A Guide to Blog Writing

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Pretty much anyone can write a basic blog but creating content that people value, share and act upon is far more challenging.

There is no point in spending time writing an article if it makes no impact.

To help you improve your blog writing skills and learn more about the aims and ambitions of preparing an article, we have put together this helpful guide, which covers:

- The aims of writing a blog
- The importance of audience
- The anatomy of a great blog
- 12 important SEO points
- Effective proofing tips

What are we trying to achieve?

An important question but one that is perhaps not asked often enough. The primary goal of blog writing is to attract prospective clients, retain existing clients or get both groups to perform a specific action.

You can achieve this by:

- Highlighting issues they may need help with
- Raising awareness of your services and support
- Showcasing your expertise
- Reshaping perceptions

How do we do it?

This is simple – by attracting and maintaining the attention of the right people. This is achieved by writing original blogs that offer value and beat the other content fighting for their attention.

Value is a key aspect of writing. People only read what will benefit them in some way. With traditional novel writing the benefit is to entertain, while an eshot to a client might be created to inform them.

A blog has to achieve these things and more.
The ways that they add value to what you do, include:

- Entertaining
- Informing
- Providing new perspectives on a familiar issue
- Thought-provoking
- Something unexpected – Not just news but Q&As, Tips, Mythbusting.

Ultimately you want the reader to come away thinking that it was time well spent, rather than a waste of time.

The importance of audience

Before even putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) you need to think about who the article is trying to attract.

How a blog is written should differ depending on each audience.

A great blog will be attuned to the audiences' values, sensitivities and sensibilities, as well as their needs.

The best blogs are those that can provoke an emotional response that causes them to act.

Choosing a story or topic

If you are planning on writing a regular blog you will want to find facts, figures and stories that you can hang your narrative from.

We advise:

- Using official/primary sources wherever possible
- Making sure it is relevant to your audience
- Considering whether it adds value to your services
- Remaining, topical or interesting

A great way of choosing a story is to think:

- How many people or businesses will it affect?
- How significant will that effect be?
- What can we do to help or assist?

Often by answering these questions you will get an idea of the potential audience and can develop a plan for your blog around the topic you have chosen.

Importantly, it should help you to clarify the final 'call to action'. This is the part of the article that attempts to invoke a response or action from your audience.

The anatomy of a great blog

Here is a checklist to consider when creating a great blog:

Does it tell a story?

Stories are fundamental to being human and are ultimately about change. We've evolved that way because all threats are changes, although not all changes are threats.

That means telling us:

- What's changed/happened **[Change]**
- Why it's changed or happened **[Cause]**
- What it means for other things and people – especially where relevant to our audience **[Consequence]**
- How it relates to other concepts, events, people, places and objects **[Context]**

Change

- You can draw a circle around very specific things or leave it wide, bundling different things together
- The borders can be sharp or fuzzy
- You're essentially pinpointing some aspect of reality
- You don't have free rein, however – other people have to share your understanding

Cause

- Chains of events, where each event is dependent on the previous event having happened
- You can emphasise certain causes over others
- You also have flexibility in how you name causes subject to the constraints of shared understanding

Consequence

- Again, you have some level of choice over which implications you focus on over others
- And, you have flexibility in how you name implications

