Design

First impressions count, especially online where the competition is just a click away. But beyond first impressions, making it easy for readers to find what they're looking for and understand what

they're looking at is even more important and will be directly reflected in how long they stick around and whether they come back.

Whether you're getting a custom design for your blog or using one of the existing free themes, you'll want a design that is easy to use and appropriate to your audience, as well as attractive.

Your writing style

Your writing style is like your voice; it's the ingredient that makes your blog uniquely yours. Your style includes things like the tone and words you use, how personal or formal you decide to be, and how you choose to engage your audience. Making these decisions upfront—as you've done with developing your topic and your approach—will help in the process of creating and focusing your blog.

GETTING STARTED

The last section provided the framework you need to launch a successful blog. Now you're ready to actually do it! It's time to take the information you've gathered and start blogging.

Blogging basics

Regardless of which blogging software you use, there are a few elements common to all blogs, including posts, comments (whether they are enabled or not), sidebars, and categories.

Understanding what these pieces do will help you find your way around any blogging software.

Getting to know WordPress

WordPress has a few unique features that make it arguably the best blogging software available.

You can extend its abilities through plugins (I have some suggestions) and easily rearrange your

sidebar with widgets. If you're not using WordPress, you can safely skip this chapter, but you might want to read it just to see what you're missing!

Your “About” page

The “About” page is one of the most overlooked—yet essential—aspects of a successful blog. It's well worth taking the time to write, because your readers rely on it to understand the context of your blog. It can be in the form of a short biography, Q&A, or any style you like, and it's the perfect opportunity to share things (like unrelated hobbies, for instance) that aren't on-topic as blog posts but will help your readers get to know you.

Your business “About” page

Just as it's important to introduce yourself, your business can benefit from being featured. This is your chance to really promote your business in a way you can't in blog posts (at least without annoying your readers). Many bloggers find that this page gets found in the search engines, so it also serves as a good way to raise the general profile of your business online.

Your contact page

Don't underestimate the importance of having a clear way for readers to contact you. There are many examples online of comments left on blogs that would have been sent directly to the author if only the commenter could find the author's contact info. Not every reader is patient enough to scour your blog to find what they're looking for, so it's important to make the information prominent.

Your contact info also gives you credibility because it implies a willingness to stand behind what you say on your blog.

What makes a good blog post?

See sample chapter.

Your first post

After all the preparation, many beginning bloggers find it difficult to write that first post. Usually that's because they're overestimating its importance and are afraid of doing it wrong.

Good news! Your first post is really not any more important than any other post, because you'll have at least a handful of posts before most people even see your blog. As long as you follow the guidelines you set up for yourself (topic, style, etc.), you can't do it wrong.

The next four posts

The next week or two is when you'll start finding your blogging rhythm. Pay special attention to the way you feel about the process. Does the writing come easily or is it difficult? Is your posting schedule working for you? Does your topic still seem like a good fit?

You'll probably make small adjustments almost constantly throughout the life of your blog, so this habit of regular self-analysis is a good one to start.

Pre-launch checklist

Once your blog has its foundations in place, it will be time to get the word out. But before telling the world about your blog, there are a few things you'll want to do. This list will help make sure you've covered your bases.

Combating spam

As soon as you start promoting your blog (and possibly even before that), you'll see irrelevant, self-serving comments come through, advertising discount prescriptions, black-market software, and porn sites.

Obviously you won't want these "comments" on your blog, and ideally you won't even have to read them yourself. Let's set your blog up to take care of these for you automatically.

YOUR BLOG AND COMMUNITY

Blogs don't exist in a vacuum; by their very nature they are social sites, and they work best when bloggers embrace several levels of community: their own readers, other bloggers on similar topics, and the wider world of their topic. These communities will help grow your blog from a kind of article repository to a dynamic resource that will attract plentiful visitors.

Connecting with your readers

A successful blog will have a regular, growing audience of readers. There are some simple things you can do to make your blog attractive to your ideal reader, and tools you can use to help readers find what they're looking for. You can use your blog's comments feature to encourage communication and buy-in from readers, which will also serve to expand your blog's reach as the concept of "social proof" kicks in: you look more popular, so you become more popular.

Connecting with other bloggers

The community of bloggers, or the "blogosphere," is ever-expanding, but like other communities, bloggers are very interested in connecting with other people who have similar interests. Because blogging has such a strong social element to it, forging relationships with other bloggers can be

extremely beneficial on both sides. Connecting is an easy way to get feedback, more visitors, and fresh ideas.

Carnivals, group projects, and memes (oh my!)

With the astounding amount of information available on the Internet, it's natural that bloggers would self-organize to make diverse content accessible to the readers who are looking for it.

