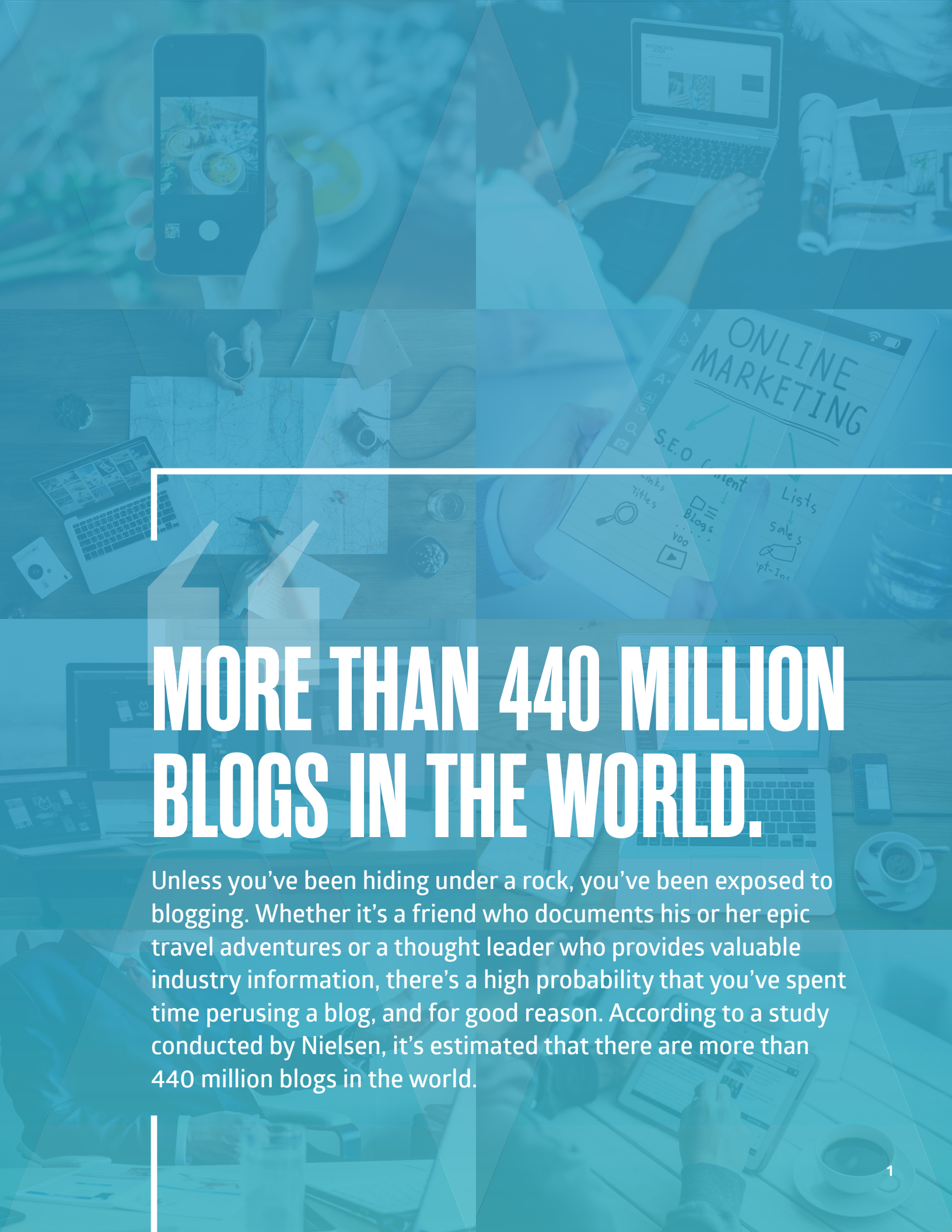




A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SMALL BUSINESS BLOGGING





MORE THAN 440 MILLION BLOGS IN THE WORLD.

Unless you've been hiding under a rock, you've been exposed to blogging. Whether it's a friend who documents his or her epic travel adventures or a thought leader who provides valuable industry information, there's a high probability that you've spent time perusing a blog, and for good reason. According to a study conducted by Nielsen, it's estimated that there are more than 440 million blogs in the world.

THE BLOGGING BOOM.

Believe it or not, the first known instance of a weblog (a precursor to the phrase “blog”) appearing on a traditional news site can be traced back to 1998. During the early 2000s, the growth of blogging was a slow and steady one, but blogs eventually took off in the middle of the decade. Fast-forward two decades, and we now find ourselves in the midst of a blogging boom.

But don't let the longevity of blogging dissuade you. If you're thinking that blogging is on its way to becoming an outdated marketing tactic like brochures and taglines, think again. In fact, it's not too late to hop on the blogging train and ride it full steam ahead to content marketing success.

