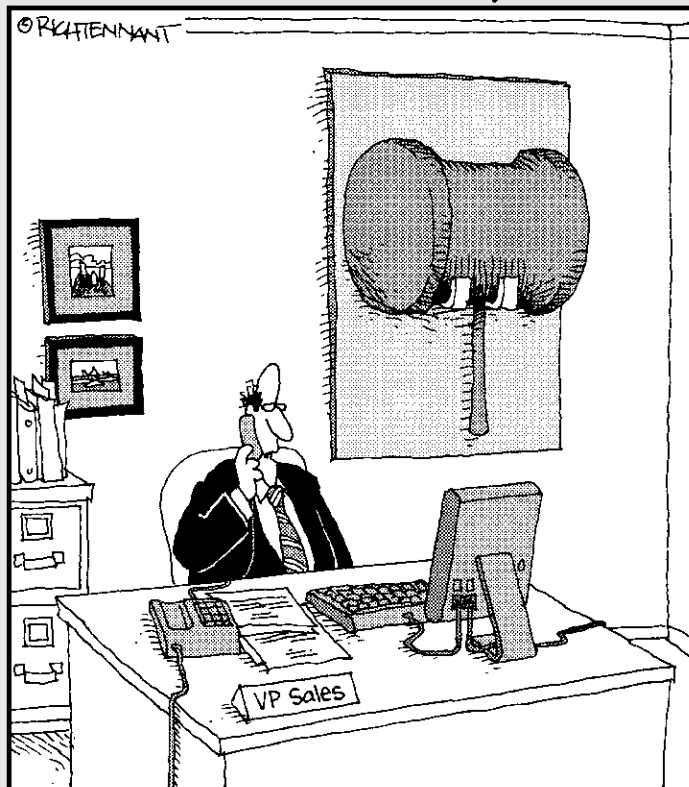


# Part I

# Getting Started with Corporate Blogging

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant



"It's web-based, on-demand, and customizable.  
Still, I think I'm going to miss our old sales  
incentive methods."

## *In this part . . .*

**T**his part introduces corporate blogging and the value it provides your organization — from customer service to customer acquisition and sales to an overall Web presence.

Chapter 1 discusses corporate blogging in general terms, laying the foundation for the rest of the book and your team's blogging efforts. You discover the key factors that set corporate blogging apart from everyday corporate Web sites.

Chapter 2 shows you how to make sense of blogging for your organization — everything from who owns the program to what content to publish on your corporate blog. Most importantly, you find out about setting expectations with the blogging participants from the start to create accountability from the beginning.

Deciding your blogging goals is the focus of Chapter 3. All good marketing efforts start with goals for short and long term business results. After reading this chapter, you'll be able to successfully set measureable goals for marketing and promotions, public relations, and customer relationship management.

## Chapter 1

# Corporate Blogging from Soup to Nuts

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Defining corporate blogging
  - ▶ Delineating a corporate blog from a Web site or a personal blog
  - ▶ Surveying the key features of a blog
  - ▶ Understanding the benefits of a corporate blog
  - ▶ Outlining the best ways to create a successful corporate blog
- 

**W**hat is blogging? Blogging is the ability to publish articles via the Web, using platforms that are simple to use. These articles are published in descending order, providing the most recent articles first. Blogs make content easy to publish and easy to find. You read about the distinctive blog characteristics throughout this book.

As social media continues to rise in both popularity and demand, businesses are compelled to join this incredible marketing and communication movement. Blogging is the centerpiece of a great social media strategy because it can lead Internet traffic from various sources into your sales funnel.

Blogging isn't simply about garnering more online prospects, though. Blogging is a strategy that has enormous benefits to organizations well beyond prospecting. Blogging can help leaders communicate the vision of their company to employees, prospects, and shareholders. Blogging can provide a great knowledge base to support your customer service department. Blogging can also spotlight the talent in your organization, giving your company authority in your industry.

## *Why Blogging Is Different than Your Web Site*

Your Web site is an essential part of your online marketing presence. Consumers expect certain standard conventions and user experiences from business Web sites: Web sites tend to be online marketing brochures, with standard pages for information about the company, products, and services.

If your Web site is your marketing brochure, then your blog is your public relations representative. It's the face and voice of your business beyond the marketing mumbo jumbo that's written into a product page. Your public relations representative is there to talk about the company, answer questions, and put some personality into your brand.

Your blog can be the face and voice of your company. Your blog also provides a fantastic medium to introduce talent from deep within your organization. The talent within your company is one of your biggest investments and the largest differentiator between you and your competitors.

More and more customers are demanding (and rewarding) companies who have a social media presence online. Blogging is a perfect platform for engagement; it's a safe place where your company can manage the conversation and leverage the medium to drive business. Your company can own the content, control the message, and respond effectively through a corporate blog.

## *Understanding blogging as a communication tool*

Companies have several mediums at their disposal to communicate with their audience. A Web site is your well-produced brochure. E-mail is an opt-in communication that is timely or relevant. Forums that allow members to help other members are effective for companies to deploy. Twitter offers the opportunity to update followers 140 characters at a time.

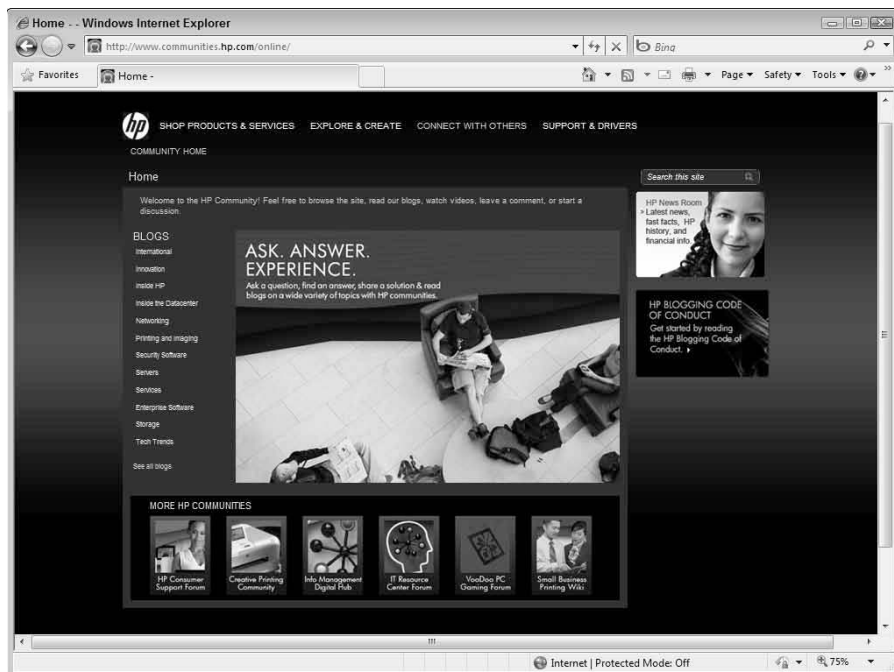
There's nothing on the market quite like a blog, though. A blog allows your company to lead the conversation with a great blog post and manage the conversation that follows. That conversation can be found through search and syndicated throughout the Web for anyone to find and read.

Companies are using blogs to control their messages and responses rather than waiting for traditional media to portray their companies. Public companies are using blogs to communicate to shareholders. Large companies are using blogs to communicate the direction of the company to employees — from the CEO to the most junior hire.

Of course, the most popular use of blogs as a communication medium is to acquire inbound marketing leads and support clients. (Figure 1-1 shows HP Community, a collection of blogs from HP employees focused on their customers.)

Your customer service department answers calls and responds to e-mails on a daily basis. This is one-to-one communication and is most likely the most expensive form of communication your company enlists. Imagine if your customer service department, instead, wrote a blog post with a great response to each support question. Clients could help themselves online via an incredible knowledge base that's categorized, indexed, and easily searchable.

**Figure 1-1:**  
HP leverages blogging to effectively communicate with the industry, the media, its employees, and avid customers.



## *Using blogging as a search engine marketing platform*

According to Nielsen, there are over 10 billion searches on search engines each month in the U. S. This number continues to grow, but that's about 33 searches per day per American! Google leads the search market with 66 percent of all searches. As the content on your blog grows, so does the *farm* of content that is harvested by search engines and the opportunity for your company to be found in those searches.

Consumers and businesses use search engines to research their next purchasing decision, so it's essential that your business be found if you wish to capitalize on this traffic. Optimizing Web sites in order to be found organically on search engines can be a costly (but still worthwhile) investment. Because your Web site is typically a set number of pages, each page must be carefully optimized and the number of keywords you're optimized for is limited.

Blogs, on the other hand, provide a means for businesses to write limitless quantities of content and target countless combinations of keywords. Each post that you publish is aggregated on category and tag pages and published as its own page, providing several ways for search engines to find and index the content. Publishing a single blog post per day, your blog can provide thousands of pages that attract search engine traffic found organically through countless numbers of searches for relevant keywords.

Search engines want to provide relevant content to search engine users, so they identify sites that are relevant, updated frequently, and are popular. Blogs have the ability to be relevant, can be updated frequently, and can gain major exposure and popularity. It's no coincidence that blogging has become an effective search engine strategy for businesses!

## *Recognizing blogging as an inbound lead strategy*

*Inbound marketing* is a strategy that drives prospective customers to your business without you having to send resources out to contact them. That is, the prospective customer calls your business, contacts your business through contact forms or e-mails, or even completes a purchase online. Inbound marketing is an effective means of marketing because it drives prospects to you, which is cost effective and typically results in a very high conversion rate.

