

## Topic | Social Media

### Tutorial 49

# Blogging For Tourism

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

*Reading time: 30 minutes*

*Prerequisite: None*



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is an initiative of the National Online Strategy Committee, and is funded by all the Australian States & Territory Tourism Offices.

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## 1. What 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 (URL). Blogs can be maintained by individuals, groups and businesses. Their authors are called "bloggers".

The screenshot below is an example of a blog called "A Luxury Travel Blog".



Screenscapture credit: [www.aluxurytravelblog.com](http://www.aluxurytravelblog.com)

### a) Aim of blogging

**The main aim of a blog is to share thoughts and communicate with the rest of the world.**

Blogging has revolutionised the manner in which knowledge is shared. Recent research revealed that 60% of people now turn to the Internet when they need to address problems and issues.

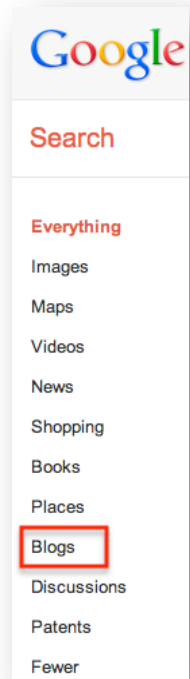
Only 25% turn to traditional media and even less to libraries or other sources.

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

BLOGGERS CAN OFTEN COME ACROSS OTHER INTERNATIONAL BLOGGERS WHO WRITE ABOUT SIMILAR TOPICS, FORM RELATIONSHIPS AND BECOME INFORMATION SOURCES FOR EACH OTHER.

From a third-party perspective, blogs are perceived as an extraordinary market research tool. 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 for user-generated content. Just like websites or TripAdvisor reviews, they get indexed by search engines. They even have their own search engines! Users can refine their search to blogs only as per the screenshot on the right.



### b) *Why is blogging good for my business?*

Whether skimming through a favourite blog, reading a news post, or publishing your own thoughts and ideas, blogging has become an everyday part of the lives of many online enthusiasts.

AS WELL AS PROVIDING AN OUTLET FOR NEWS, VIEWS AND OPINIONS, AN INFORMATIVE AND REGULARLY UPDATED BLOG ALSO HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PROMOTE YOUR TOURISM VENTURE.

A blog keep your content fresh and current and helps a lot with your search engine rankings.

Time and money are at a premium for small tourism operators. Even a modest amount of regular time and expense on a blog can pay dividends. Search engine “spiders”, which crawl the Internet, love a regularly updated blog rich with original, updated content and keywords so regular blogging can improve your search engine rankings.



*For example a blog located on a website for a company dealing in cruises in Byron Bay may look to include the keywords “cruise Byron Bay” and “Byron Bay holidays” a number of times.*

Using keywords regularly should increase the chance of content being picked up by search engines. Over time, the company may be listed higher in rankings when potential customers search these terms. A keyword-rich blog may play a significant



role in the visibility of your website to potential customers.

Despite search engine optimisation playing an important role in a blogging strategy it is crucial not to forget that “content is king.” Posts should always be written with the reader in mind. Blog posts work best when they are concise, relevant, informative and well written. A regularly updated blog maintained in this way may help promote your tourism brand through the building of a community of readers and by increasing the number of search terms that may bring visitors to your site.

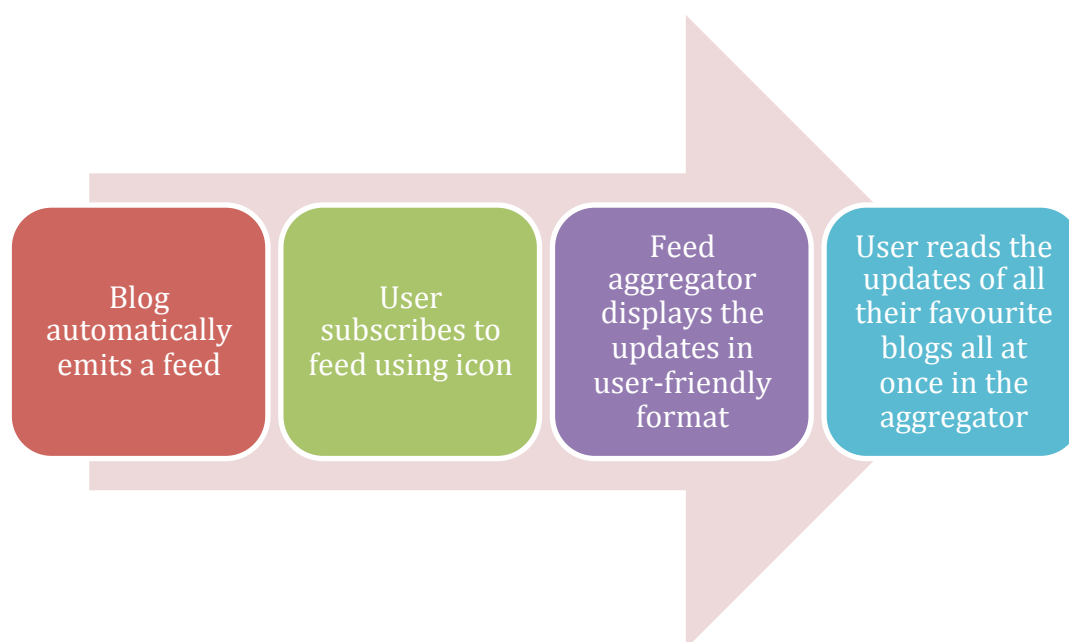
## 2. How people access blogs

Since blogs are indexed by search engines you need to ensure your blog is search engine friendly so that potential guests can find it on Google or search engines. Readers will also be able to subscribe to your blog using what is called a feed:

### a) *RSS and ATOM feeds*

If people visit your blog and are interested in the content, they may wish to subscribe to receive regular updates using the universal feed icon (see subscribing section for image).

**A feed simply is a list of recent articles transformed into 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 a dot and two curves) or the words “rss feed”. 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.

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.

If you do not yet have a feed aggregator, there are many to choose from:

- Google Reader ([www.google.com/reader](http://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](http://www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon)) for Windows is excellent and free.
- NewsFire (<http://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!

### 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! For instance, if there is a new blog post or comment on a blog post about your business Google Alerts will pick it up.

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](http://www.google.com/alerts)
2. 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).
3. Confirm your email address
4. Repeat the same process for more alerts
5. Set up a Google account if you want to manage your alerts (however, you don’t need one to set up the alerts)

- It is free and you don't even need a Google account.

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>.

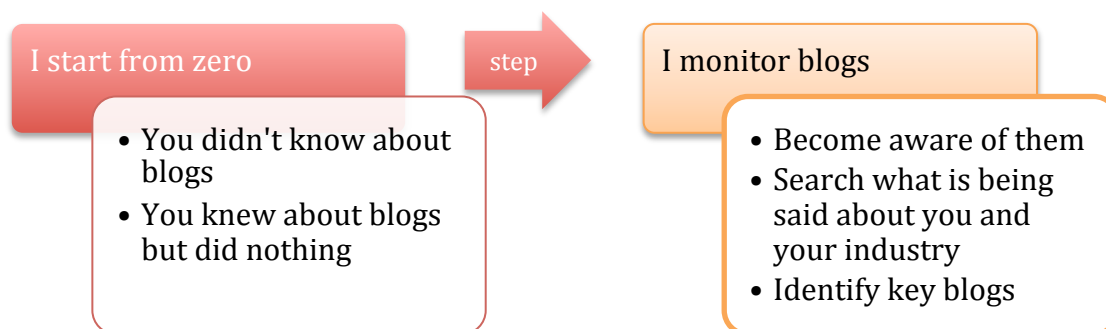
This blog post provides information on how to further customise Google alerts: <http://labnol.blogspot.com/2006/11/google-alerts-tutorial-to-help-you.html>.

### 3. Identifying my current blog-awareness level

Blogs are such a powerful marketing tool that it is worth getting involved. Start by first identifying which of the below two categories you belong to and work towards reaching the next level.

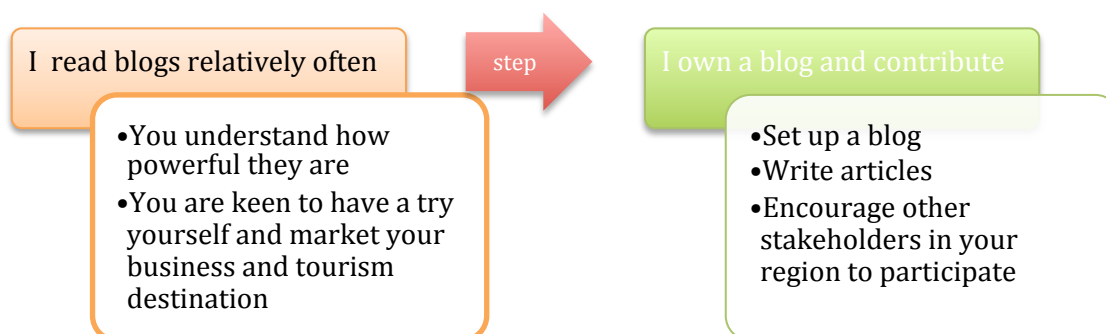
#### Category: Beginner

#### Level to reach:



#### Category: I want more

#### Level to reach:



I belong to Category ..... and I will reach the level of .....

### 4. 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 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](http://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.

## 5. Setting up a blogging strategy (I want more category)

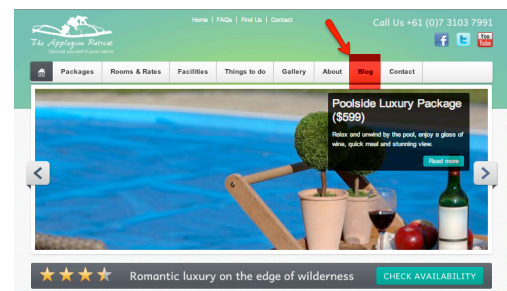
Possibly the most effective way to start a blog is to integrate it with your current website. A regularly updated section headed "news" or "blog" containing points of interest to readers should have the benefit of being easy to find and also have the advantage of helping to drive traffic to the rest of your site.