This e-book will take you on a journey to grasp the general understanding of how blogging can positively impact your marketing strategy and ultimately help you develop a comprehensive plan to create, share, and scale award-winning blogging content.



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BLOG

IN A NUTSHELL

So, what exactly is a blog?



THE BEST PART? A BLOG CAN BE ANYTHING THAT YOU WANT IT TO BE.

We'll admit that when comes to the vast terrain of the World Wide Web, language and definitions can get a little confusing. However, before you embark on a blogging adventure, it's important to recognize what makes a blog unique.

In layman's terms, a blog is a frequently updated online medium in which a writer shares his or her thoughts, expertise, and experiences in the form of posts as either part of a page on a website or the whole website itself.

The best part? A blog can be anything that you want it to be. From a cathartic journaling experience to an informative business platform that's centered around your products and services—there's no one-size-fits-all description for when it comes to defining your blog.



SEO AND WEB
OPTIMIZATION

SEARCH PROCESS

PROJECT
DEVELOPMENT

WEBSITE R

THE IMPORTANCE

Benefits of blogging for your business.



Now that the serious business of defining a blog is out of the way, let's get down to the fun part: the various reasons that have compelled 53% of marketers to say that blogging is their top content marketing priority (HubSpot). And why you—regardless of your industry—should take the time to incorporate blogging into your marketing strategy and never look back.

Here are the top five benefits of blogging for your business.

1. INCREASES SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION.

In the digital world that we're living in, search engine marketing has become the foundation of becoming discovered on the internet. Since 75% of users (HubSpot) never scroll past the first page of search results—Google, Yahoo, and Bing—dominating the first page is crucial to your success. Although SEO involves a complicated algorithm and a multilayered approach, blogging is a small feat that can help to increase your ranking.

In simple terms, search engines are looking for indexed pages and links, fresh content, and relevant keywords. According to a ContentPlus, blogs give websites 434% more indexed pages and 97% more indexed links. In addition, continuously posting high-quality blogs with copy that contains strategic keywords will, in turn,

help search engines rank you higher, directing more traffic to your website.

2. HELPS TO CONVERT WEB TRAFFIC INTO LEADS.

We all know that lead generation is the backbone of any industry, and for good reason. Leads have the potential to convert into valuable customers, which means one thing—more revenue. If you think your prospecting strategy ends at cold

COMPANIES THAT BLOG GENERATE MORE THAN 67% MORE LEADS PER MONTH

calling and referrals, think again. It's been proven that companies that blog generate more than 67% more leads per month than those who don't (Social Media B2B).

Think of it this way. When you read a blog that resonates with you, what do you do next? More than likely, you're compelled to learn and read more. It's no different for businesses. Connecting with your prospects via engaging content will compel them to hand over their coveted contact information. Including tangible downloads with a form submission and an email newsletter opt-in feature will help to keep your pipeline full.

3. ESTABLISHES AUTHORITY.

When you think of brands, who comes to mind? More than likely it's the big players—Apple, Amazon, and Coca-Cola, to name a few. While their respected industries vary, they all have one thing in common—a strong brand recognition and recall.

Blogging helps to establish your brand in a sea of competition. By providing valuable content on a consistent basis, you're setting the foundation for your clients to come to expect and rely on your expertise. When prospects come across your blog, your content will help them to develop a sense of trust for your services (brand trust) and, in turn, keep you top of mind for when they're ready to buy. In fact, 47% of buyers view three to five pieces of content before engaging with a sales rep (Demand Gen Report, 2016).

4. PROVIDES YOUR ORIGINAL CONTENT.

Let's face it: nowadays, if you're not utilizing social media for your brand, you're behind the eight ball. But creating an account is the easy part. In order to garner real results and engagement on social media, you need to develop a posting schedule that involves original content (e.g. blogs).

While there's no reason to knock curating content (the act of repurposing someone else's work), utilizing original content will take your social media presence to the next level. Posting your own blogs on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter will give your audience the opportunity to engage with the posts and potentially share them on their pages. This means that your content can reach a multitude of people and you'll gain an even larger brand exposure.

5. HELPS TO HUMANIZE YOUR BRAND.

We all have that one family member who only talks about the amazing things that are happening in his or her life. Frustrating, right? Now, apply this same situation to your marketing communication. If you only talk about your own products and services, your audience is going to eventually stop listening. It quickly gets stale.

Instead, they want to hear about your brand, such as the things that happen behind closed doors, what keeps you up at night, and real-life scenarios that they can relate to. Blogging provides you with the unique opportunity to share your voice and personality, humanizing your brand. This will help your audience develop trust for your brand and lead to profitable relationships.





BUILDING A BLOG

How do I get started?



