

Blog Content Recommendations

HOW TO PLAN FOR AND WRITE YOUR NEXT BLOG POST

Overview

Maintaining a blog is a way to not only improve SEO but solidify a brand's reputation as a knowledgeable and trustworthy source of information — provided that the blog is well-written and well-researched. Give your content the best chance of success by following a few key steps: planning the topics and publishing schedule in advance, learning how to add value to an oversaturated web, and writing the right kind of content in the right way.

Below are recommended strategies and tips to apply when planning for and writing your next blog posts:

1. Know your audience(s)

Before planning the content and outline of your post, have a clear understanding of who your target audience is, how familiar they might be with the topics you are covering, what will resonate with them, what their interests are.

What to consider:

- Stick to your mission
 - Have a mission statement for your blogs and stick to it. Your mission should include the reason you are producing content, who you are writing content for, the type of things you will write about, the cadence.
- Listen to your audience(s)

- Use avenues like social media, focus groups and tapping into your client-facing teams to identify topics and moods that resonate with your audience(s)
- Come at it from your audience's perspective
 - What is their pain point? What do they want to know when researching the topic?

2. Plan ahead

Planning ahead is key in sticking to a timeline and posting cadence. It also promotes consistency and alignment with the other areas of marketing.

What to consider:

- Collaborate with your other team members, especially those in charge of social media and email campaigns, on developing a theme or a focus for the quarter. The theme can align with a business focus, seasonality, product/service launch or holidays.
- Decide on the number of posts you and your team can realistically produce every week. Blogs are not a numbers game. Be realistic and keep in mind that quality trumps quantity. The days of churning and burning blog content for SEO are gone.
- Once a theme is selected for the quarter and you've decided on the number of posts you can produce per week, build a content calendar inclusive of each post's:
 - Title
 - Outline
 - Target keywords
 - Pro tip: Use a tool like the Google Keyword Planner to identify search volume for your keywords. These types of tools often provide additional suggestions for more queries that can provide ideas for different blog topics.
 - Creative needs (custom images, infographics, videos)
 - Blog category
 - Due dates for approval
 - Publish date
 - URL (to be added as the posts are published)

Trouble finding new topics to write on? Here are some tips!

- Use sites like [answerthepublic.com](https://www.answerthepublic.com), [quora.com](https://www.quora.com), [reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com) and other similar sites to identify what users are searching for and discussing on different topics of your interest. For most sites, all it takes is typing in a query to uncover questions, complaints or feedback on a topic.
- Collect feedback from your customer facing team regarding questions, concerns or popular topics that always come up with customers.
- Watch the competition. They may come up with great topic ideas but leave out the depth, uniqueness and value you can bring to the table with your own piece.
- Check out the news for topical blog posts, as there may be an ongoing story, industry innovation, issue or success for which you could give your expert opinion.

3. Add value

Because the web is oversaturated with content, the competition for high-quality blog pieces is strong. While new topics can't always be introduced, due to other bloggers having already written on the subject, you can still develop unique pieces by adding the right dose of creativity into any topic your audience is interested in.

What to consider:

- After making a selection for a topic, identify what the top ranking blogs/resources on that topic are. Do this by simply typing in the queries you believe are relevant to the topic in question into Google.
- Gather the top 2 – 3 blog posts or resources and identify the following:
 - The types of blog posts or resources they are. Are they Q&As, a short answer, in-depth pieces, interviews, a combination of copy and custom graphics, etc.? Begin thinking about the type of content that is missing for the topic and how you can craft your piece to fill that void.
 - How current the information provided in the post is. Is there an opportunity to contribute updated information?
 - The angle of the content and who it's intended for. Is there a different perspective that can be taken? This could be another void to fill.

Now that you're done identifying what already exists on the web for the topic you've selected, ask yourself this question: "How will my content be different from what's been already written on the topic?" Set a goal and use it to help guide the outline of your piece.

4. Compose the content

I. Start with an outline

An outline shouldn't be lengthy or too detailed. Think of the outline as your rough guide to ensure you cover all important aspects of the topic and avoid repetition or going off-topic.

Before writing, make a list of all your points and the information you would like to include, making sure that you have enough to say about each. If it seems you're lacking information in a certain section, do more research or leave it shorter; do not add filler or repetitive content to flesh it out. Once you've added that piece of information or point to the outline, cross it out/delete it from your original list.

Keep this format in mind when writing the next posts (note the number of sections and/or format will vary based on the length and type of the post) to help guide your outlines:

Introduction

[Quick summary explaining what your blog post will cover]

Section 1 – <name of section>

- One sentence describing the focus of the section. Lead with your most powerful point, especially one supported by interesting, specific facts and figures.

Section 2 – <name of section>

- One sentence describing the focus of the section.

Section 3 – <name of section>

- One sentence describing the focus of the section.

Section 4 – <name of section>

- One sentence describing the focus of the section. End the article with your second most powerful point, so your least strong arguments are sandwiched.

Section 5 – Conclusion

- Wrap-up of your points. Don't feel pressured to include one; if your last section ends at a natural conclusion, end the blog post there.

II. Don't get stuck on the length

The length or number of words in a blog post is not a predictive indicator of the success of the piece regarding its user experience, virality or SEO weight. All variations of blog post lengths can be successful and it strictly depends on what the topic calls for.

The focus should instead be on the amount of information you believe is needed to successfully convey the message.

As a baseline, most blog posts range from 400 – 1500 words or more. The post outline can help guide the length.

III. Consider the traits that sell

Most users engage with blog posts that have a few characteristics in common. The most successful content is typically actionable, visual, entertaining, relevant, solution-based, urgent, clear and direct. Use the below considerations to develop a relatable, easily digestible and action focused piece.