Participating in various topical projects will produce desirable results. First, awareness of your blog will grow. Second, you'll receive a quick flash of new visitors, some of whom will probably return. Third, participation can motivate you to write good posts that might otherwise be overlooked, capturing great opportunities for more exposure.

Social networks

Many of the things I've been talking about so far (interacting with your readers, developing relationships with other bloggers, etc.) are social activities. There is also an online movement called "social networking" that is made up of websites and tools that create a framework for social interactions. MySpace.com is probably the best-known example, but there are other networks that have even more potential for consultant-bloggers, including:

- StumbleUpon
- Del.icio.us
- Digg
- MyBlogLog
- BUMPzee

Using these tools can help your blog get noticed by potential readers who might not have found you otherwise, and they also make it easier for your existing readers to recommend your blog to others.

RSS feeds

RSS feeds are one of those exceptionally useful tools that remain a mystery to most people. RSS feeds allow readers to subscribe to your blog just as they would a newspaper or magazine (except that it's an online process), with essentially the same effect: they receive the newest information when it's published, in a convenient format. This makes it easy for readers to keep up-to-date with your blog, and it's also a useful and time-saving tool you can use for the blogs you read.

Blogging etiquette

The blogosphere has its own conventions and expectations for what constitutes “acceptable behavior.” It's important to understand these to avoid accidentally committing a blogging *faux pas*—bloggers are generally very friendly folks, but they often have a kind of knee-jerk response to perceived problems. In this case, you're definitely better off avoiding questionable behavior in the first place than learning by trial and error!

GETTING FOUND

Once your blog is ready for the spotlight, you need to get to get the word out. One of the best sources of visitors is search engines, and there are specific things you can do to help them help you. Remember, the central goal of a search engine is to help people find the information they're looking for, so your task is simply to let them know that the info on your blog exists, is of high quality, and is of interest to their searchers.

Design for the search engines

While most people would readily agree that the design of a website can help or hinder its human visitors, few realize the impact it has on the automated search engine “robots” that visit. They come to find out what your site or blog has to offer, but the code that runs your blog can either help them find (and love) your content or it can be a barrier.

It’s not hard to guess what happens if the robots can’t easily use your content: they move on to the next site, and you miss out. Don’t let this happen to your blog!

Titles and keywords

Every time you write a post, you have an opportunity to strengthen the position of your blog. How? By choosing a helpful, keyword-focused title and reiterating those keywords in the post content.

This serves the same purpose for both your visitors and the search engines: it reveals the central theme of the post and sets up expectations about what the post will cover. In practical terms, this means you’ll get targeted visitors from the search engines, and your readers (from every source) will feel satisfied because you’ll deliver on the expectations you’ve created. Learning to write good titles and use your keywords effectively is definitely worth the time it takes.

Linkbait

While all of your posts should contribute to the overall goal of your blog and serve your ideal reader’s needs, sometimes you can intentionally write a post that does all that *and* also appeals to a broader audience.

The word “linkbait” refers to posts that are written to attract links from other blogs and sites.

Linkbait posts have a few characteristics that make them more attractive as fodder for other

bloggers, so following some specific conventions can greatly increase your odds of being considered “linkworthy.”

Because this strategy relies on other people, and people are notoriously unpredictable, this tactic sometimes gets nowhere. But when it does take off, you’ll make great progress toward lasting success, and it will happen extremely quickly. Even if a specific post doesn’t take off, you’ll have created a useful resource for your existing and future readers, so the time and effort are well-spent.

MONITORING YOUR PROGRESS

How do you know when your blog is successful? Several excellent—and free!—tools can help track your blogging goals and the progress you’re making.

Google Analytics

Google Analytics provides a fabulous selection of information about the people who visit your blog. You’ll learn how people are finding your blog, what search engines they’re using, and what posts they’re most interested in. Information like this helps you track your growth over time and also helps you evaluate how well your focus matches your reader’s needs and can alert you when some realigning may be necessary.

Sitening tools

The free Sitening tools are extremely useful for analyzing the likelihood of your blog to appear prominently in the search engines.

The SEO Analyzer tool checks your blog for common problems that might discourage the search engines from sending you many visitors. The SERP Tracker tool lets you see at a glance how you’re

improving over time for your selected keywords. The Backlink Analyzer tool helps you evaluate the potential value of a link from a given site.

Each of these tools will be most useful during a specific phase of your blog's growth, but all of them are worth learning about.

Google Alerts

Would you like to know what people are saying about you (or your blog) online? Want an easy way to come up with post ideas on your topic? Google Alerts (yep, another freebie!) will help with both.