Context

- What is this similar to?
- What is it analogous to?
- What is it different from?
- Who does it relate to?
- Where does it relate to?
- What sectors does it relate to?
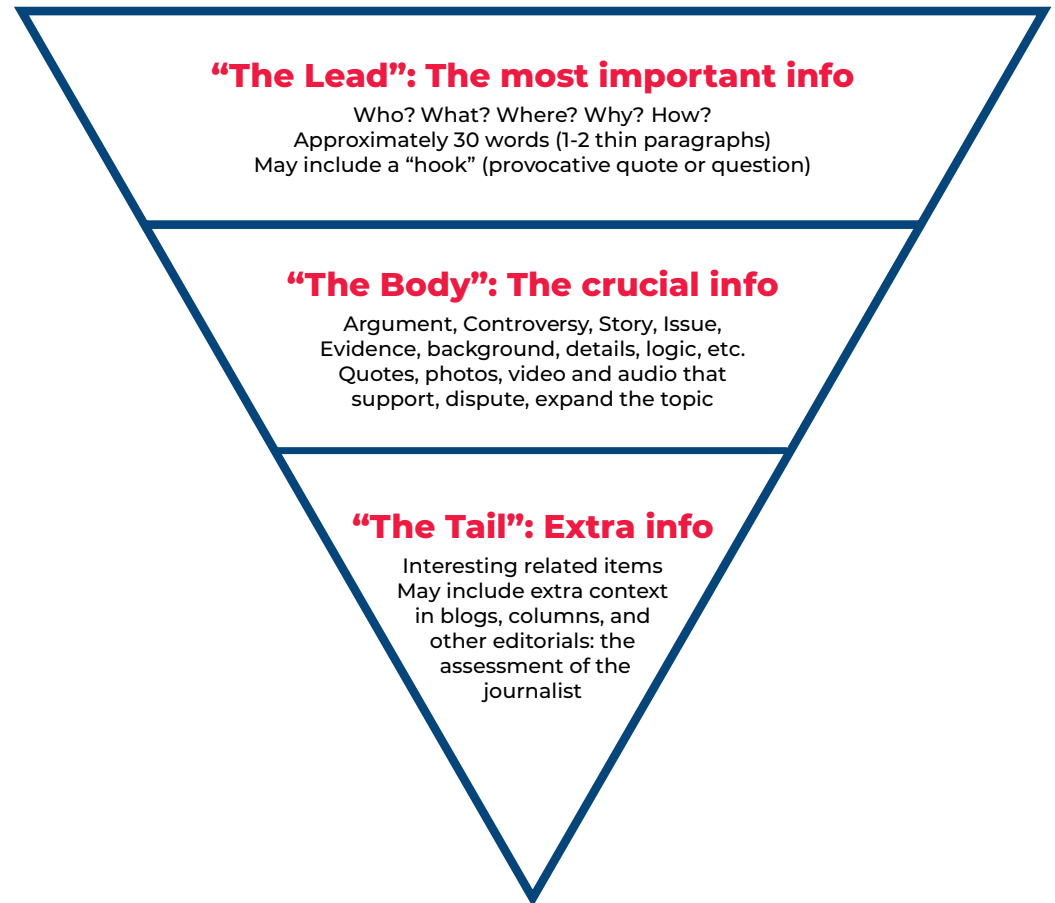
The anatomy of a great blog (continued)

You don't need to address name, cause, consequence and context in that order either, meaning there is huge scope for creativity and making things interesting.

How you get these points and the information across is also important to a blog. Journalists for years have been told to focus on the 'inverted pyramid'.

This isn't some ritual or secret cult but rather a simple diagram that shows how a story should be structured.

When writing a blog we must add a point to the tip – the call to action. This rounds off your article and presents the reader with an action.

Don't offer options, if possible, guide them to where you want them to be. Our ultimate goal is to change behaviour and get them to meet our goals, be it telephoning, emailing or even sharing the article with others.

"The Lead": The most important info

Who? What? Where? Why? How?
Approximately 30 words (1-2 thin paragraphs)
May include a "hook" (provocative quote or question)

"The Body": The crucial info

Argument, Controversy, Story, Issue,
Evidence, background, details, logic, etc.
Quotes, photos, video and audio that
support, dispute, expand the topic

"The Tail": Extra info

Interesting related items
May include extra context
in blogs, columns, and
other editorials: the
assessment of the
journalist

Is the tone, right?

Tone focuses on how you say things as opposed to what you are saying. It is especially important when it comes to conveying your relationship with the reader.

There are five different spectrums to consider:

1. Formal vs. informal

2. Serious vs. humorous

3. Respectful vs. irreverent

4. Enthusiastic vs. regretful

5. Direct vs. indirect

The tone is altered through the choice of pronouns, syntax, punctuation, rhythm, use of abbreviations, cultural references and more. It is a vital element in creating engagement and gaining responses from your readers.

Modern writing tends to favour a punchier and more direct tone. The attention spans of most people are minimal. If you can't capture them and keep them intrigued, they will simply go elsewhere.

How will the blog be framed?

A frame is a coherent structure of concepts that is crucial in giving meaning to the words you use.

• How does the story fit into a conceptual model of the world?
• What conceptual model of the world can we best use to understand the story?

We could talk about divorce as a tragedy, conflict, transaction, an end or a fresh start, amongst other things, for example.

Your choice of language should dictate the point you are trying to get across. Don't be afraid to be bold and creative.

Here are some things to consider to improve your use of language when writing a blog:

• Try to say things as simply as possible
• Use more sentences if you need to
• Minimise abstraction and try to use concrete metaphors
• Minimise the number of clauses in your sentences
• Avoid cliches where possible
• Be consistent with your use of terms, capitalisation etc.
• Adhere to your 'house' style
• Be judicious with the use of technical terms

As a professional, you may be focused on demonstrating your expertise and/or knowledge, but think about the point you are trying to get across.

