The 11 Biggest Mistakes
Small Business Bloggers Make

It's easy to get started blogging...today's blogging software is inexpensive, easy-to-learn, and does most of the heavy lifting for you. However, it's a lot more difficult to build a *successful* blog: one that attracts prospects and clients, establishes you as an expert or an industry leader, and helps you attain search engine "findability."

With all the hype that surrounds blogging these days, too many businesses are jumping into blogging without knowing the pitfalls. Here are eleven of the biggest mistakes small businesses make when blogging, and how to avoid them.

This article assumes a certain familiarity with the **blogosphere**, but the words in red are defined in the left margin.

1) They don't get their own domain name for their blog. The problem with piggybacking your blog on another company's URL, such as *mycompany.typepad.com* or *mybusiness.blogger.com* is that it locks you into that **blogging platform**.

If that company goes out of business or you decide to move your blog you'll lose all of the incoming links you've so carefully cultivated.

What to do: From day one, get your own domain name for your blog and make sure it's set up properly at your blogging platform of choice. Then, if you're forced to move, you'll at least be able to keep the same domain and all of your **incoming links**.

Blogosphere: The unfortunate name representing blogs and blogging, and the network and community they create.

Blogging platform: The software one uses for blogging. Common platforms include Movable Type (http://www.movabletype.com), TypePad (http://www.typepad.com), Blogger (http://www.blogger.com) WordPress (http://www.wordpress.com) and dozens of others.

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Incoming Links: Links from other blogs (or Web sites) to your blog (or Web site).

Categories: Many blogging platforms allow you to organize your posts not just by date but by theme. This way your readers can find all of your posts on "Hiring Practices" or "Uses for Plastic Wrap."

Since the details vary between platforms, be sure that your platform allows such a setup.

2) They use the blogging platform's pre-set defaults. One reason it's so easy to get started with blogging is that you can start blogging moments after you've signed up.

From design templates to color choices to pre-chosen **categories** for organizing your content, a lot of the decision-making process has been simplified or removed for those who want to jump right in.

Unfortunately, these are the same templates, the same color schemes and the same categories that so many other bloggers are using. (In addition, some platforms don't allow you to re-name the pre-set categories, limiting what you can later change.)

Every communication from your company—including your blog—should be representative of your brand. To paraphrase Michael Levine, author of *A Branded World*, will your content have more weight in a Tiffany Box or in the same plain wrapper that every other blogger is using?

What to do: If you don't have the skill set in house, hire a professional to create a design for your blog that complements the rest of your marketing collateral. It will probably require both graphic design and advanced Web design skills.

If that's not possible within your marketing budget, at least get someone to create a unique page header and change the color scheme to match your business colors.

Also, don't lock yourself into any pre-set categories, but roll your own instead.

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3) They don't read other blogs. Blogs are often the best way to stay on top of trends that affect your industry and your clients' business. By ignoring these blogs, you're missing a real opportunity to stay in the loop and establish yourself as an expert.

In addition, by reading other blogs, even ones not in your industry, you can get a better understanding of what works and what doesn't.

The best chefs eat at other great restaurants.

What to do: Download a stand alone **news reader** (for Mac users I recommend NetNewsWire by Ranchero,) or use a browser-based option like Bloglines (http://www.bloglines.com) to subscribe to many blogs all from the same page.

In this fashion, you can keep track of dozens of blogs every day without having to visit dozens of Web sites.

5) They don't allow comments or trackbacks. One thing that makes blogging so powerful—and scary—is allowing other people to attach their own .02 to your communications. Can you imagine Coca-Cola allowing customers to add their own thoughts to Coke's 30-second TV or radio spots? Or Wal-Mart allowing site visitors to comment publicly on their Web site's home page?

Yet, that's just what's expected in the blogosphere.

Blogging's unique proposition is that this is a two-way conversation; you can get on your soapbox, but you need to make room for other people as well. And not all of these comments will be positive.

News Reader: A piece of software or Web application for receiving and reading news feeds.

Comments: Feedback left on a post from a reader, often including a link back to the reader's blog or Web site.

TrackBack: Similar to a comment, it's a snippet of referring commentary from one blog attached to the bottom of a post on another blog. It also includes a link to the new post.

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When you create a post, your readers can leave their own comment on that post, or create a trackback to their own blog where they will often discuss your post.

While I wouldn't recommend keeping comments up there that are offensive, companies that have whitewashed their blog by deleting critical comments have received a lot of bashing in the blogosphere.