Setup is straightforward: you tell the tool what words you are interested in and how often you want updates. Then you get an email whenever Google discovers new information online that matches your keywords. The trick is in picking the right words to watch and having a plan to use the information you receive.

APPENDICES

There are a lot of differences between bloggers, and one of the biggest variations is in the area of technical interest and skill. Because topics like installation and configuration are a much-needed reference for some but unnecessary for others, I've included these resources in the appendices.

Hosting and domain names

If you don't already have a host for your blog (or know what that means), it's useful to know what to look for and where to look. Once you have a host, the next step is to buy and set up your domain name.

Installing and configuring WordPress

There are several ways to install WordPress, and which way is best for you depends on your host, your technical skills, and your budget. Learn the pros and cons of each option and choose the process that best fits your needs.

Recommended WordPress plugins

Now that you have WordPress installed, you can add extra optional features called plugins. There are many free plugins available for just about anything you might want to do, but this section covers the ones that are useful for almost every blog.

How to collect info with your blog

If you'd like to gather visitor information for future marketing, there are several excellent tools worth considering. They can help you run a newsletter, for instance, or provide your best info as an email course. These services will help you do these things affordably, ethically, and legally, and can dramatically improve the process of converting readers into clients or customers for your products.

SAMPLE CHAPTER: WHY BLOG?

I talked about the ease-of-use and culture of blogging in the last chapter, but there are other valuable benefits of blogging, particularly for consultants.

One of the biggest benefits is the fact that a well-done blog can rocket you to a position of authority and credibility in a remarkably short time. Many readers will be attracted to your blog over time, giving you a receptive, self-selected audience. Some bloggers have also gotten traditional media exposure through blogging; bloggers are often interviewed as subject matter experts and many have leveraged their online success into magazine columns and even book deals.

Another advantage of blogging is the “cultural” expectation about the style of blog posts. Sure, it’s worth re-reading your writing before putting it out there, but blogs are supposed to be written with a conversational tone, closer to an email to a friendly colleague than a report or business presentation.

This is great news for you because it means that you can achieve blogging success without making it a full-time endeavor, even if you aren’t a *great* writer (a side benefit of blogging, though, is that you’ll likely *become* a better writer along the way).

Blogging is also one of the areas where one person working alone can get as good or even better results than a large company. Honestly, the way many companies use their websites reveals that they’re pretty out of touch with Internet culture, so “doing the blogging thing” well could put you leaps and bounds ahead of larger competitors.

When practiced simply for the sake of expression, blogging is an extremely effective way to share ideas with your target audience. You can use your blog to test and refine new ideas without devoting a lot of time or money to an unproven concept, and get great feedback from the people who matter. And tools are freely available through blogging that make it surprisingly easy for one-time readers to become regular readers, constantly expanding the size of your “focus group.”

There are many other benefits of blogging, some of which will depend on your blog’s topic and your specific goals. But every consultant-blogger can expect:

- Increased visibility and sales of your service and/or product(s)
- Increased credibility as an expert in your subject area, both with your target audience and with the mainstream media
- An effective way to collect leads who have happily given you permission to communicate with them
- A deeper understanding of your area of expertise as you first teach it and then expand on it
- A more prominent presence on the search engines (like Google and Yahoo!), making it easier for your target audience to find you

SAMPLE CHAPTER: BUSINESS GOALS

Like most things in life, blogging is most effective when you have a target to shoot for. People write blogs for many reasons: passion about a subject; fame; direct income; getting leads for their existing businesses; even just killing time. Often it's a mix. At first, the goal is usually more a vague feeling than a concrete set of criteria.

For consultants, business goals for blogging need to be specific and focused, and typically might include demonstrating expertise, creating a national platform, educating existing and/or potential clients, gathering leads, and getting early feedback about new ideas.

Most bloggers pick two or three goals like these to focus on. One financial advisor I've worked with is using his blog to test-drive ideas, prove he's an expert on his topic, and make a little direct income from advertising.

Another financial advisor (referred by the first) is using his blog to educate his existing clients with in-depth reports. His blog makes it easier to distribute the information, and that's its sole purpose.

Your specific goals will determine what kind of progress indicators you monitor, and will also affect your expectations. For instance, the first advisor might be thrilled when he starts to see a thousand visitors a week. The second advisor would be equally thrilled with 30 visitors a week, if they're the right ones.