Conversions take time, though. Blogging often takes more time than a simple pay-per-click or e-mail marketing campaign because your blog needs time to build traffic, authority in its industry, and trust with its readers. Unlike a

pay-per-click or e-mail campaign, though, a blog post doesn't have an expiration date. A great blog post can continue to acquire new customers long after it's written. As a result, the long-term return on investment on blogging is typically much higher than short-term campaigns.

Blogging is a marathon, not a sprint. The irony of corporate blogging is that many great corporate blogs are abandoned because companies fail to see results a month, two months, or six months into their blogging program. The company also doesn't take into consideration the other advantages of blogging and the accompanied savings.

Unless you decide to remove your blog, your content will never expire, it can continue to be found in search results and continue to drive customers. When you design your blogging strategy, be prepared for the long haul — possibly writing posts for the next year to see where it takes your company!



Do not to trade in your other marketing efforts for blogging. If you have a positive return on investment from other marketing strategies, continue them. Incorporating a blogging strategy in addition to those other strategies provides a comparison of which strategies produce the best leads at the lowest cost per lead.

## *Differentiating Corporate Blogging from Personal Blogging*

As personal blogs gained momentum as trusted resources and a great search engine strategy, companies took notice and began adopting blogging as well. Early corporate blogs looked very much like their personal predecessors, except the great content of the original was replaced by marketing-speak. These corporate blogs did not perform well and most corporate blogging strategies were abandoned altogether.

It's important to recognize the difference between a corporate blog and a personal blog or other published blog, though. Personal blogs are often used to provide one's opinion or personal experience. Personal blogs can be controversial, not safe for the workplace, and aren't necessarily focused at building a blogger's reputation in an industry. A publication blog does tend to focus on an industry, but the goal is to garner large audiences so that advertising revenue through banner advertising, sponsorships and pay per click revenue increases.

Your corporate blog's purpose is to do neither.

Visitors to your corporate blog may not be interested in your personal posts and may even be offended at your opinions. Ensuring the articles written on your blog maintain the integrity of your corporate brand yet provide a

glimpse at the people behind your brand is a careful balance that you want to keep close tabs on.

Traditional brand marketing is all about having pixels perfectly placed and messaging that is always positive and on target. Because blogs allow prospects and customers to openly voice their opinion (or complain) about your company, you open your company to scrutiny.

Fear of scrutiny stops many companies from entering the social media realm, but the benefits have been proven to far outweigh the risks. Your company's response to a negative issue is the very information that opens a reader's trust in your authenticity. Transparency has risks, but how you handle challenges publically will pay off.

Many companies have leveraged blogging through corporate crisis to actually grow their business and reputation rather than hiding in silence.

Consumers know that businesses aren't always perfect. Blogging provides an opportunity to show how the company works through that imperfection. Honesty and transparency are important to a corporate blogging strategy that quickly builds authority and a great reputation.

## *Putting a human voice on your marketing communications*

People don't want to work with brands. People want to work with people.

Many company blogs fail because they don't provide a personal touch, publish posts that are relevant to the business and the visitor, or drive the conversions necessary to support the strategy. Your blog should accomplish all this, but it's a very careful balance.

Every blog post you publish on your corporate blog should provide value to your visitors and build your authority in the industry. However, a blog should avoid marketing spin or press release regurgitation. Plainly put, readers mistrust marketing content and are drawn to a human voice.

Humanize your blog further by sharing stories about how your company and its employees give back to the community. Spotlighting employees, their interests, and the groups they belong to connects with your readers. Share events and conferences your company will be attending and let readers know how to meet up for coffee.



Over time, you find the content that draws the most attention to your blog are controversial topics, topics that make your blog stand out in your industry, and blog posts that answer the questions that visitors are seeking. You might be surprised to find bloggers within your organization that have incredible writing talent and humor. They can attract attention and business, too.



Don't just put up a blog that showcases your Chief Executive Officer or some other executive. The bloggers who work closest to the clients provide the most value to a corporate blogging strategy. Your sales team will blog and acquire leads. Your leadership team will blog and get opportunities to write and to speak at industry events. Your customer service team will blog and answer questions for clients, which reduces customer service costs. Your public relations team will blog and get industry attention.

## *Speaking to your audiences*

Many companies make the mistake of thinking their blog is simply reaching one audience. They ignore that readers are coming from all directions:

- ✔ **Prospects** find your blog from sites that are referring traffic or from search engines. Be sure each of your blog posts, even if written specifically about your product, is written so that someone unfamiliar with your product can still understand it.
- ✔ **Shareholders** read your blog to better understand your products, services, and vision.
- ✔ **Customers** read your blog to keep up on releases, enhancements, new products, issues, and anything else that impacts their use of your product or service.
- ✔ **Employees** read your blog to keep up on company information and to learn more about the direction the company is heading.
- ✔ **Industry professionals** read your blog, looking for news and information that your company brings to the industry as a whole.
- ✔ **Competitors** read your blog! Don't make the mistake of comparing or criticizing your competition if you can't stand up to scrutiny.

The more your content can relate to the audience, the stronger the message is for the visitor. Your bloggers should write as though every post was written for every audience to fully leverage the blog for maximum impact. Back up your blog posts with supporting data, and link to strong industry resources to deepen your audience's trust of your company.

## *Writing with a purpose to a blog that sells*

As you continue to write content, over half of your audience will be first-time visitors who arrived at your blog through a relevant search. Over half your audience! Many companies don't think about this and forget there's an incredible opportunity to drive sales to your organization through your corporate blog.

You may get thousands of new prospects visiting your blog on a weekly basis, so it's critical that your blog is designed and optimized to drive sales. Every blog post should be written with a desire to sell to new clients.

Visitors to a personal blog or publication blog typically don't appreciate being sold in a blog post. Because your blog is represented as a corporate blog, visitors recognize that one of its purposes is to sell. Don't be shy about providing direction to your audience on how to make their next purchase from your company.

## *Defining Key Features of a Blog*

Aside from publishing content in descending chronological order, some important blog features aren't found in other content management systems on the Web. The combination of these features makes blogging platforms highly desirable to businesses seeking to grow via the Web.

### *Basic user interface features of a blog*

The majority of what visitors see on a blog is viewed on the publication, or front-end of a blog. Blogs typically consist of:

- ✓ A **header** throughout the pages. This might be a combination of a logo and navigation menu.
- ✓ A **body** that is page or blog post content.
- ✓ **Blog posts**, with a title, publication date, author, content, and commenting system.
- ✓ **Sidebars** where calls-to-action are provided for visitors to click and engage your company further. Sidebars may also contain a breakdown of categories that a visitor can jump to directly.

- ✔ A **footer** with copyright information, terms of service, or disclaimer information.
- ✔ A **really simple syndication (RSS) feed address** for visitors to subscribe to the blog through a feed reader.
- ✔ **Contact information** available via a publicized phone number, and physical location. Corporate blogs also have ways for readers to engage online, either through a contact form or published e-mail address.
- ✔ A **search field** to search the blog internally.

The purpose of these components is to effectively publish content that is easily digested by the reader and to provide additional navigation for those visitors who are seeking to engage further. (See Figure 1-2.)



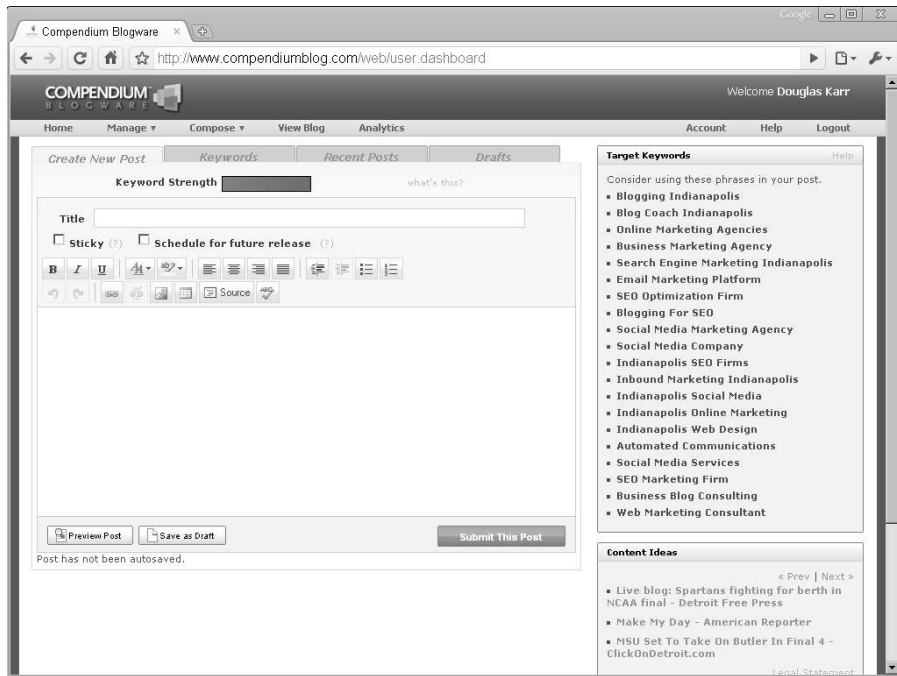
**Figure 1-2:** Brian Solis's blog uses a standard layout with sidebar right.

## Basic back-end features of a blog

The front-end of your blog may not look very different, if at all, from a typical Web site. The back-end, or administrative, capabilities are much different, though.

- ✓ An **editor** for the author to easily add, edit, or manage blog posts.
- ✓ An **administrative section** for managing users, categories, pages, and design of the blog. (See Figure 1-3.)

Newer content management systems (CMS) incorporate many of these features, too, but most blogging platforms have them by default.



