

TUTORIAL 30 BLOGGING



This tutorial has been produced by The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse as part of the complete online education program, Tourism e-kit

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BLOGGING

Reading time: 25 minutes

Prerequisite: n/a

Blogging is one of the most effective forms of e-marketing. This tutorial will review what blogs are and provide guidance on how to embrace blogging for your business.

1) WHAT REALLY ARE BLOGS AND BLOGGING?

A **blog is a website designed in the format of an online journal**. It features many posts or articles. Each article should be complemented by a title, graphics, photos, videos, and often followed by readers' comments. Each blog article has its own web address. Blogs can be maintained by individuals, groups and businesses. Their authors are called "bloggers".

a) Aim of blogging

The main aim of a blog is to share thoughts with the rest of the world. Blogging has revolutionised the manner knowledge is shared amongst experts. Recent research revealed that 60% of people now turn to the Internet when they need to address problems and issues. Only 25% turn to traditional media and even less to libraries or other sources.

In an offline environment, one had to rely on encyclopedias and research articles published in magazines.

THANKS TO BLOGGING, BLOGGERS CAN OFTEN COME ACROSS OTHER INTERNATIONAL BLOGGERS THAT WRITE ABOUT SIMILAR TOPICS AND GO ONTO FORM RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM AND BE AN INFORMATION SOURCE FOR EACH OTHER.



From a third-party perspective, blogs are perceived as an extraordinary market research tool as they provide an **unlimited source of up-to-the-minute information which conveys what the world thinks, discusses, vets, encourages and bans**. Blogs are the biggest resource of user-generated content. Just like websites or customer reviews on TripAdvisor, they get indexed by search engines. They even have their own search engines!

Photo credit <http://flickr.com/photos/andypiper/>

b) Blogging is good for my business

As a business owner, blogging will allow you to:

- Establish yourself as an authority in your niche
- Engage your customers
- Engage in dialogue with peers and increase your knowledge
- Discuss industry and business matters

Anyone can set one up in less than 15 minutes, for free and become a blogger.

2) HOW PEOPLE READ BLOGS

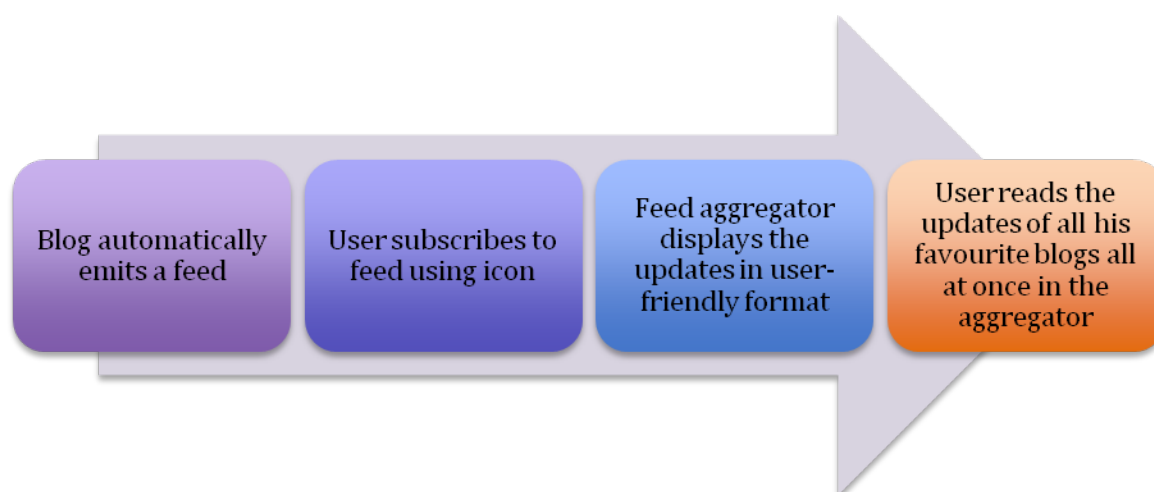
Since blogs are indexed by search engines just like standard websites, you need to ensure your blog is search engine friendly so that it attracts visitors.

