

Start Your Business Blog Today!



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Five Reasons Your Business Needs a Blog and Tips on Getting Started

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Professional blogger

So you've established your small business, and things are going great. You've developed a strong customer base, your employees are loyal and trustworthy, and money is coming in. What more could you want?

For starters, how about more of the above?

Too much to ask, you say? Not true!

But what more can you do? You're already working your marketing plan, sending press releases to the media, advertising and getting your name out into the community. Those things are already a lot to keep up with for any business. What would you say if I told you that you could do a lot more, but without a lot of effort?

It's possible. And it's not hard. All it takes is a little creativity and talent, and you'll have a whole new outlet for communication with your customers.

Ask yourself this simple question: Are you constantly talking with your customers? Are you putting your business out there, sharing good news, staying in touch with the community and establishing yourself as the go-to company for your customers' needs?

You can do this in your own words through a blog. Yes, you've heard about them, and you know they're popular. They aren't just for college students or social media junkies. If done correctly, a blog can establish you as a leader in your industry and build a community of your customers.

Sure, you can issue a press release and hope one of the local media outlets will pick up your story. That's important to any marketing strategy. But don't allow your great business news to be at the mercy of what other events might be happening that day. Don't let fickle reporters act as gatekeepers between you and your customers.

Not convinced? Keep reading.

WARNING

Before you go all willy-nilly writing a hundred blog posts and slapping them up on your site, you have to understand what your blog is all about. You probably think it's all about you. And in a way, yes, that's true.

But the message that you should be sending to customers is simple: "This is all about YOU."

It's imperative that you view this community-building effort as a way to engage your customers with information they care about. Your customers want to know how you're affecting them. Here's an example: No one cares about the technology behind the new iPhone. Sound crazy? It's not. Think about it – People buying the phone care how it is going to make their lives simpler and more fun. Most people don't care how it accomplishes that goal. Make sense now?

Keeping that in mind, let's talk about why your business needs a blog. Read on.

Reason #1: You control the message

This is your turf. You have home field advantage, so use it! You own your blog and have control over all the content. You provide the message you want customers to see. Unlike getting your story in the media, a blog is dependent on you alone – not on the availability or willingness of a reporter to cover your event or promotion.

Murphy's Law clearly states that the possibility of breaking news increases exponentially when you're holding a press conference, so you might not get a cameraman to cover that live shot as you hoped. Leaving your message entirely for the media to report leaves a lot to chance and human error. Perhaps the reporter gets some of the details wrong or forgets to mention a critical idea.

With a blog, you don't have to rely on someone else to get your message straight. You choose the timing and tone of your news.

Also note: You'll also be in charge of monitoring comments on your blog. On one hand, this is a great method of gauging how your customers feel about your small business. If you're getting a lot of positive feedback – keep up the good work! But what do you do if someone posts a negative comment?

Remember: You control the message here, which means you get to craft a careful response to address customer concerns. They'll appreciate your attention and commitment to customer satisfaction. And because a blog is posted for all to see, future customers have the opportunity to see how you solved a previous customer's problem. Proof that you're a great business to work with!

Keeping up a blog ensures your message is constantly being publicized in exactly the words you choose. On top of sharing good news, you have a controlled environment to address customer concerns, paving the way for an immediate improvement in communication and customer loyalty.

Reason #2: Build a community

A blog is a great way to encourage your customers to interact with you. Give your customers a reason to engage with you by posting relevant, interesting content. Show your customers that your business is not just a business: It's run by caring human beings who are trying to make the lives of their customers better in some way.

Sure, a press release and an article in the local newspaper can inform the public about your news, and that's great for any business. But a blog gives that public a place to respond to you, to voice their opinions, to tell you what they like and don't like. Use the opportunity to learn about your customers: how you can continue to serve them and satisfy their needs. Which posts are getting the most comments? Evaluate the quantity and quality of the responses, and use that information to guide your ideas and craft future winning posts.

A blog is also a place for potential customers to learn about you from current (or former!) customers.

If you're running a great business that helps its customers and treats them right, they'll have a reason to leave positive feedback on your blog posts. Say someone is Googling about the product or service you provide. That person clicks on your site, browses briefly, and finds your blog. After reading just a few positive comments on your blog – voilà! – that visitor is now a new customer.

Beware: The reverse is also true. If you're running a crummy business that rips off its customers... well, they'll let you know they're unhappy. Disgruntled customers will respond negatively if they feel they have been mistreated, and they could come to your blog to warn other customers of their poor experience with your business. If you consistently treat your customers badly, a blog is not for you!

But if you're running a good business and truly care about your customers, a blog provides an opportunity to address concerns and complaints on your blog in a positive way, reinforcing that you care about your customers. Your response to complaints can actually bring new customers knocking on your door. People tend to trust satisfied customers who have recommended a business, so assemble a community and you'll have a built-in testimonials page.

Don't worry if your blog doesn't receive an overwhelming number of comments, especially in the beginning. It's common for blog posts to receive only a few responses or none at all. Use the comments section as a guide for what engages your customers and what topics they find unexciting. Then adjust your messages to your community's interest.

Reason #3: Establish your expertise

Show customers that you're the authority on what you're doing. Offer solutions, tips and advice relevant to your customers needs to establish that no other similar business does your job better than you do.