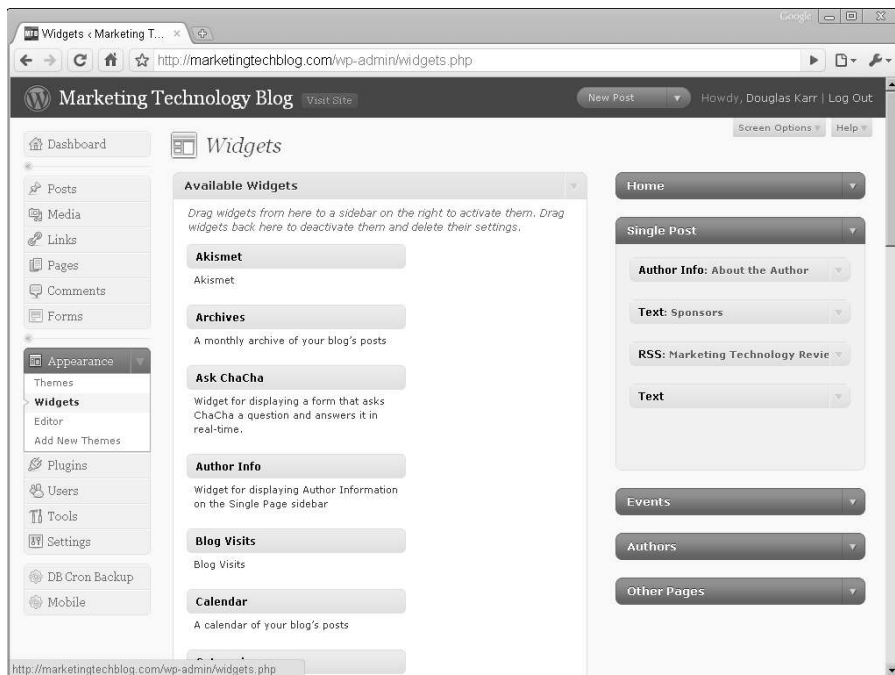
**Figure 1-3:**  
Compendium  
Blogware's  
user admin-  
istration  
for blog  
authors.

## Expanding your blog's functionality

Bloggging platforms have evolved and you can find or even develop your own advanced features with the following:

- ✓ **Widgets:** Widgets can add additional features to your blog without the need for development or integration. Widgets typically are added by simply pasting a small chunk of code or dragging an unused feature into a sidebar element. (See Figure 1-4.)

Once installed, WordPress has a dozen or so available widgets, and you can add more by adding plug-ins for additional features and functionality. One of the available widgets is the Tag Cloud widget, which allows you to *tag* your posts with specific keywords. Tags can be visualized in a *tag cloud*, which displays the tags you write in a size proportional to the number of times you've written about that topic. (See Figure 1-5.)



**Figure 1-4:** Viewing the WordPress Widgets Administration Page.



**Figure 1-5:**  
The Tag  
Cloud in the  
Roundpeg.  
biz Blog  
sidebar.

To add a Tag Cloud widget to your WordPress blog, follow these steps:

1. **Log in to WordPress Administration.**
2. **Navigate to Appearance → Widgets.**
3. **Drag the Tag Cloud widget from the Available Plugins section into the sidebar where you want to view it.**
4. **Add a title for the Tag Cloud section.**
5. **Click Save.**

➤ **Plug-ins:** Plug-ins are developed third-party integrations that add additional features and functionality to blogs using the blogs' development platform or application programming interface (API). Platforms like WordPress have an extensive directory of thousands of plug-ins to expand your blog's functionality and integration.

Plug-ins can also enable new widgets. One great plug-in is the Related Posts plug-in, which displays links after each of your blog posts to contextually related blog posts. If your reader doesn't find what she needs, then the resulting related posts may offer the precise answer she's looking for. Providing alternative posts like this increases the number of page views per visitor and can reduce your *bounce rate* (the ratio of visitors who stay versus the ones who leave the page they arrive on).

To add the Related Posts plug-in to your WordPress blog, follow these steps:

1. **Log in to WordPress Administration.**
2. **Navigate to Plugins⇨Add New.**
3. **Click Install on the WordPress Related Posts plug-in.**
4. **Click Install Now.**
5. **Activate the plug-in.**
6. **Navigate to Appearance⇨Widgets.**
7. **Drag the WordPress Related Posts widget from the Available Plugins section into the sidebar where you want to view it.**
8. **Add a title for the WordPress Related Posts section.**
9. **Click Save.**

✓ **Application Programming Interface (API):** A series of development commands that allow for content to be imported, enhanced, integrated, or exported.

For example, if you want to solicit questions directly from your audience, you can integrate a service like ChaCha.me. ChaCha.me (<http://me.chacha.com>) allows businesses to set up a site to answer questions online, but it has a number of integrations to make publishing of that content to your blog very easy.

To add a Questions and Answers site with ChaCha.me to your WordPress blog, follow these steps:

1. **Add an account at ChaCha.me by clicking Sign Up.**
2. **Add a username that represents your company.**

The username is used in the full Web address and advertised on your page.

3. **Add an e-mail address, password, and your business name.**
4. **Log in to your new account and navigate to Settings⇨Services.**
5. **Click WordPress and add your WordPress login and password.**
6. **Add your blog address with “/xmlrpc.php” at the end of it.**

This location is where ChaCha.me posts your answers when you submit your response.

7. **Enter a blogid of 1 (or your blogid if you’re using WordPress Multi-User).**
8. **Log in to WordPress Administration and navigate to Settings⇨Writing.**
9. **Enable XML-RPC and then click Save Changes.**

Your ChaCha.me account can now publish to your WordPress Blog.

**10. (Optional) You can copy the ChaCha.me widget to your sidebar via the ChaCha plug-in or a Text Widget plug-in.**

This allows users to post a question directly from your sidebar.

## *Recognizing the Benefits of Corporate Blogging*

A successful corporate blogging strategy can have many benefits. Success in blogging can be measured in many different ways.

- ✔ If you're an e-commerce company, a blog can provide product information that leads to a direct sale from your blog post.
- ✔ If you're a technology consulting company, your blog may be a means of building authority or raising awareness of your staff's expertise so that you can be invited to speak at industry events to attract and acquire customers.
- ✔ If you're a public company, a blog may be a means of providing valuable information to stockholders so that you maintain a good public image, and in turn, attract more investment.
- ✔ If you're a real estate agent, your blog may provide invaluable information about the geographic region you serve, which will attract more buyers and sellers to your firm.
- ✔ If you're a large organization, you may wish to have multiple strategies. Webtrends is a Web analytics company in Portland, Oregon that deploys multiple blogs: leadership blogs specifically for their leadership team that speaks about company vision to employees and stockholders; customer service blogs that are specifically focused on assisting customers; and marketing blogs that promote upcoming events, partnerships, and integrations.

### *Booking public speaking engagements*

Great content draws regular readers to your blog. After you've been blogging for a long period, your following becomes attractive to industry professionals who wish to promote their events and conferences on your site. Be sure to include your presentations and speeches from industry events on your blog so that other industry professionals know that you're available.

Speaking at industry events not only puts you in front of relevant prospects, it also drives traffic to your blog. When you become better known in the industry, that following grows. These opportunities (and the associated growth) can generate a lot of leads for your business.



## *Publishing opportunities online and offline*

Each time your bloggers publish content, you add to a collection of content relevant to your business. These blog posts can support your products by publishing frequently asked questions (FAQs), developing a series of best practice guides, and repurposing the content in other publications — both online and offline.

When you're looking for content for whitepapers, case studies, e-books, industry articles, or e-mail newsletters, take the opportunity to get content from your blog and repurpose it. You've worked hard to build this impressive collection of content; don't be afraid to use it wherever possible.

## *Attracting leads through your blog*

Regardless of whether the goal of your corporate blogging strategy is to attract leads, leads will come. Designing your blog with this in mind makes it easier for you to drive them into your sales funnel. Your blog should incorporate contact details, a contact form, your full mailing address, and calls-to-action (CTAs) for visitors to click and engage with your company.

Many companies start a corporate blog to increase authority or service their customers but neglect to provide a path for leads to engage with their company. Your blog should have multiple, clear methods for visitors to contact you or make a purchase directly (if possible).

## *Driving conversions online through blogging*

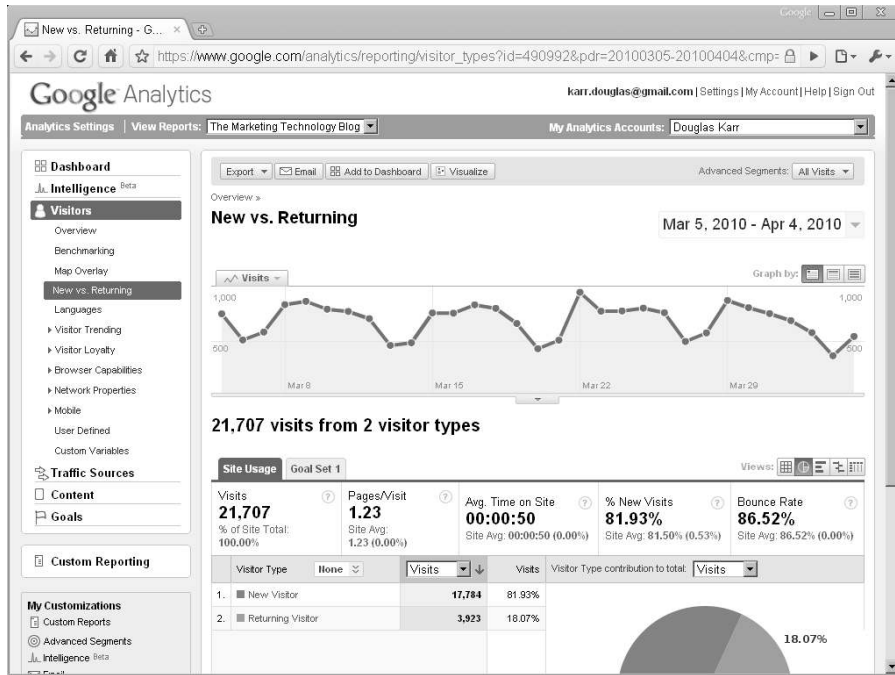
The majority of visitors to your blog will be first-time visitors. While you continue to blog and appear in search engines, you may even find that that number exceeds 80 percent of all your visitors. Each of these visitors may be a relevant lead for your business, so it's essential that you provide multiple paths for them to convert.