People will then be able to subscribe to your blog using a feed:

a) RSS and ATOM feeds

If people visit your blog and are interested in the content, they will subscribe to receive regular updates using the universal feed icon (see image on the right).

A **feed simply is a list of recent articles in a machine-readable format**. A program known as feed reader or feed aggregator will go and collect the updates on behalf of the user and present the content in a user-friendly layout.

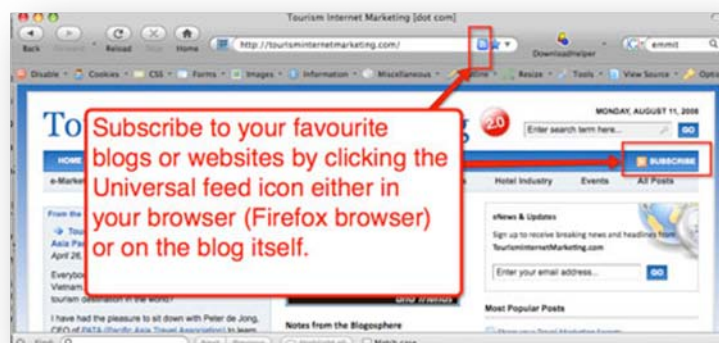


Subscribing to feeds

When a reader wants to subscribe to a blog, they look for the universal feed icon (orange button with dot and two curves). They are then provided with a feed address (it looks like a web address e.g. <http://tourisminternetmarketing.com/feed/>).

Sometimes the browser will ask which feed the reader would like to subscribe to. RSS 2.0 is a safe choice.

Screen capture copyright:
TourismInternetMarketing.com



Once the reader has clicked on the feed icon, they will need to copy and paste the feed address into their feed aggregator. A feed aggregator is similar to an email inbox.

Now put yourself in the shoes of the reader (if you haven't already done so). If you do not yet have a feed aggregator, there are many to choose from:

- Google Reader (www.google.com/reader) is a very good free web-based reader.

If you prefer a program that resides on your computer:

- FeedDemon (www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon) for Windows is excellent and free.
- NewsFire (www.newsfirerss.com) for Mac is excellent and free as well.

Why not start searching for tourism-related blogs right now and subscribe to a few relevant ones? Check your feed aggregator when you check your emails and learn from the experts for free!

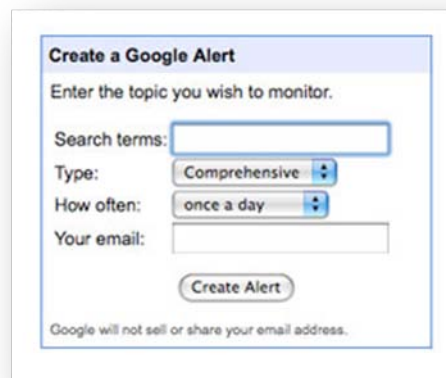
Watch this short video that explains what RSS feeds are in plain English: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oklgLsSxGsU.

b) Google Alerts

Google Alerts is a very easy way to subscribe to what the world is saying about you or about any topic of your choice! Set up as many Google Alerts based on your keywords and any new webpage mentioning them will land in your inbox!

E.g. If you are a bed and breakfast called “Gold Coast Lone Star” on the Gold Coast, create a few Google alerts: “Gold Coast Lone Star”, “bed and breakfast Gold Coast”, “tourism Gold Coast” etc. Set alerts for the name of your competitors, your staff, your State or Territory’s Minister for Tourism...

- 1) Go to www.google.com/alerts
- 1) Enter the terms you want to subscribe to. Put the terms inside quotes if there is more than one (so write “tourism marketing” if you want to subscribe to tourism marketing).
- 2) Confirm your email address
- 3) Repeat the same process for more alerts
- 4) Set up a Google account if you want to manage your alerts (however, you don’t need one to set up the alerts)
- 5) It is free and you don’t even need a Google account.



Screen capture copyright: Google

This blog post provides further information on how to monitor your company’s online presence: <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/4203/How-to-Use-Google-Alerts-to-Monitor-Your-Company-s-Online-Presence.aspx>.