To recap: we've touched on how blogs can positively impact your content marketing strategy, which begs the question—how do I get started? For many, building a blog can seem like a hefty undertaking. However, thanks to advances in technology, it's actually easier than one would assume.

Here is a step-by-step guide to help you get your blog up and running.

STEP ONE: CHOOSE YOUR BLOGGING PLATFORM.

There are multiple platforms to choose from, such as Tumblr, Blogger, Squarespace, and Wix. However, we highly recommend using WordPress. Why? For starters, it's cost effective. All you need is a web host and domain name. WordPress also offers multiple free and paid themes to ensure that your blog boasts a high-quality appearance. Lastly, it's extremely popular among bloggers. In fact, over 50% of all blogs are running on WordPress (ManageWP).

STEP TWO: SELECT YOUR DOMAIN NAME.

In simple terms, www.YourBlogName.com. This step is essential for a few reasons. First, it's your first impression that you give website viewers, so consider picking a name that is concise and easy to type. It also helps define your personal brand. That being said, make sure that it's branded and unique to give you an edge over your competition. Before you select your domain name, keep in mind that you need to search to see if it's available.

STEP THREE: SIGN UP WITH A WEB HOST.

Web hosting is the service that allows your blog to be accessible to viewers. It acts as a storage system for the files, images, and content of each post. Like platforms, there are multiple hosting companies to choose from— such as HostGator, DreamHost, and GoDaddy. You'll need to select an annual payment plan—keep in mind that it doesn't have to be anything lavish. Once you've selected a plan, you'll register the domain name that you determined in the previous step.

STEP FOUR: INSTALL THE BLOGGING PLATFORM AND ADD A BLOG PAGE.

Regardless of the platform you've selected, you'll need to install it in the web hosting panel. The majority of web hosts are compatible with popular platforms, but be sure to double-check. Once you've installed the platform, you'll need to add a blog page. This differs from platform to platform, but it's relatively simple and will only take a couple of minutes. (Tip—if you're stuck, refer to the platform's FAQ section.)

STEP FIVE: CREATE YOUR FIRST BLOG POST.

The last and most exciting step! After you've added a blog page, you can begin writing your first post. Continue on to the next section, where we break down what goes into the composition.



CREATING CONTENT

Formatting and topics for your blog.

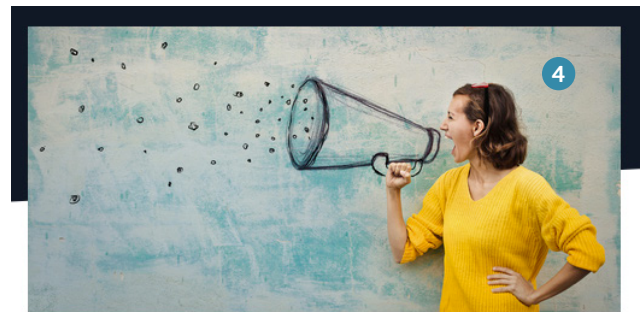
FORMATTING

Before we jump into the different types of blogs that you can write, it's important to touch on the formatting. Because, let's face it: when it comes to marketing, appearances are everything. If your blog doesn't look inviting upon first glance, visitors are more prone to bounce off of your site before they even have the time to digest the first sentence. Fortunately, formatting the perfect blog post is relatively simple.

- 1 You'll want to start with the title. While click-bait headlines are all the craze, they are not effective. Headers should use language that entices a reader to click but also summarizes the article. Keep in mind that the shorter the headline, the better. A general rule of thumb is five words or fewer. If you can, adding a keyword or two into the title will help your SEO efforts.
- 2 After the title, you'll move on to the intro. This should be exactly that: an introduction to the blog. It should outline what you'll be discussing throughout the piece. Try to keep your paragraphs short so you can draw attention to the body of the content. The majority of readers will skim the intro to get to the meat of the blog.
- 3 Ah, the body. This is the most significant section of any blog. We can't stress enough the importance of breaking down the body into different subheads. In short, utilizing subheads will help readers to better digest the content. To emphasize the subheads, use bold text or bullet points. If you're focusing on SEO efforts, utilizing H2 tags and including at least one high-quality image will help increase your rankings.
- 4 When it comes to selecting a blog image, don't think that you have to spend big bucks. Thanks to the Creative Commons Zero license, there are multiple websites that offer high-quality photos for free. This means that you

have access to a comprehensive library without having to worry about legal ramifications. We recommend websites like Pexels, Pixabay, and StockSnap.

- 5 The closing is your opportunity to wrap up your thoughts. It doesn't have to be lengthy; two or three sentences will suffice. If you have a specific call to action or download that's relevant to the post, including it during the closing is a great way to ensure readers read the whole post.