In the blogosphere, transparency and authenticity rule.

Comment or Trackback Spam: Comments or trackbacks left solely to create inappropriate links to the commenter's Web site or blog.

What to do: Open up your blog to comments and trackbacks, and develop a thick skin. However, don't be afraid to delete comment or trackback spam.

6) They don't leave comments and trackbacks on other blogs. Leaving comments or trackbacks on other blogs offers many benefits. First off, it shows that you're an active participant in the blogosphere. Second, it helps you establish yourself as an expert or industry leader. Third, with each comment or trackback you create a link back to your own blog.

Why does this last item matter? Visitors to these blogs may follow the link back to your own blog to see what other brilliant insights you might have. This way you're reaching new prospects you would have otherwise never contacted.

Also, incoming links encourage better search engine rankings. Search engines view incoming links as "votes of confidence." You can help your own blog's ranking by leaving comments and trackbacks on other blogs.

What to do: Leave intelligent, appropriate comments and trackbacks on the blogs you read.

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If your .02 comes across as a crass attempt to lure new prospects or improve your search engine rankings, expect that these other bloggers will delete your comment, and might even ban you from commenting again!

7) They don't create a blogroll. It's more important to give than to receive.

Blogroll: A list of links to blogs you read and recommend. Kind of like the links page on your Web site.

A blogroll gets to the heart of what blogging's all about: connectivity. It lets people know whom you read, who influences you, and whom you recommend.

While it's always nice to be listed on someone else's blogroll, it's more important to create a blogroll for your own blog. When I visit a blog without a blogroll I'm always less likely to create a link to that blog, whether through a post or a blogroll.

What to do: Take your list of favorite blogs and add it to your blogroll.

8) They don't submit their blogs to blog directories. Blogrolls and following comments and trackbacks aren't the only way people discover new blogs. Many people use blog directories to find blogs of a certain category. By not submitting your blog to these blog directories you're missing the opportunity to connect with these prospects.

While there are literally hundreds of blog directories today that allow you to submit for free, expect that over time the number will dwindle and the days of free submission to be a pleasant memory.

What to do: Submit to as many blog directories as you can, and as quickly as you can. Start with the near-exhaustive list at Robin Cook's blog here: http://www.masternewmedia.org/rss/top55/

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News Aggregator: A piece of software or Web application that collects news feeds, often from blogs.

9) They don't ping any/enough news aggregators. There are dozens of news aggregation services and blog search engines out there just begging to hear from you...so why aren't you talking to them?

While most blogging platforms ping some services, often you are limited to just one or two. That limits your reach to people who use these services to get their news.

What to do: Go to Pingoat (http://www.pingoat.com) and submit your blog, selecting as many appropriate news aggregates you like. Then bookmark the next page that shows your ping "results." Every time you post, visit this page and you will automatically ping the news aggregates.

10) They don't post often enough. "It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt." – Mark Twain.

And yet, when it comes to blogging, you're expected to post often.

How often? The experts often say two to three times a week at least. While that's a good benchmark, I'd recommend not posting if you have nothing new to add. If you start to see blogging as a chore, you'll quickly lose your enthusiasm and get burnt out.

What to do: Establish a weekly time budget for blogging. It can be an effective communications tool for your business, and should be considered an important part of your marketing. In your budget, leave time for reading other blogs, leaving good comments and trackbacks, and writing your own posts.

I'd also recommend using a service like Google Alerts to let you know about news in a given niche. Every day you'll receive an email with links to press releases on industry news and happenings...fodder for your blog.

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11) They blog a sales & marketing campaign. Here's a news flash: nobody cares about you or your company. They've got their own worries and their own needs and their own concerns.

They don't want to know about the rpm's in your latest mower, but they do want to know how they can get their lawn mowed faster and spend less money on gas. They don't care about how long you've been in business, but they do want to know if you can help them retain employees.

What to do: Keep the focus of your business blog on your prospect's needs and you'll attract a steady following of readers, and customers.

flyte new media is a Web design and Internet marketing firm located in Portland, Maine, USA, and on the Web at http://www.flyte.biz.

If you're looking for advice to get a successful business blog off the ground we're here to help. We offer **design**, **consultation**, and **promotion** for your blog.

If you're not working with flyte, consider giving us a call at 207.871.7921 or complete our contact form (http://www.flyte.biz/contact) today!

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