To view visitor statistics in Google Analytics, follow these steps:

- 1. Log in to Google Analytics.**
- 2. Navigate to Visitors↔New vs. Returning**

The resulting report provides you with a comparison of new versus returning visitors for the period selected. (See Figure 1-6.)

**Figure 1-6:**  
Viewing  
visitor  
statistics  
in Google  
Analytics.



Blogging conversions typically occur through a variety of calls-to-action that direct the user to a landing page where they can make a purchase or contact your sales team. Your blogging sales funnel starts with a search engine and referring traffic directing the visitors to your posts. After the visitors read your posts and wish to do business, they click a call-to-action that leads them to a landing page. The landing page allows the visitor to convert.

Designing your blog, your calls-to-action, your landing pages, and writing your content with this sales funnel in mind helps you increase conversions through your blog.

## *Blogging: From Concept to Content to Conversion*

The first step of a successful blogging strategy is understanding what content is going to drive traffic to your blog from search engines and other referring Web sites. This is accomplished by identifying keywords that are relevant to

your business, that have large search volumes, and by targeting other social mediums and blogs that could drive content to your business.

While you write your content, you want to syndicate and promote the content throughout your social networks — Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and so on. You also want to connect and comment on other blogs of influence within your industry to try to drive traffic to your site.

Driving relevant traffic to your site should grow the number of leads, and ultimately, the number of conversions to your business.

## ***Establishing your strategy and goals***

The first step in establishing your blog may be simply to get relevant, compelling content published on a regular basis. The more content you write, the more opportunities visitors have to find you so don't start out slow. Be consistent in delivering great content and try to increase the volume over time.

When your blog begins to attract traffic, you want to track the number of people clicking through on your calls-to-action and, ultimately, the number of conversions acquired through your blog. When your posts, leads, and conversions acquire a certain consistency, you can begin to assess your blogging program and set goals. You should set goals for the number of articles published, the number of visitors, the number of calls-to-action that are clicked, the number of conversions, and the revenue associated with those conversions.

Within your analytics application, you also want to set up event tracking and conversion tracking to easily monitor how well your blog is performing in comparison to the goals that you set for it.

## ***Picking and training the blogging team***

Don't restrict your recruiting of bloggers to public relations professionals, marketers, or leaders within your organization. Sometimes, the seasoned professional writes some of the worst blog posts and sounds more like a faceless brand than a human being.

When you provide opportunities for blogging to your personnel, realize that not all your team will be excited about the opportunity to blog. You should avoid recruiting bloggers who aren't excited because lack of enthusiasm is clearly evident in writing. Instead, focus on employees that are closest to the customers and who are looking forward to writing on the blog. You'll be surprised at the talent your staff has!

Before writing, your staff should fully understand any legal issues, their responsibilities, and content that's not suitable for the blog. Have a meeting with the team and set expectations with them. You may want to incorporate a blogging solution that allows for blog posts to be manually approved and published by an administrator.

Your team should also understand the objectives of the blog, your rewards or incentives, keywords that you want them to focus on, industry blogs or sites they should be frequenting, and how to promote the blog (and the company) via social media sites.



If a blogger is having difficulty keeping up or is writing content that's flat and not driving visits, leads, or conversions, cut them loose! Your blog's success depends on the quality of the content, not just the quantity.

## *Identifying platforms and resources*

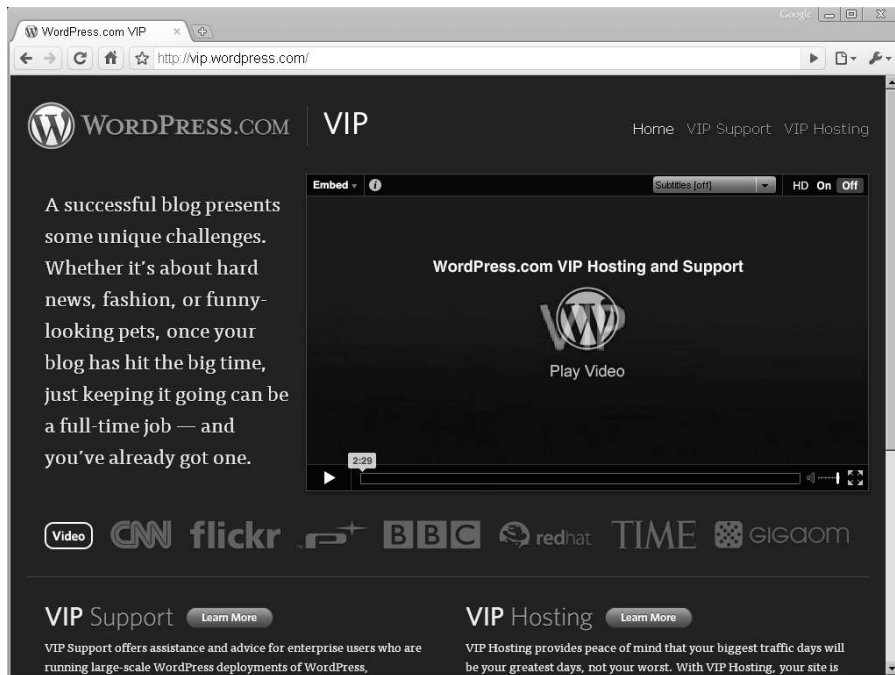
The majority of blogging platforms have evolved from either personal blogs or publication blogs. It's imperative that you realize the difference between these blogs and a corporate blog. Each requires a different editorial process, publishing design, and measurement.

Most companies default to a free blogging platform and throw it on a cheap hosting platform. Free turns out to be not free when you need to hire search engine optimization consultants, graphic designers, and integration specialists to fully realize the opportunities that a corporate blog can provide.

Cheap hosting platforms work perfectly until your blog is recognized as a great source and a ton of visitors come to your blog. A couple dozen visitors can freeze a self-hosted blog on a cheap hosting platform. Unfortunately, most companies don't find out how bad their hosting or platform is until it's too late.

Newer hosting solutions allow for cloud-based server resources that grow with demand and dynamically add resources as needed. Your blog can bring in hundreds or thousands of leads — this isn't an area that you want to risk saving a few dollars on.

Corporate solutions like Compendium, WordPress VIP (see Figure 1-7), or TypePad Business have service level agreements and resources that can handle massive loads of unexpected traffic, 24-hour support, security enhancements, and regular backups. Additionally, Compendium provides client success management to monitor and help you improve your blogging results.



**Figure 1-7:**  
WordPress  
VIP service.

## *Compiling search-engine-optimized content*

An *optimized platform* is a foundation that you must have when deploying a corporate blogging strategy that incorporates search traffic. Many companies download and install free platforms as-is. The problem is that platforms like WordPress aren't fully optimized without the use of plug-ins to publish sitemaps and effective meta descriptions. You find details on optimizing your platform in Chapter 8.

After you optimize your platform, the next step is to design your theme using search engine optimization best practices. These incorporate the overall page structure, page titles, and headings on the pages.

Your theme construction or platform determines some of your search engine optimization, but your content will determine the rest. Keyword research is essential before writing your first blog post. *Keywords* are the terms used by searchers to find relevant content.

Using keywords in post titles, meta descriptions, subheadings, alternative image tags, bolded terms, and content presents your content to search engines in a manner that ensures it's indexed appropriately. When your content is indexed properly, it's much easier to find in the appropriate search results. This is also discussed in Chapter 8.

## *Monitoring, measuring, and analyzing*

Understanding whether your blogging strategy is working is impossible unless you measure. Selecting the right analytics application is essential to monitoring and measuring your program's performance. Free analytics applications, such as Google Analytics, can accommodate your needs but have some limitations.



Google Analytics lacks any real-time measurement and has limitations in the event you exceed their maximum number of pageviews.

Enterprise analytics applications, such as Webtrends, have no limitations and have real-time analytics with campaigns, goals, and alerts. If you need finite measurement of your corporate blogging strategy, an enterprise analytics solution may be worth the investment.

Chapter 15 explores the metrics to analyze, monitor, and measure your blog and provides steps you can take to improve traffic and conversions.