For example, say you're running a garden shop or nursery. You might write a blog on ways to get rid of backyard pests. Now, thanks to your post, anyone searching for answers about how to send some garden insects to an early demise will be grateful for your expert advice. It also encourages them to browse the other helpful suggestions in the archives of your blog.

Guess what? You now have a much higher chance of converting that site visitor into a customer.

If you're the leader in your field within the community, let the city know. Maybe the president of the company won a meaningful but little-known award, and the announcement received only a few sentences in the local newspaper's business section. With a blog, you can tell the story and convey its importance to customers.

This can be a great way to toot your own horn, but tread carefully. Your messages must be meaningful to customers. Remember how I said this blog is not all about you? You must give your readers a reason to care that the president of the company won the award. Does the award assure the customer of receiving the best possible service at your business? The most up-to-date products? The most experienced service? Make the message about fulfilling your customers' needs.

Even if the local television station ran a great package on your company's recent award, there's still a deeper story there. Because you control the content, the blog is the place to tell the whole story behind the one-minute segment on the evening news. Explain the meaning, how it affects the lives of your readers, for the greatest impact.

Reason #4: Increase brand recognition

You know what your company stands for, but does the rest of the community understand your mission? Brand is crucial to your game plan as a small business, and your blog is a perfect place to make sure you're giving the right impression to the community.

But how do you build brand recognition through a blog?

Determine your goals, your mission, your brand, and list examples of how you've met or exceeded those goals. Now you're armed with a list of potential blog posts to build brand recognition.

- Want to be known for your new ideas, products or services? Announce the arrival of great new stuff to your customers via your blog. Let your blog subscribers be the first ones to find out what's new, or offer a discount if a customer mentions your blog post when making a purchase. Everyone likes to be the first to get the scoop, so let your readers share the news with their friends about the great coupon being offered on your blog. They'll get credit with their friends for being well informed, and you'll get more business sent your way. And who knows... if you're posting really great content, you might even gain a few new readers.
- Do you want to be known for employing the crème de la crème, the best of the best? Praise your employees on your blog! Don't let your Employee of the Month award remain an internal-only honor. Give kudos to your outstanding employees for everyone to read. How does this impact your customers' lives? Explain what your employees are doing to provide great customer service, brainstorm innovative ideas or stay abreast of the most current practices. Along with helping to establish your company's expertise in the field, it will also engender a feeling of goodwill with your customers. Not only will your employees be pleased that they've received public praise for their effort, you'll earn a reputation for treating your employees well. Show the world why your company is a great place to work, and everyone wins.
- Is it your mission to do good deeds? Share news or personal stories that your blog readers would find heartwarming. For example, say the company is going to give \$2 to a local charity for every pizza sold on a particular day. Tell customers on your blog why that charity is important to your small business.

Don't limit yourself to these ideas. There are countless ways to remind your customers of what you stand for.

Reason #5: Improve your website's search engine rankings

Google doesn't pull websites at random to list on its results page when you make a query. There are many ways to make your company's website search-engine friendly. Fresh content is one of the big ones, and there's a really easy way to refresh your content regularly without changing the information on your site. You guess it: a blog.

Keep up with the analytics of your website, and you'll know how many visitors are landing on your page and how long they stay. A blog increases the chance of getting those visitors to your page by increasing the ranking on Google search results.

And when you're posting great information, your readers will share your blog on social media outlets. In addition to getting in front of people who weren't your customers with well-written, thought-provoking content, you're also building links to your site. **Without any extra effort or expense on your part!** It's a passive marketing technique that also helps increase search engine ranking.

While a blog helps Google find you out there in cyberspace, it also helps visitors engage. If your content is exciting, helpful or funny (depending on your brand), you'll see more visitor click-throughs to your main site for more information on what you're all about.

Convinced yet?

When you take time to write thoughtful blog posts, customers will notice that you're thinking about them, their needs and concerns.

If you have a presence on the social media communities where your customers hang out, a blog gives you additional content to promote to your followers. In addition to spreading the word about your small business, you're giving your followers a reason and a place to interact with you. Don't forget: it's on your home turf, so you have the advantage.

Even if you don't have a social media presence yet, it's likely your customers do, so give them something to share with their friends. Be relevant, be funny, be exciting, be serious, be personal, be helpful. Most important, be visible and be in front of your customers with great content. They'll share the good stuff, and spread the word for you.

Give them what they want, and they'll keep coming back.

Good luck!

Need help?

Does the task of keeping up a regular blog seem daunting? Don't have the time, passion, ideas or ability to write it yourself? Or maybe you started off strong and ran out of steam. No matter what problem your company is facing with its blog, I can help.

Contact me at ashley@ashleyfesta.com for a free consultation to discuss your blogging needs.

About the Author

Ashley Festa is a freelance writer specializing in blogging and creative materials. She has more than 10 years of writing and editing experience, and she has blogged for business and for pleasure. She also writes magazine features, newspaper articles, advertising and brochure copy, grocery lists, and sometimes on the back of her hand.

Ashley is the Social Media Chair for the Association for Women in Communications San Antonio chapter. Ashley holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in English.

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