It is very easy to dilute an argument by constantly focusing on the technicalities.

To them, there may be little or no value in knowing the latest law or policy, they are looking at the practical steps they need to take and you need to demonstrate how you can support them.

SEO

If it wasn't hard enough writing an engaging, interesting and accurate blog you must also consider ways to improve the SEO score if you are going to get people to visit your page and website.

Here are 12 key Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) points that you need to consider when creating a great blog:

1 Outbound links

Blogs should include outbound links to other sites, this helps with backlinking, which is used to prove the 'trustworthiness' and value of your website.

2 Internal links

Internal links to other pages within the website help to reduce the bounce rate, which ultimately dictates how long someone stays on your website.

3 Keywords

Take the time to think about what the keywords may be and include them in the intro and near the top. You should use focus keywords in the introduction, that either has particular relevance to the topic or your firm.

4 Keyword density

Keyword density is the number of times the focus keyword occurs in the copy, compared to the total text of that page.

This is important to search results as the algorithms attempt to match a user's search query to the best fitting web pages.

5 Text length

At the moment it is recommended that blogs are between 300 – 400 words to aid Google's algorithms. Longer is OK but anything shorter than 300 words may not perform as well.

6 Sentence length

Try to stick to concise sentences where possible. The content can be as complex as you want but the writing should remain simple. Google recommends that only 25% of an article should contain sentences with 20 or more words.

SEO (continued)

(7) **Consecutive sentences**

Using the same word to start consecutive sentences leads to awkward and repetitive writing. It breaks the rhythm of the text and tends to put readers and the algorithm off.

(8) **Paragraph length**

Properly sized paragraphs play an important role in making the text readable and scannable by the search engine crawlers. Big walls of text are not very readable and tend to scare off the readers.

Paragraphs help break down the text into bite-size and easy-to-understand chunks, which puts the readers at ease.

Every time a paragraph ends, it allows readers to relax and think about what they've just read. This helps in making sense of the entire text.

Paragraphs shouldn't be more than two sentences long – around 40 words.

SEO (continued)

9 **Passive Voice**

Using the passive voice almost always makes the writing more distant and the message conveyed in the blog less clear.

What is active voice?

When the subject of a sentence performs the verb's action, we say that the sentence is in the active voice. Sentences in the active voice have a strong, direct, and clear tone.

Examples of active voice:

• Monkeys adore bananas.
• The cashier counted the money.
• The dog chased the squirrel.

What is passive voice?

A sentence is in the passive voice when the subject is acted on by the verb. The passive voice is always constructed with a conjugated form of the verb's past participle. Doing this usually generates a preposition as well. Same sentences as before but in the passive:

• Bananas are adored by monkeys.
• The money was counted by the cashier.
• The squirrel was chased by the dog.

Google has a recommended maximum of 10% passive voice use. You can check your passive voice score by using the advanced settings on spellcheck.

SEO (continued)

10 **Transition words**

Using transition words in your writing can help enhance the readability of content, which has a big impact on SEO ranking. These words include 'and', 'but', 'so' and 'because'.

Their use in an article helps the search engine crawlers to make a logical flow of the article.

11 **Add questions**

The best place to be ranked on Google is position Zero. This is the box that will sometimes appear with a question and answer when you search.

By posing questions in your text and providing concise answers (90 characters or less). Google's algorithms are likely to rank pages and blogs higher.

12 **Add subheadings**

If you are writing a longer article or discussing multiple points or stages in a blog, add subheadings containing keywords.

This will help Google's algorithms to make sense of the text and can help readers skip to the section most relevant to them.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an ever-present danger when writing a blog. Using quotes and information from other sources can be a great way to back up your argument, but if you go too far, you run the risk of being accused of plagiarism.

As a simple rule, try to ensure the text you use is original. Where you do feel the need to quote another article make sure it is properly cited within your blog.

Examples of this include:

• The BBC wrote…
• HMRC explained…
• The official document stated…
• Speaking to Sky, Boris Johnson said… (important for an article or quote reported as exclusive)

Also, feel free to include backlinks to original articles to help with citing sources.

In plagiarism, ignorance is not a defence. Just because you weren't aware you were plagiarising, doesn't mean another party can't take legal action.

You must be able to demonstrate that your article was sufficiently different to the other parties – the burden of proof rests on you.

Defamation

Defamation is the act of lowering someone in the eyes of others and thus having an impact on their standing, earnings, etc.

The risk of defamation is rare, especially within most blogs, but you can get caught out easily if you report a previously defamatory matter or statement.

For this reason, take care when writing about court cases to include all relevant information. Avoid being vague, report all the facts, including names, ages and locations accurately.