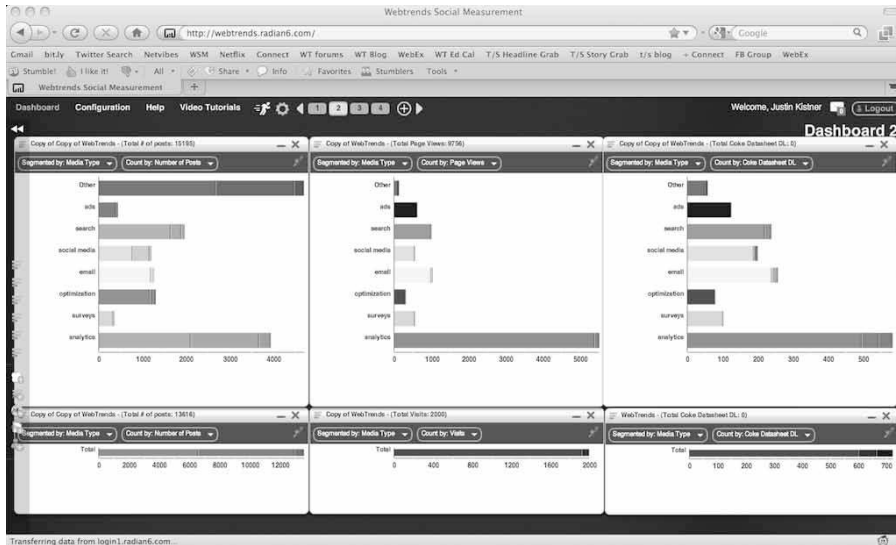
Additionally, a convergence of social media monitoring and analytics is occurring in the analytics industry, so corporations can effectively measure the impact of social media on their inbound marketing strategies, including corporate blogging. Radian6 and Webtrends integration, for instance, offers off-site analytics monitoring for social media. (See Figure 1-8.)

## *Adjusting strategy or messaging*

While you monitor your program, the content, the authors, and the sources of relevant traffic, you may also want to adjust your strategy. There's no secret program available that can turn your blog into a major revenue generator overnight (although a lot of blogs gladly try to sell you such a program).

Bloggging requires time, energy, a strategy, and momentum. Bloggging is a marathon, not a sprint. You want to make adjustments to your design, your keyword targeting, your content, your calls-to-action, your landing pages, and everything in between.

**Figure 1-8:**  
Radian6 and  
Webtrends  
integration  
analytics.



You might be asking why you would want to undertake such a strategy then. The reason is that every blog post you write adds another opportunity to acquire traffic and business with your blog. Unlike traditional marketing campaigns that start, run over a period of time, and then end, blogging grows and acquires leads every time you post.



As time goes on, your blog's return on investment will improve. Don't give up!





## Chapter 2

# Laying the Foundation for Blogging

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Defining corporate blogging strategies
  - ▶ Determining your content and responding to criticism
  - ▶ Understanding industry expectations
  - ▶ Assessing your resources and defining ownership
  - ▶ Planning your content
- 

**T**he vast opportunities of the Internet have changed consumer and business behavior when it comes to purchasing decisions. In the past, customers would contact sales personnel to find out more about your products or services.

These days, though, consumers and businesses use the Internet to thoroughly research their next purchasing decision in advance. By the time your Web visitor has made contact with you, he may know more about your company, products, and services than the person he connects with on the phone!

Consumers are seeking additional information so they can make the right choice. If your company wants to compete for that decision, they must deploy an effective strategy to have the information needed where the consumer expects it. A blog is the perfect platform for deploying this strategy!

An effective corporate blogging strategy, offers a number of benefits, including:

- ✔ It provides a voice for your company beyond your brand and marketing.
- ✔ It showcases your authority, knowledge, and experience in your industry, positioning you as a leader or expert.
- ✔ It provides content that attracts search engine traffic.
- ✔ It gives you a knowledge base of information in an easily organized and searchable online format, allowing your company to save on employee education and customer service calls.
- ✔ It is an effective inbound marketing strategy, providing a path for visitors to your site to convert into customers in a manner that's efficient and affordable.

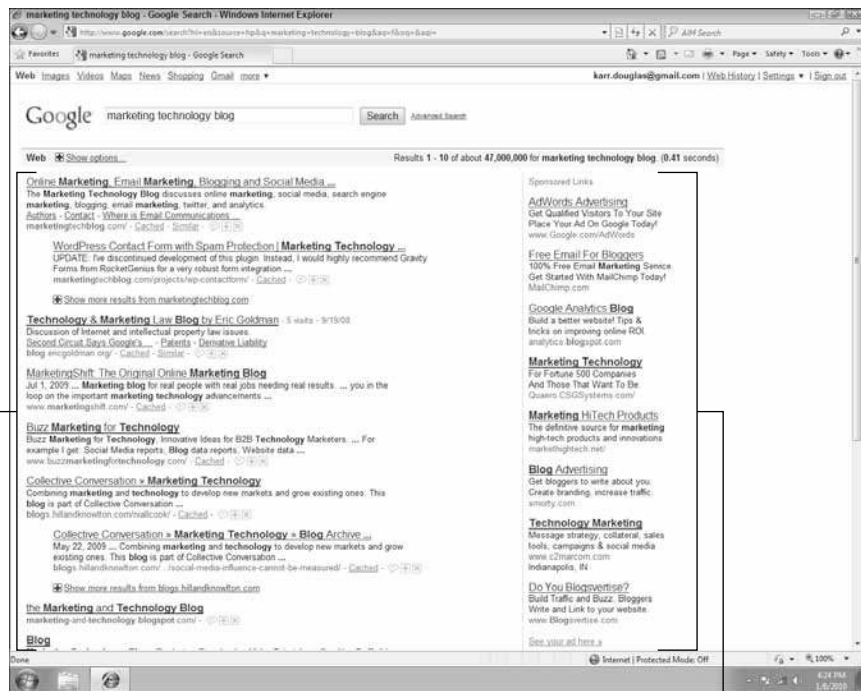
## Understanding What a Blog Can Do for Your Company

According to Nielsen, folks perform over 10 billion searches on search engines each month. This number continues to grow, and Google leads the market with 66% of all searches. On average, that's about 33 searches per day per American!

*Organic search results* are the results on a search engine results page (the page you reach after you submit your query) that show up naturally. Search engines analyze the content within the page and on referring pages, and then decide what terms to display in the search results and how to rank them. Paid results aren't displayed in this manner — they are simply bid on and the highest bids are displayed first.

Organic search results are the main column on the left side of the page. Paid or sponsored results sometimes surround the organic results to the top and to the right. (See Figure 2-1.)

**Figure 2-1:**  
Organic  
versus paid  
search  
results on  
a search  
engine  
results  
page.



Organic search results

Paid search results

Consumers and businesses employ search engines to research purchasing decisions, so it's essential that your business be found if you wish to capitalize on this traffic.

Optimizing Web sites in order to be found organically on search engines can be a costly (but still worthwhile) investment. Blogs, on the other hand, provide a means for businesses to write limitless quantities of content.

Search engines want to provide relevant content to search engine users, so they identify sites that are relevant, updated frequently, and are popular. Blogs have the ability to be relevant, can be updated frequently, and can gain exposure and popularity.

That blogging has become an effective search engine strategy for businesses is no coincidence!

There's much evidence that people buy from people, not companies. People also buy emotionally — so if your marketing material contains nothing but complex acronyms, multi-syllable industry speak, and hard-to-understand marketing terms, a blog may provide the human touch that your prospective clients are seeking.

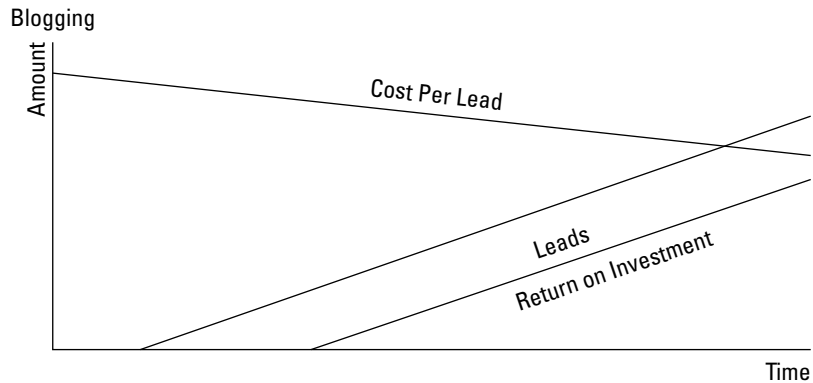
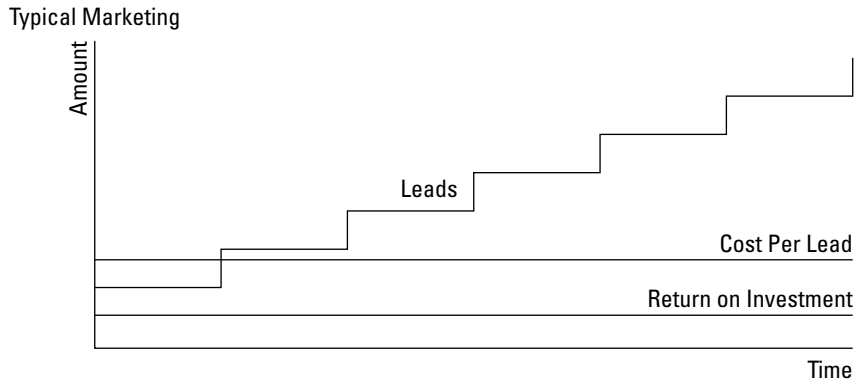
However, as a marketing strategy, blogging is a marathon, not a sprint. Most blogs are abandoned because companies fail to see results 1, 3, or even 6 months into their blogging program. If your business is new and you're putting a new blog on a new domain, it could take a few months for search engines to identify you as a viable source of information.

Compared to short-term marketing strategies, such as pay-per-click and e-mail marketing that produce immediate results, a blog seems a poor choice. Blogs are slow, methodical, long-term solutions. Because blogs produce authority, reputation, and content over time, results appear much later in the marketing cycle.

Typically, in a marketing campaign, you spend money, you obtain leads, and the return on investment (ROI) remains fairly constant over time. This is because once your campaign is over, the leads stop coming in.