This blog post provides information on how to further customise Google alerts: <http://labnol.blogspot.com/2006/11/google-alerts-tutorial-to-help-you.html>.

3) BLOGGING IS EXCELLENT FOR MY BUSINESS’ HEALTH

Blogging is a way to advance the world’s knowledge of your industry, develop a personal connection with your clientele and befriend search engines.

a) Advancing the world's knowledge and connecting with my clientele

Think about how many times you wanted to contribute your expert knowledge to your industry and beyond. Maybe you have been able to provide insights based on your experience at local tourism meetings, or on the other hand you experienced frustration because nobody wanted to listen to what you had to say?

Setting up a blog is the solution: it will allow you to communicate with peers and potential clients, be heard and will give you and your business a level of exposure that was never envisioned before!



Photo credit: <http://flickr.com/photos/badjonni/>

b) Taming search engines

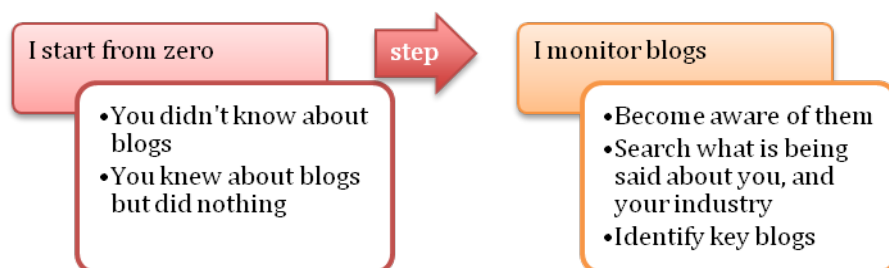
If you have already read the tutorials about search engines, optimisation, and link building you will know that content is key to encourage search engines to rank your website higher in the results pages.

Since each blog post is made of short, judicious and topical content, **it comes as no surprise that your blog can be your best ally to boost your search engine rankings.** Search engine crawlers (or robots) will continuously come and visit your site for more relevant content. Your online popularity is going to grow and more and more people are going to link to you.

4) IDENTIFYING MY CURRENT BLOG-AWARENESS LEVEL

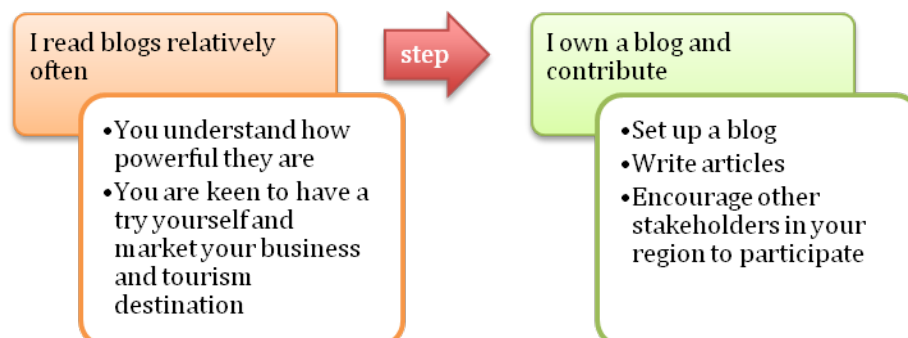
Blogs are such a powerful marketing tool that you need to take the next step. There is however no need to put the carriage before the horse. Start by first identifying which of the below two categories you belong to and work towards reaching the next level.

Category: Beginner



Level to reach:

Category: I want more



Level to reach:

I belong to Category and I will reach the level of

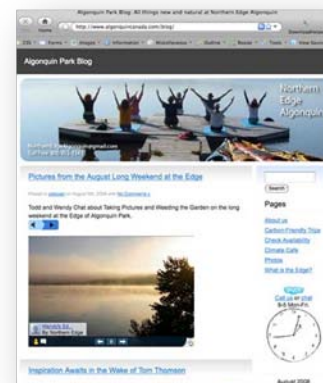
5) MONITORING BLOGS AND COMMENT (BEGINNER CATEGORY)

If you don't feel you are ready to blog yet, start by increasing your blogging awareness. First search for blogs you are interested in (it doesn't have to be about tourism, but about any passion of yours) and participate by leaving comments. Use the feed button to subscribe to updates and set up Google Alerts.

a) Examples of tourism blogs

Below are listed a few tourism blogs. Have a read through and see for yourself if this is something you are willing to consider for your business.