However if your site isn't set up to include a blog, there are a number of blogging platforms that are free and easy to establish. One of these is WordPress ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com) and [www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org) for the self-hosted version). Other popular platforms include:

- Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com))
- Tumblr ([www.tumblr.com](http://www.tumblr.com))
- Posterous ([www.posterous.com](http://www.posterous.com))

Posts published on a separate platform should always contain a link back to your website.

Using Real Simple Syndication (RSS) is an effective way of extending your readership. Setting up



an RSS feed for your blog simply means giving readers another way to access your blog updates through readers such as Google Reader. Instead of clicking on a number of sites to read their favourite blogs, RSS gives the option of adding links to updates in one central location.

Feedburner ([www.feedburner.com](http://www.feedburner.com)) is a free service that transforms your content into an easy to read "feed".

Screencapture copyright [SmartAccommodationWebsite.com](http://SmartAccommodationWebsite.com)

### a) *Setting up a blogging strategy*



Having decided to set up a blog, it is important to plan (and adhere to) a blogging strategy. Remember, blogging for your business is free and it will help you with your search engine rankings. Make sure you check your Google Analytics to see if your blog posts (articles) have generated visits.

Create a one-page blogging plan that includes the following:

<b>What</b>	<p>Which topics would interest your readers? How can these be related to your tourism business? Topics might include updates on festivals held in your local region, giving times, dates and agenda where available. Also blogging about items of historical interest in the area may help encourage readers to plan a visit. An important goal of blogging is to initiate a conversation or to encourage the reader to take a particular action. Posing a question, inviting opinions, or finishing with a call to action are ways of doing this.</p> <p>Other relevant topics might include interviews with the owners of the company, how-to articles slanted towards your product or service, recipes based on local produce, as well as staff and business news.</p> <p>Using videos and images in blog posts is a recommended way of attracting visitors and getting them to return. A standard video camera, YouTube account and free video editing software such as Windows Movie Maker or iMovie are often all that is needed to produce quality material. Once uploaded to a free YouTube account, these can be embedded into the posts.</p>
<b>When</b>	It is important to decide when and how often you intend to post. Is it once a fortnight, once a month?
<b>Where</b>	Where will you blog? Do you currently own a blog or can one be integrated to your website? Will you be commenting on other blogs that your Google alerts made you aware of?
<b>Who</b>	<p>If there are a number of people on your team, ask them to create posts or suggest topics.</p> <p>Also ensure you keep in mind who your target audience is. Ensure you are writing to attract the type of guests that you want.</p>

**How** How can the blog be both informative and create a conversation?

### **b) Top blogging strategies**

Having established the blog and begun adding content, you'll need to promote it effectively. This could include:

- adding the URL address to your email newsletter
- placing a link to the blog prominently on the front page of your website
- reaching out and creating a conversation by adding comments on other similarly themed blogs.

By adding regular, relevant comments which further the discussion, you may encourage links back to your own blog in a cost effective way. As with all social media, the goal is not to spam other blogs with advertising content, but to contribute to the conversation in a meaningful way.

Some small tourism blogs may also benefit from guest posts from other bloggers and writers. This will have the benefit of keeping the blog fresh while adding new content and new views.

Should you lack the time or number of staff, you may even consider outsourcing your writing altogether and allow your blog posts to be written by professional writers according to the subjects you stipulate. This has the advantage of freeing you up for the management of your business while ensuring the blog is regularly updated and the quality of writing maintained.

### **c) Marketing your blog through social networks**

Consider linking your blog posts with your social media sites to create a wider audience. If you have a Facebook or Twitter account, add your individual blog posts to allow your Facebook or Twitter followers to like or re-tweet the posts. This can be done manually or your blog can be set up to automatically publish to these sites. If you have a LinkedIn Profile, list your blog there as well. If not present in your blog theme or template, add social bookmarking buttons to your blog posts as well.



Also consider using networking facilities such as Networked Blogs ([www.networkedblogs.com](http://www.networkedblogs.com)) an online community of blogs which can be linked to social media sites such as Facebook. As well as connecting with Facebook Pages or Twitter accounts which also blog on small tourism issues, consider looking to join other bloggers interested in reading about the topics on which you blog.

By engaging with social networks, you gradually build your visibility and credibility which could help increase your blog's following. Make sure you actively participate in these sites as well as any communities which potential customers may use. Starting a conversation to promote your business has probably never been easier!

## **6. Key learning outcomes**

- Blogs are a great way to increase your knowledge on topics you are interested in and to

further improve the online visibility of your business thanks to their coverage by search engines

- If you would like to setup your blog you can start by using free blogging platforms such as Google Blogger or WordPress.
- Setting up a blogging strategy is the best way to ensure your blogging is an ongoing commitment and successful for your business.

## 7. Related material

### a) *Related tutorials*

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- Social media for tourism
- Online tourism communities

### b) *Related websites*

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- RSS Feeds in plain English: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klgLsSxGsU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klgLsSxGsU)
- Blogging resources: [www.searchengineguide.com/blogging](http://www.searchengineguide.com/blogging)