With a blog, your content continues to work for you over time. Although the resources don't result in a positive return on investment initially, eventually, you see your ROI increase. (See Figure 2-2.)

Unless you stop writing, your blog never expires; it continues to appear in search results and drive customers. That's not to say you should stop spending on other strategies, though. If you have a positive return on your investment on other marketing strategies, you should continue them.



**Figure 2-2:**  
Assessing  
ROI on blog-  
ging versus  
typical  
marketing  
campaigns.

How can your organization benefit from blogging? Here are a few ideas:

- ✔ A blog can provide product information that leads to a direct sale from your blog post.
- ✔ A blog can build authority, raise awareness to your staff's expertise, or open avenues to speaking at industry events.
- ✔ A blog can provide valuable information to stockholders so that you maintain a good public image and attract more investment.
- ✔ A blog can provide invaluable information about the geographic region to attract more buyers and sellers to your firm.
- ✔ With multiple blogs, you can have multiple strategies. Webtrends, a Web analytics company in Portland, Oregon, has multiple blogs: a leadership blog for their leadership team that addresses the company's vision; customer service blogs that focus on assisting customers; and marketing blogs that promote upcoming events, partnerships, and integrations.

A blog has the opportunity to build sales and transform your business. A blog can provide many things, including the following:

- ✔ Company leadership can disseminate the corporation's vision so that employees are informed and understand how their responsibilities impact the bottom line.
- ✔ Blogging provides an open forum where employees can ask questions or provide feedback in an environment where they may feel more comfortable contributing.
- ✔ A blog can develop into a searchable, organized knowledge base. Blogging applications have built-in search mechanisms that make content easily findable.
- ✔ A blog can be used to confront crisis and keep customers informed without flooding your e-mail and phone systems.
- ✔ A blog can be used to promote upcoming events, to live-blog at events while they're happening, or to summarize events for those who couldn't be in attendance.
- ✔ A blog can be used to release new product information and company news to inform customers, the media, and industry professionals.
- ✔ A blog can help acquire new customers, retain current ones through improved communication, and upsell clients with new offerings.
- ✔ A blog can provide employees with the spotlight, encouraging them to promote their business and, ultimately, themselves. This can lead to improved employee satisfaction and improved productivity.
- ✔ A blog can drive business and build your company as a leader in its industry, without the costs or dependence on traditional media.
- ✔ A blog will provide your brand and company with a personality if you leverage the medium.
- ✔ A blog is a perfect platform for distributing video and making it easier to find in search engines. Some companies, such as Cantaloupe.TV, specialize in video blogging and hosting video for your blog.
- ✔ A blog can also be used to distribute audio.

By publishing information in text, voice, and video, you're reaching different audiences the way they wish to be reached.

## *Defining a Blogging Strategy*

The first step of a successful blogging strategy is to understand the content that drives traffic to your blog from search engines and other referring Web sites.

As you begin to think about your blogging strategy, content will be your primary concern. Many companies embarking on a blogging strategy simply regurgitate the same information they've already published in their marketing and advertising. Your visitors are looking for something different. Your visitors are searching for answers, and they want those answers to be delivered from a real person.

To define your content objectives, you must first determine the questions that people might ask that would lead them to your business. The easiest means of doing this is to find out what sorts of problems your business solves for your clients. Ask your client what you've accomplished for them. The more your blog speaks to the problem(s) you're solving for customers, the more likely you are to attracting new customers.

Many companies use heavy jargon in their content — jargon that's lost on search engine users, or terms that target the wrong customers. Understanding the specific keywords and topics that lead the right customers to your business is critical if you wish to target and find the right visitors for your blog.

Walker Information is a company that consults with Fortune 500 companies on customer intelligence. Walker works through online content and sophisticated customer feedback to provide clients with strategies to improve their customer retention.

Some of Walker's most intensive work is in deciphering customer survey data. *Customer survey* is a common keyword that gets thousands of searches each month — but it's not a term that Walker is targeting because it won't attract the *right* audience. Over time, Walker experimented and identified *customer intelligence* as the term that better targets the companies they wish to do business with.

Understanding the topics that are going to attract the right visitors to your blog is essential. Writing about those topics frequently is key. The more focused your blog is on specific keywords, the easier it is for search engines to identify the topics your blog is writing about. Keywords are the common ties between the content you are writing and the terms that visitors are searching for.

There are a number of tools, free and paid, which can provide you with competitive research on keywords and content you should target in your corporate blogging strategy. You can find out more about this in Chapter 6.

## *Assemble your blogging team (and have backups)*

Assembling a team of bloggers is the next step toward ensuring you're frequently delivering relevant content via your blog. Who should be on the team? Although you may be tempted to search your company for volunteers with English majors or master's degrees, this isn't always the best solution. You might be tempted to encourage *every* employee to blog.

Either of these choices could lead to challenges in building your blog's audience, however. Because the majority of Web readers digest information written at a sixth-grade level, an overly educated blogger may prevent your message from getting to the right audience. On the other hand, poor grammar or spelling could turn away valuable prospects.

Just as you decide the terms that connect visitors to your business, you should also think about the variety of the voices on your blog. Are your customers Chief Executive Officers or are they blue-collar maintenance personnel? You may find that your target audience is everything in between. As a result, don't limit the voices on your blog to any one group.

Providing your audience with a diverse selection of bloggers varies the voice and the content of your blog — and over time you'll begin to see which type of blogger attracts the most attention and business.

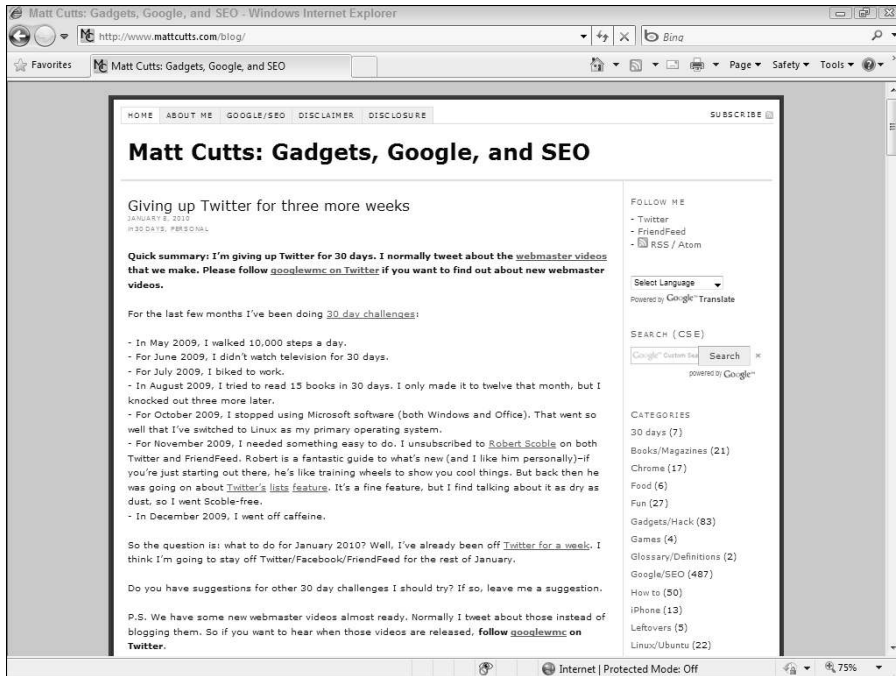
You may be surprised at who produces a great blog within your organization. Robert Scoble is a well-known blogger from Microsoft and Matt Cutts is a celebrated blogger from Google (see Figure 2-3); however, neither company realized each man's talent until his blog grew to great heights.

Chapter 6 provides more details about assembling your blogging team.

## *Create a publication schedule*

The easiest way to manage your bloggers and ensure your blog is producing content is to set a schedule, manage it, and reward your bloggers when they keep to it! You may have some bloggers with more opportunities to post than others, so set expectations properly.

You might be asking, "How often should we blog?" In the online marketing world, a blogging platform is the equivalent of a race car. The faster you push the pedal, the better the chances of winning the race.



**Figure 2-3:**  
Matt Cutts' Gadgets, Google, and SEO blog.

That doesn't mean you should drive recklessly, though. Great content will attract new traffic, keep readers coming back, and ultimately, compel visitors to do business with your company. If they're already doing business, great content will generate more revenue from current clients as well.

The answer is to have a balance of both frequency and quality. The best way to determine this balance is to track readership and business generated. Thankfully, blogging does not require polished prose from the best of English students. A 150-word post that simply comments on industry news may be the perfect fit for your audience.

When you're writing a press release and you want to ensure you get 100 percent impact, your marketing team may spend hours to get it right. In that case, you have only one chance to get it right.

With a blog, you have as many chances as you like to get it right. In fact, you can continue writing similar messages to ensure readers get the correct idea. Don't get discouraged that the great blog posts you're publishing aren't being discovered and promoted all over the Web. It takes time to build authority and to capture the attention of others within your industry.



People don't spend a lot of time reading online. Visitors arrive at your blog looking for an answer and if they don't see what they're looking for, they vanish into the thick of the search engine in a matter of seconds.

Don't spend time organizing your thoughts and words too carefully, just get the message out to the audience in a timely manner. If you can write a great blog post once a week and some short tips the remaining days, you're going to succeed!



Spend 80 percent of your time writing one great post and 20 percent of your time producing some other relevant, quality content. To spend the necessary time to make every post hit a home run would be nice, but even the best bloggers don't.