What to consider:

- Not all users may fully understand a process you are describing. Use metaphors, analogies and/or examples to communicate a less widely known topic to ensure the readers can relate.
- Break up the content using headers, numbered or bulleted lists and short paragraphs. Along with images and/or videos, this will make the post more visually attractive and easier to follow/digest. When using bullet points, make sure to keep each point concise, using just a few words or, at most, a couple sentences.
- Avoid overused and filler words such as “market-leading”, “best in class”, “world class,” “cutting edge”, “industry standard”, “first rate”, or other similar terms. Be clear and specific with your message instead.
- Avoid fluff, filler content, and unnecessary words. Be direct, to the point and concise in your writing, e.g. use active voice instead of passive and avoid interjections and rhetorical questions.
- Offer a solution to a problem if the blog post discusses a need. A service or a product are part of the solution. Include educational and informative content that runs parallel to a service or product the post may reference.

- Keep the content entertaining when possible. In most cases, using a funny image, meme or short video can add character and entertainment to a post.
- When possible, make the content sound urgent. Not only “why,” but rather “why not now.”
- Provide clear takeaways and actionable steps. Don’t get wishy-washy, i.e. avoiding forming an opinion or leaning more towards one argument — the reader should come away more secure in his or her decision or opinion.
- Get specific. Many blog posts are very generic, e.g. “There are many different materials used in computer manufacturing.” Instead, dive deep into the details, e.g. “There are several types of metals, plastics and other materials used in computer manufacturing, such as gold, copper and aluminum. The pros and cons of using each are discussed below.”
- Check for clarity and flow by reading the blog post aloud. Does it sound informative and interesting? Does it flow naturally? Is it written professionally? Remember that you should not write exactly the way you speak — the content should be a more elevated form of your speech.
- Double check the facts. Support any statistics, numbers or other types of data with sources if applicable. Is it fact-checked and supported by trusted sources, e.g. government agencies, scientific studies or professional organizations?
- Keep the voice consistent across all posts, unless specifying different authors. Ensure that the vocabulary and writing style apply to the target audience, e.g. avoid using modern slang for an older audience or long, complex terminology and sentence structures for laymen.

IV. Remember to optimize the post (so your post is found in search)

First and foremost, remember that you are writing for humans first and search engines second. If a keyword makes a sentence sound awkward, find a different spot or a synonym for that keyword.

Here are a few elements to pay attention to when optimizing your post:

Keyword placement and density

- Choose the keyword set before beginning to write the blog post. Mainly focus on long tail keywords that ask or answer a question. Limit the number of focus keywords to 1 – 3 per post, but feel free to incorporate more synonyms or similar queries.
- Incorporate the top keyword (out of your keyword set) into your title tag, post title/headline and meta description. Ensure the rest of the keywords and their variations are incorporated into the actual copy, but do include them in the meta description, headers (h2,3, etc.) and alt text if possible.
- A good way to visualize keyword density is to use the “Find” feature in your document and search the keyword(s). If it looks or sounds oversaturated, start plugging in some synonyms or other keywords from the keyword research that were recommended for that page. Ensure that keywords are included naturally; if it sounds awkward, it’s best to place the keyword elsewhere.

Title tags

- The focus of title tags should be to entice and attract the user through their description but to also improve the post’s SEO. Title tags are a known “ranking factor,” and incorporating your top keyword into it can help the blog post’s search rankings.
- Using numbers or parentheses can make your title tag stand out.
 - Length (including spaces): 55 characters
 - Keywords a factor: yes

Meta descriptions

- The focus of meta descriptions should be placed on growing click-through-rates. Think of the meta descriptions as an “elevator pitch” for your blog post.

Length (including spaces): approximately 300 characters (fluctuates)

Keywords a factor: no, but consider including them if possible. If the keyword the user searched to find the post matches with the one in the meta description, Google will bold it in the meta description.

Header tags

Also known as H1s, H2s, H3s and so on, header tags can be great on-site elements to incorporate keywords into. Do so only if the keywords don't make the header sound unnatural.

Alt text

Use descriptive alt text for all images inserted into the blog. Additionally, keep an eye on the file name too! No IMG007 file names; make those descriptive as well.

URLs

URLs provide users and crawlers with an understanding of what the destination page is about and hold SEO weight from a keyword and anchor text perspective. Choose shorter, human-readable URLs with descriptive keywords.

We recommend keeping URLs under 75 characters.

Internal linking

If a reference to a topic is made on another blog post, resource or web page, link to that page from the blog.

Use descriptive anchor text for internal linking that can easily communicate the destination page behind the link.

Categories and tags

Limit each blog post to 1 or 2 categories that are highly relevant to the topic. If tags are used on the blog, a post can contain multiple tags as long as you ensure that the "tag pages" are blocked from being indexed by search engines.

Call to action

Add a call to action at the end of every blog post, clearly indicating what steps you would like the reader to take next. This helps readers take action on the information they've read about from the post.

5. Popular post formats

Creating content in an easily digestible and familiar format will help keep readers engaged and on your page longer. Consider using some of these popular post formats:

- **How-To Post:** Great for educational and tutorial type content
- **List-Based Post:** Possibly the most popular blog post format, appealing to the modern online reader who likes to skim through most of their content
- **Q&A Post:** Useful for addressing common questions your audience may have
- **Slide Share Presentation:** A curation of visual media with quotes, charts, and quick takeaways. Works well with social media incorporation
- **Curated Post:** This post requires more upfront research but can be a very helpful resource for your audience. It is also ideal for building relationships with other bloggers and businesses you highlight in your content.