- Blog about Algonquin National Park in Ontario, Canada:
www.algonquincanada.com/blog/
- Blog about Hervey Bay: <http://herveybaygossip.com>
- Blogs about the renovation of a bed and breakfast. A great way to build a brand before going live with a website:
<http://makingbandb.blogspot.com/>
- Blog about Cape Town in South Africa. One new photo daily.
www.capetowndailyphoto.com/



Consult blog search engines such as <http://blogsearch.google.com> and <http://technorati.com/blogs/directory/> (use the search box) and search for your passion or your industry sector's keywords:

- Bed and breakfast blog
- Tourism blog
- Wine making blog
- Adventure tours blog
- Etc.

Subscribe to the ones you are interested in using the feed button and interact with the author by leaving comments.

Screen capture copyright: Algonquin Park Blog

6) SETTING UP A BLOGGING STRATEGY (I WANT MORE CATEGORY)

As a tourism business, you should consider blogging as part of your online strategy. It is an **excellent manner to increase web content, grow your organic visitors and develop your brand.**

If you are willing to dedicate 3 to 5 hours a week to blogging, consider setting up an individual blog about your product and experiences you offer. Link to it from your website and vice versa.

If you have less time on your hands, work with other stakeholders in your region and set up a joint blog. Define a "who blogs when" calendar with your team in order to maintain a constant flow of information on your blog.

a) Setting up my blog

When you are ready to set up your blog you will have to choose a blogging platform.

Free, hosted solutions

These are good to start with, however they can be restrictive as their hosting is outside your control. Should you wish to move your blog to a more flexible blogging platform you will have problems redirecting your users.

- Blogger (www.blogger.com) is Google's blogging platform. It is a very simple way to get started and your blog will be hosted on Google's servers.
- WordPress.com (www.wordpress.com) is similar to Blogger. Your blog will be hosted on Wordpress' servers.

More flexible solutions, hosted on your server

- If you intend to take blogging seriously, WordPress.org (www.wordpress.org) is a better solution than the two above. The blogging platform is free, all you need to do is to organise hosting. Due to WordPress.org's popularity, many hosts (such as www.dreamhost.com/wordpress.html) offer a "one-click install" for WordPress blogs.

Once your blog is set up, you can customise its look and feel using "themes". The WordPress.org blog is very popular and there are millions of free themes available on the Internet. For instance, www.freewpthemes.net/ is a website that references free themes. To find more, simply search for "free wordpress themes" on Google.

If you are using Blogger and WordPress.com, search for "free blogger themes" or visit this page <http://wordpress.com/tag/free-wordpress-theme/> for WordPress.com themes.

b) Writing the content

Below are a few tips to get you started:

- Your focus should be on sharing news about your product and your region. Tell stories, discuss visitor experiences, surroundings, unique facts and other engaging content
- Remember to use pictures, videos and hyperlinks. Write short paragraphs
- Do not "sell" your establishment or service using your blog (so ensure there is NO call-to-action)
- Set yourself a blogging schedule
- Empower your staff to blog
- Promote your blog on your website
- As a blog really is a website, focus on your keywords and implement search engine optimisation principles to encourage search engines to visit and crawl your blog posts

An excellent blog that provides copywriting tips for online material is www.copyblogger.com.

c) Becoming a pro

Blogging has become an art of its own. If you want to learn more about blogging, search for blogs about blogging and learn from the experts. A good place to start is here: www.searchengineguide.com/blogging.

7) RELATED MATERIAL

a) Related tutorials

- Web strategy: assessment and components
- Finding a good web professional
- Search engines 101
- Critical components of optimising a website
- Keywords
- Bringing people to my site with e-marketing

b) Related websites

- Blogging resources: www.searchengineguide.com/blogging