## *Determining Your Blog's Content*

Traditional brand marketing encourages being positive and staying on-message. However, because prospects and customers can openly voice their opinion (and complaints) about your company, blogs open your company to public scrutiny. Fear of negative criticism stops many companies from entering the social media realm, but the benefits far outweigh the risks. In fact, your company may find that a 4-star recommendation may lead to 5-star sales!

Companies should not write about some topics and content, however. Proprietary information, content that could violate privacy laws, and information that could put your company at risk with your competition are topics to avoid.

There are even topics you cannot write about. In the United States, financial regulations prevent companies from releasing marketing material that could mislead investors. And a number of privacy regulations, including the Healthcare Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, prevent those in the healthcare industry from blogging on specific topics. Chapter 6 offers more information about protecting your blog legally.

When in doubt, discuss what you can and can't blog about with a public relations professional. Be sure to clearly communicate that information with the other bloggers on your team. To be absolutely certain, allow your bloggers to submit posts but ensure that you have a knowledgeable administrator who moderates and approves the posts.

## *Putting your customers and employees first*

Traditional marketing is all about getting attention. Traditional marketing is about directly marketing your products and services. Blogging isn't always about getting attention or marketing your products and services directly, but you can reap the benefits indirectly. By improving communication to your customers and employees, you increase productivity and reduce customer dissatisfaction.

Instead of focusing your blog on your company, focus on your customers. How are customers using your products? What advice can you provide customers that will help them succeed? What questions do you get in sales and support calls that you can share online?

Bloggging allows you to put your customers in the spotlight. Rather than using your blog to say why your company's great, use it to speak about your customers. Your readers will be more compelled to do business with you when they understand the benefits to your customers.

Bloggging also provides a spotlight for your employees. Bloggging is a medium that your employees can use to promote the company while advancing their careers.

Jon Arnold, CEO of Tuitive Group, a Web usability and design firm, said that he's never hiring sales staff again. All the quality leads his firm obtained in the last year were acquired through social media or speaking with people at industry conferences. This year, he's made it part of his team's goals to incorporate bloggging, other social media, and networking to drive leads.

Each year, universities and colleges produce graduates who feel empowered to make a difference. Traditional top-down organizations often struggle to keep young talent. Providing these young, entrepreneurial staff members a voice on a blog can improve their satisfaction and help you retain great talent.

## *Understanding industry expectations of corporate bloggers*

Once you begin bloggging, you'll benefit from some unwritten expectations of bloggers. In the first years of bloggging, the term *blogosphere* was penned to describe the underlying network of blogs on the Internet. Although no formal rules exist for interacting with the blogosphere, you should still follow some code of behavior. These "unwritten rules" include the following:

- ✓ Don't spam.
- ✓ Support other bloggers.
- ✓ Give credit where it's due.

### ***Don't spam***

Blogging applications used to speak to one another through a feature called *trackbacks*. If a blogger mentioned one of your posts in his blog, the platform would “ping” your blog. The “ping” was simply a request that was made with the Web address of the post where the mention was made.

Trackbacks could be seen within the blog's administration panel so you could see who wrote about you (and vice versa). With the widespread adoption of blogs, *trackback spam* became prevalent. Spammers would send false trackbacks and clog your administrative panel with nasty links.

Now, feeds from search engines are common in your administrative panel, so you can still see who's writing about you, but the feeds are called *incoming links*. You can check your incoming links in WordPress by following these steps:

- 1. Log into WordPress through your administration page; typically, your blog address plus `/wp-admin`.**
- 2. Select Dashboard ⇄ Dashboard.**
- 3. Find the Incoming Links section, as shown in Figure 2-4.**

Sections can be dragged and dropped within WordPress, so you can drag them to a location that's easier to locate.



If you just started blogging, you may not have any mentions yet. Over time, you'll build authority and generate links from other sites.



A lot of blogs programmatically steal content and produce sites they hope will capture search engine traffic and subsequently advertising. These sites may show up in your Incoming Links section. Research the person who started the blog and contact them if you're not quite sure. Spammers won't answer e-mail.

### ***Support other bloggers***

Bloggers are a generous bunch! You write about them and they'll often reciprocate and write about you. This is fantastic because it generates backlinks and popularity — which means a better search engine ranking!

Become aware of other bloggers within your industry, comment on their blogs often, and mention them once in a while in a positive light. Sometimes it's fun to start a respectable debate online as well. Any publicity is good publicity when it comes to promoting your blog.

Incoming links

The screenshot shows the WordPress dashboard for 'Marketing Technology Blog'. The 'Incoming Links' widget is highlighted, listing the following links:

- Kipp linked here saying, "If you're engaged in email marketing, you already ..."
- Tom Lindstrom linked here saying, "As a blogger I am always on the look for useful in ..."
- 唯奈 linked here saying, "もうすぐ2009年も終わりますね。っていうことで、このブログでふだいでるプラグインを紹介します。 ..."
- ScLoHo (Scott Howard) linked here saying, "I have an easy job, if I keep it easy. The best wa ..."
- Targetseo - Top SEO India linked here saying, "1) Search Engine Land URL: <http://searchengineland...>"
- Joe Hanna linked here saying, "11 Unforgettable Marketing Lessons 2009 Many impor ..."
- Kyle Lacy linked here saying, "I know... a little egotistical right? That's why I ..."

The dashboard also features a 'Stats' widget with a 'Views per day' line graph, 'Top Posts' (e.g., 'Check Email Address with JavaScript'), 'Top Searches' (e.g., 'search engine, javascript check email'), and 'Recent Comments' (e.g., 'Pingback on Launch! Marketing Technology Ratings and Reviews #').

**Figure 2-4:** Discovering who has written about you in your Blogging Administration.

Be cautious of speaking about other bloggers in a negative light. You never know when that blogger you insult may wind up on a panel of professionals who are evaluating your business. Proceed with caution, even when you vehemently disagree with another blogger.

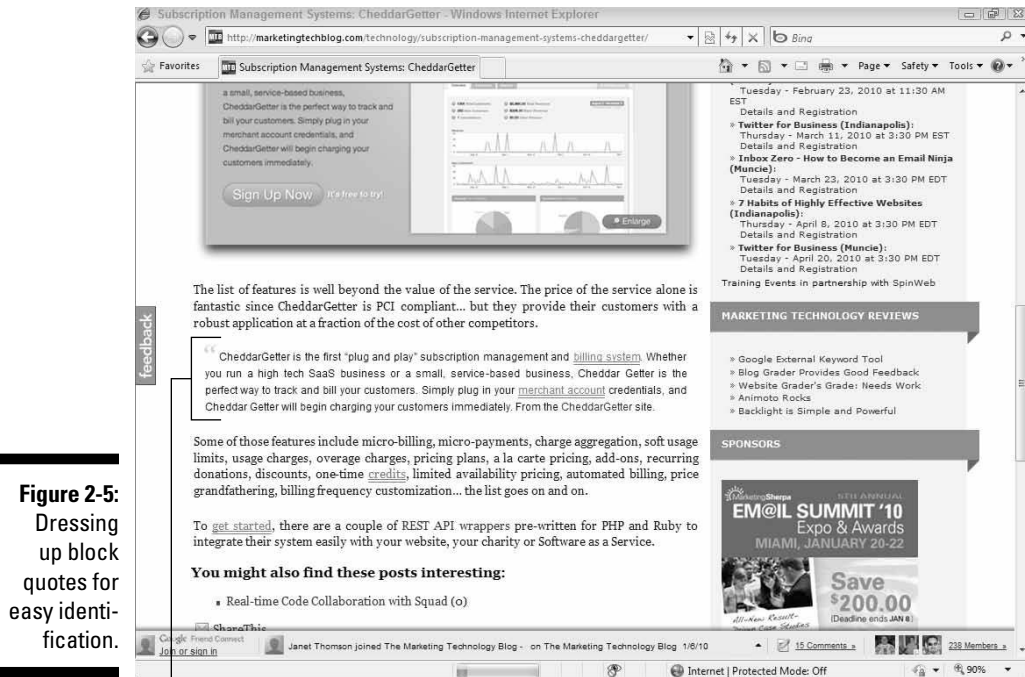
### *Give credit where it's due*

Be sure to always link to a blog that you reference within your posts. Mentioning or discussing another blog without actually linking to it is just plain bad manners and inconsiderate. If you're directly quoting, be sure to apply blockquotes with your text editor. (See Figure 2-5.)

In HTML, the `blockquote` tag is written like this:

```
<blockquote>Here is my quote from a <a href="http://where.com">blog</a></blockquote>
```

Always give credit where credit is due and never, ever, post someone else's content in its entirety without their permission.



**Figure 2-5:**  
Dressing up block quotes for easy identification.

Blockquote

## *Writing your company's blogging manifesto*

A *manifesto* is written declaration of principles, policies, and objectives. In 2005, IBM decided to write blogging guidelines because blogging caught on in popularity. These guidelines, IBM's Social Computing Guidelines, are a great example of a blogging manifesto. (You can find them at [www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html](http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html).)

Preparing your blogging team with some guidelines on blogging, social media, and the associated legalities will strengthen your corporate blogging strategy!

## Determining Who Owns Blogging

Ultimately, it's up to the leadership within your organization to recognize who owns blogging and who is responsible for the management of the strategy and the results. Some pros and cons associated with ownership, though, must be discussed beforehand.

In large organizations, the group most likely to assume the ownership is the public relations department because they are often in charge of the long-term communication strategy of the organization and held accountable to ensure the right information is properly disseminated. However, other groups might make more sense for you.

Establishing an owner is important to ensure that content is being created and a community is starting to form. Your organization decides who will lead your corporate blogging strategy. In many companies, the voice of the corporate blog is defined by corporate leadership or marketing.