YOUR TURN: BUSINESS GOALS FOR YOUR BLOG

Take a moment to think about what you want your blog to do for you. Start out with the vague concepts, for example:

- “Make me famous”
- “Get more clients”
- “Launch a national platform”

Then move to how you would *know* if you reached your goals:

- “Have 1000 regular readers”
- “Get three inquiries a week through the blog”
- “Be contacted at least twice a month for an interview”

Your goals may be very different from the ones above. The key is to find the core thing(s) you want your blog to accomplish, and then define the concrete results you’ll be aiming for.

SAMPLE CHAPTER: WHAT MAKES A GOOD BLOG POST?

Even good writers get stuck when they decide to start blogging, mostly because they aren't clear about their direction or their purpose in the first blog posts.

Regardless of the specific topic, there are some common characteristics of good posts. Even though you will come across plenty of blog posts that break the mold, good blog writing is one of those "know the rules before you break them" things.

GOOD BLOG POSTS ARE LASER-FOCUSED.

A good blog post has one (and only one) "big goal"—one key point to drive home, one action to provoke, or one concept to unpack. Sometimes a post, particularly a "list" post, will have many small points, but they should all lead back to the big goal.

It's often tempting to squeeze more than one topic into a post, particularly if they're related.

However, this can hurt you in two ways:

1. Your readers have a set of expectations *before they even start reading your post* based on its title. If you add in other goals, you're effectively asking readers to change their expectations, making them feel vaguely uncomfortable without knowing why.
2. It's almost always the focused posts that search engines and other bloggers will send visitors to. They're more likely to see focused posts as valuable resources on a specific topic, so don't muddy the waters by adding unrelated (or even loosely-related) info.

Remember, this is blogging; you can always write a second post!

GOOD BLOG POSTS ARE RELEVANT TO THE TARGET AUDIENCE.

Relevance means more than just staying on topic—doing it well means anticipating questions and needs and addressing them from an angle that makes sense to your ideal reader. This can sometimes be a gray area; for instance, as a consultant, how much should you talk about the actual process of finding clients, and how much should you stick to your topic of particular expertise (presumably the one your readers are interested in)?

If you can frame the lead-generating process so that it helps your readers understand something better or consider a helpful concept, then I'd say go for it. Along the same lines, if you learned something really interesting as part of the marketing you did, then share it, with the client-finding process as context. Be ruthless, though. If there's no specific relevance to your target audience, leave it out.

GOOD BLOG POSTS ARE PERSONABLE.

This doesn't mean you have to be extremely casual if that's not your style, but you do want to let your humanity shine through. You're more likely to garner long-term readers if you reveal a little personality in your posts. This can be as simple as using relevant personal anecdotes, offering an opinion, and writing "I" instead of "we."

Posts without these small personal touches tend to read like textbooks and don't seem to do very well with readers *or* the search engines.

GOOD BLOG POSTS HAVE ORIGINAL CONTENT.

There are some notable blogs that successfully "recycle" information and have loyal followings. However, they are definitely the exception. Most blog posts on successful blogs have either completely new information or existing information with a new twist.

This doesn't mean you can't report relevant industry news, for example, but if you do, you should interpret it and add your own valuable insight rather than simply repeating it. If you don't have anything significant to add, just let people read it elsewhere (and if it's news, it *will* be elsewhere, probably on a blog that's less interesting than yours!).

GOOD BLOG POSTS ARE READABLE.

This means not only having a readable writing style, but also paying attention to your structure to make it easier for readers. For instance, long posts can be broken up into sections with sub-headings that tell the reader what to expect. You can use lists to make information easy to scan and to break up long, intimidating blocks of text into smaller paragraphs.

Consider using pictures to make your posts more interesting to look at and give your readers more clues about the content. You can find thousands of photos on Flickr (www.flickr.com) that are available for use on your blog (just link back to the original). Photos or illustrations can add a little punch and break up a text-heavy post.

GOOD BLOG POSTS LINK TO OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION.

Even though good posts are usually original writing, they often provide thoughtful links to other blogs or articles. Many new bloggers are a little wary of sending their hard-won readers to other sites, but more experienced bloggers will tell you that generosity is definitely the way to go.

The idea is that you're providing a useful service to your readers, helping them dig deeper if they so desire, saving them time and effort and again, making your blog a valuable resource. And this practice doesn't have to be entirely altruistic: most bloggers will notice if you're sending readers their way and check you out, potentially launching a mutually beneficial relationship.

GOOD BLOG POSTS HAVE ACCURATE, INTRIGUING TITLES.

I've written more on this in "Titles and Keywords" on page ##, but for starters, you should always choose a title that clearly communicates the point of the post and compels visitors to jump in and read the first paragraph. Titles are every bit as important to your blog posts as headlines are to newspaper articles, and taking the time to write good ones will directly translate into more new visitors and more interaction from your existing readers.