See Success with These 1 Marketing Strategies

Posted on March 10, 2018



Marketing is an essential (if not the most essential) aspect of any successful business, but in an increasingly digital world, it can be difficult to know what strategies will work best for you and how to implement them. 2

There are hundreds of different types of marketing tactics out there, so how can you navigate through the strategies you know won't work to find the ones that will? These are some of the most prominent approaches that top companies are utilizing, and how to make them work for your business.

Cause Marketing 3

There's nothing more important than showing your customers you care about the community at large, and whether or not you take the time to volunteer with a local organization, donate portions of your proceeds, or simply partner with a charity, showing your allegiance to a cause that matters to you is a great way to promote awareness for the charity, and also for you.

Big companies use this tactic all the time, working with national charities to raise money for a set period of time, through social media campaigns, collection boxes in store fronts, television commercials, etc. But even with a small budget, you can make this strategy work for you. If there is a [community organization or cause](#) that you feel compelled to get behind and that could benefit from your marketing, partner up and get the word out together.

Start small by building up your [social media presence](#), and remember to follow the 80-20 rule. You'd be surprised how much easier it is to connect with clients and prospects on social media, where they already spend a good portion of their time. In addition, you could also consider sending a digital newsletter or other relationship-building tool to grab your audience's attention —whatever you can make work for your business on a regular basis. 5

Don't get overwhelmed by all of the different marketing strategies out there. Sometimes a little trial and error is actually beneficial in determining the kind of marketing that is sustainable for you.

TOPICS

We mentioned previously that the beauty of blogging lies within your ability to write about whatever your heart desires. While we don't recommend filling your business blog with "Dear Diary" entries, there are three different post types that can help you garner results.

1. INSTRUCTIONAL

The intention of this type of post is simple—you want to teach your audience something. Whether it's in the form of a how-to guide, a tutorial, or a checklist, you're providing valuable and educational content to help your audience learn about your area of expertise.

Below are three different examples of instructional blog posts for the real estate, financial, and health care industries.

- **Real Estate:** *4 Reasons to Buy During the Fall*
- **Financial:** *How to Prepare to Meet with a Mortgage Broker*
- **Health Care:** *7 Common Cardio Mistakes*

2. INFORMATIVE

While instructional blog posts are intended to teach your audience, informative blog posts are used to inform your audience. This can include new industry trends, cutting-edge technology, and product reviews. Informative posts can help showcase that you're well versed in not only your industry but also current happenings.

Below are three different examples of informative blog posts for the real estate, financial, and health care industries.

- **Real Estate:** *Is the Shiplap Design Trend Here to Stay?*
- **Financial:** *The Best Apps to Help You Budget*
- **Health Care:** *Is a High-Protein Diet Beneficial?*

3. ENTERTAINING

We mentioned earlier how blogging can help to humanize your brand. Remember: your audience doesn't always want to read about stuffy business content. This is where entertaining blog posts come into play. The content can range from personal experiences to community events—the world is your oyster.

Below are three different examples of entertaining blog posts for the real estate, financial, and health care industries.

- **Real Estate:** *3 New Restaurants in Town*
- **Financial:** *My Trip to Yosemite National Park*
- **Health Care:** *How I Avoid the Winter Blues*



SCALING EFFORTS

Take your efforts to the next level.



Your work isn't finished once you click "publish." In order to garner results from blogging, you have to scale your efforts. The more eyes you have on your content, the better chance you have at establishing your brand and your business.

Here are three ways to take your efforts to the next level.

1. POSTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

We've touched on the concept of social media in a previous section, but it's advantageous when it comes to scaling your blogging efforts. Sharing your blogs across a wide variety of platforms will increase your exposure, garner engagement, and drive traffic back to your page.

When using platforms like Facebook and Twitter, you can simply copy and paste the blog's URL and share it as a post. Popular business-oriented platform LinkedIn offers a "write an article" feature, which allows users to format and post the blog right from the platform itself.

2. SECURING GUEST BLOGGING SPOTS.

You are more than likely aware of other bloggers within your industry. While many write them off as competition, they can actually present you

with a great opportunity—guest blogging. Guest blogging is the act of writing content for similar blogs within your industry. Your original content will then appear on the other parties' blogs with a link back to your website.

Guest blogging not only increases traffic to your page but also helps to establish you as an authority figure within your industry. Since guest blogging is a two-way street, you can return the favor by featuring the other bloggers on your blog, building mutually beneficial relationships along the way.

3. SHARING CONTENT ON ADDITIONAL PLATFORMS

Thanks to the internet, the opportunity to share your blog goes beyond social media. There are various websites that act as online publishing platforms to help you gain exposure. Below are three examples of websites you can utilize to spread your content.

- *ActiveRain*
- *Scoop.it*
- *Medium*

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, it's safe to assume that the blogging boom is here to stay. While developing a cohesive strategy will take trial and error, adding blogging to your content marketing arsenal will help you take your business to the next level.

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