The defence for defamation is to prove that the statement made is based in reality and accurate, if you cannot verify a critical claim (even if it is made in a well-known publication) do not include it.

Effective proofing and checking

There is nothing more embarrassing than having a typo or misspelling pointed out to you. It is quite human to make mistakes, but with effective proofing and checking these can be reduced.

First and foremost, use the technology at hand to help you. Always check documents with Microsoft Word's spellchecker to start with.

We also recommend using free software, such as Grammarly, which can spot more detailed issues within an article that may be missed by Microsoft Word.

We also find the following helpful when proofing:

- Change to web layout view on Word, zoom in to 500% and read line-by-line
- Print it off – sometimes it is easier to spot something 'in the flesh'
- Proof for different things each time, such as typos, consistency, spacing and grammar
- Ask someone else for help – they will often spot things you miss

You can also use the word search function on Microsoft Word (CTRL + F) to search for common errors (business vs businesses, affect vs effect etc).
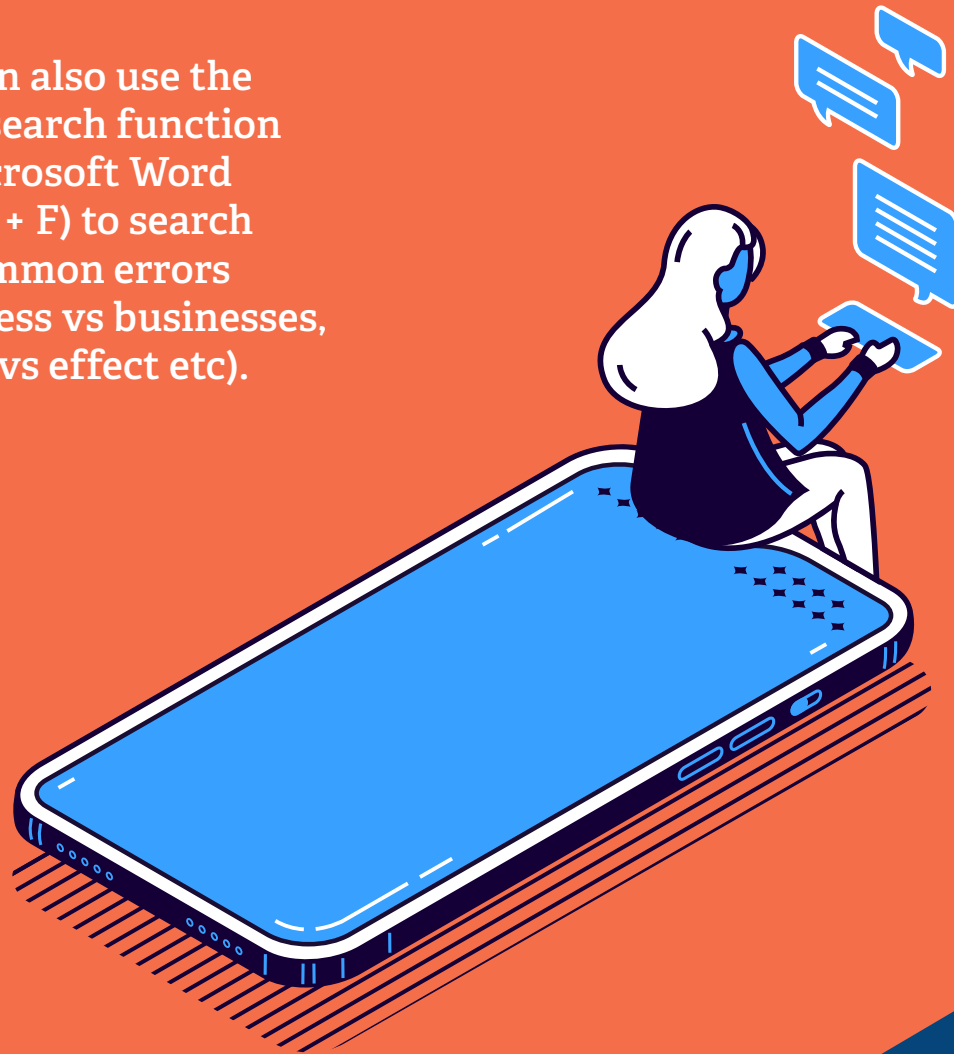
Here to help

If you are planning on preparing some blogs, we are always happy to offer advice or assist with the production of content for you and your team.

We have spent more than 20 years producing engaging and effective blogs that our clients enjoy and value.

To find out more about our blog and copywriting services, please speak to us.

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