Some companies have developed cross-departmental social media teams who collectively measure results, develop the strategy, and report directly to the leadership team. This ensures accountability from all departments on the strategy.

### *Letting leadership define the voice of your blog*

Some companies believe their leader to be the voice of the organization, so they believe that leader is the natural choice of the blog. This has advantages and disadvantages.

The pros of leadership ownership:

- ✓ The vision of the company can be clearly communicated on the blog by the visionaries of the company. This ensures that there will be clarity to the message and no confusion.
- ✓ The voice of the blog comes with great authority. Seeing *President* or *CEO* next to a name may generate more attention and more authority.

The cons of leadership ownership:

- ✓ A top-down model may not capture the true voice of the organization, especially if it's a large enterprise. Insight from employees may be the greatest selling point your organization has.

- ✔ Often, visitors to your company blog are seeking an answer that impacts their decision to purchase your products or services. A CEO may not know the answer.
- ✔ Your employees don't feel empowered to help change the organization, lowering employee morale and, as a result, productivity. Not every employee needs to blog, but seeing your employees get a voice and spotlight through your company blog can increase the morale of everyone.
- ✔ Leaders within your organization already work long hours and don't have additional time to blog.

## *Letting marketing define the voice of your blog*

Marketing departments are often identified as the owners of the corporate blogging strategy. Businesses, such as Compendium, hold the marketing group accountable for the blogging program, although, they don't interfere with it. They allow the employees to be heard, while motivating and encouraging them to blog well.

The pros of marketing ownership:

- ✔ Having a consistent message across all mediums and channels within your organization can simplify and optimize marketing efforts.
- ✔ Marketing often owns the content on your corporate Web site, so adding another medium is a natural fit.
- ✔ Marketing generates the content within your organization for the Web sites, other media, whitepapers, case studies, press releases, and e-mail marketing campaigns. Repurposing that content to the blog can be done with little effort.
- ✔ Marketing often has the resources for writing content while other departments have different goals and responsibilities.

The cons of marketing ownership:

- ✔ Your blog sounds like your marketing material. That's not what people are seeking when they read a blog.
- ✔ With bloggers throughout the organization, your marketing team feels compelled to "tweak" the message; therefore, losing its natural voice.
- ✔ Because bloggers throughout the organization don't report to marketing, the marketing team may have difficulties motivating employees or finding resources to ensure quality content is delivered.

## *Understanding What to Publish on Your Corporate Blog*

You've developed your manifesto, gathered your team, set some goals for your blogging program. Your blogging platform is up and running and the team has been fully trained. You find yourself sitting at the keyboard, staring at the screen, and wondering what to write.

Your mind is blank.

Thinking that you may have to write a post every day for the next year is daunting. Two hundred posts that will grab attention and drive sales to your products and services. But it's not that difficult.

What was your last e-mail to a client? What were you explaining? What about the last sales prospect's questions? What questions does everyone keeps asking? Coming up with blog post ideas is easy. Part of your job every day is to answer questions, you just need to learn how to write the answers online. To start, open your Sent folder in your e-mail and read the responses you provided your staff, your prospects, or your clients.

Often, sales and support teams have to document prospect and client questions in a customer relationship management system. Adjusting the content and writing it into a nice, short blog post is a great way to repurpose information, save time, and place more value on the time spent answering those questions!

If you're not sure where to repurpose content from, look no further than the Sent folder in your e-mail client. Browse through the folder until you find an e-mail sent to a prospect or customer that answered a question they submitted. These are often perfect pieces of content to repurpose on your blog.

The adjustments necessary for optimizing the content for a blog post are pretty easy. Just follow these steps:

- 1. Write a compelling a post title that contains the question and associated keywords that the blog post will answer.**
- 2. Make edits to the blog post to take it from a message written to the recipient to a message written for any client or prospect who is visiting your blog.**
- 3. Use keywords that visitors would use in search engines to get to your response. You'll want to use the exact phrases throughout your blog post.**



If you're still stuck, search Google for *200 Corporate Blog Post Ideas*, or you can use any of the following ideas:

- ✔ **Distribute company news through your corporate blog:** Humanize your blog by sharing stories about how your employees give back to the community. Share exciting news about expansions, or include new hires and new clients. Blog about upcoming events or how your clients can connect with you offline.
- ✔ **Work your public relations strategy into your blog:** Share your press releases through your blog with a personal note on the points you want to share. Press releases used to be the primary distribution method for getting news to the media. Now, you can ensure your company's news is heard by publishing it yourself. Think of your blog as your own self-publishing platform for your public relations team!
- ✔ **Integrate other marketing communications into your blog:** News that you're already communicating through other mediums, such as e-mail, newsletters, whitepapers, case studies, print publications — even speeches — can be converted to blog posts easily. Repurposing content and distributing it via a blog is a great investment of the time it takes to produce the content.

For example, if you have a great PowerPoint presentation that was recently presented, write a blog post from each slide's material — that's potentially 30 posts!

Reinforcing the same information, but providing different perspectives is a great way of producing content that connects with your visitors. Not all visitors will connect on every post — so repurposing content and reinforcing the central themes in different ways will produce results.





## Chapter 3

# Deciding On Your Blogging Goals

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Defining goals for your blog
  - ▶ Calculating your return on investment
  - ▶ Measuring the impact of your blog
- 

**A** business grows by both increasing revenue and reducing expenses. Your corporate blogging strategy can help either, but you need to decide what your objectives are, how to determine goals for each objective, and how to measure the success of the objectives.

Setting goals may be difficult at first but over time, you'll observe trends in visits, pageviews, and conversions that you can monitor and predict, making goal-setting much easier.

Ultimately, your return on investment for blogging will not be found in the first month or even the first quarter. Each post that you publish may have the information necessary in it to produce revenue for your company, but that revenue may not come today, tomorrow, or next week. Blogging is a strategy that requires time and momentum.

Your blogging strategy may ultimately take months, even a year to realize results — but those results will only continue to grow while you continue to write content. This chapter helps you define your strategy by showing you how to determine your target audience, how to design objectives, and how to estimate your return on investment and evaluate results. Let's get started!

## *Setting Goals for Your Blogging Strategy*

Understanding the business benefits of corporate blogging for your company is imperative. Your blog will have an impact on your company culture, your sales and marketing efforts, and your customer service and customer satisfaction.

Without a specific direction, it's hard to reach a destination. Setting goals and plotting the progress of reaching those goals is key to your blogging strategy's success.

In broad terms, the five goals for defining your blogging strategy are as follows:

- ✔ **Define a target audience:** Who are you trying to reach, where are they, and how are you going to effectively reach them?
- ✔ **Determine a blogging platform:** It's critical to select a platform that allows you to hit the ground running and to maximize your return on investment.
- ✔ **Estimate your blogging return on investment:** Determining how you're going to measure success, in dollars, provides your organization with a valuable yardstick. Start out with estimating the cost of the program — the cost of software, infrastructure, consulting, and content creation. Now compare that cost to your goals and the savings or additional revenue that your strategy will generate. Monitor your progress closely and expect that the return on investment will continue to increase over time.
- ✔ **Measure conversions:** Use analytics and a customer relationship manager to fully compare the volume of leads your company gets to the sales or *conversions*. This provides you with a baseline conversion rate. Over time, you can measure against that conversion rate and also monitor your cost and revenue per conversion.
- ✔ **Review objectives and evaluate results:** Set aside time each month to measure the impact of your programs, fine-tune your analytics to provide the necessary reporting, and review the results with both your team and your company's leadership.

## *Defining the target audience for your blog*

The first step of determining goals is to determine the readership audience that you want to grow from your blog. Are you looking for clients, prospects, industry professionals, job candidates, or addressing your own employees?

Your new audience online is going to be found through search engines, in social media and other blogs, and within your own customer and prospect base. Integrating your blogging strategy with your other marketing efforts helps you grow your audience immediately, and other strategies help you add a following.

Targeting an audience through search engines is accomplished by identifying the keywords or phrases they use to look for the products and services that you can deliver. In Chapter 8, you'll find detailed information on how to do research and identify those keywords.

In Chapter 11, you'll find strategies and ways to target relevant audiences and market your blog to them.

Blogging is an efficient and effective communication platform. What you decide to communicate on that platform determines the audience to target.

Providing a single blog that incorporates all news and information for your company is effective, but multiple blogs can assist you in focusing on specific audiences. Are there secondary audiences you should be targeting? Additionally, some businesses have multiple blogs to target different strategies, such as the following:

- ✔ Leadership blog focused on the media, employees, and stockholders
- ✔ Marketing blog focused on innovation, product promotion, services, events, and acquisitions
- ✔ Customer service blog focused on clients to provide direction, work-arounds, fixes, and best practices and to communicate outages and issues
- ✔ Event-specific blogs to communicate event information and times
- ✔ Philanthropy blog to discuss the company's work within the community and its support of charitable initiatives
- ✔ Industry blog to focus on providing feedback and vision to other industry professionals
- ✔ Public relations blog to publish news releases and respond to public relations issues
- ✔ Partnership blog to promote partnerships with other companies and vendors
- ✔ Integration blog for distributing information, code, and updates about your software solutions' integration capabilities
- ✔ Frequently Asked Questions blog to provide answers to commonly asked questions from sales prospects and customers

Sun Microsystems, for example, has deployed more than 5,500 blogs and has more than 4,600 bloggers in their organization. (See Figure 3-1.) Blogging is part of the organization's life-blood. Blogging at Sun includes CEO and President Jonathan Schwartz writing (somewhat infrequently) to shareholders, employees, and the technical community.



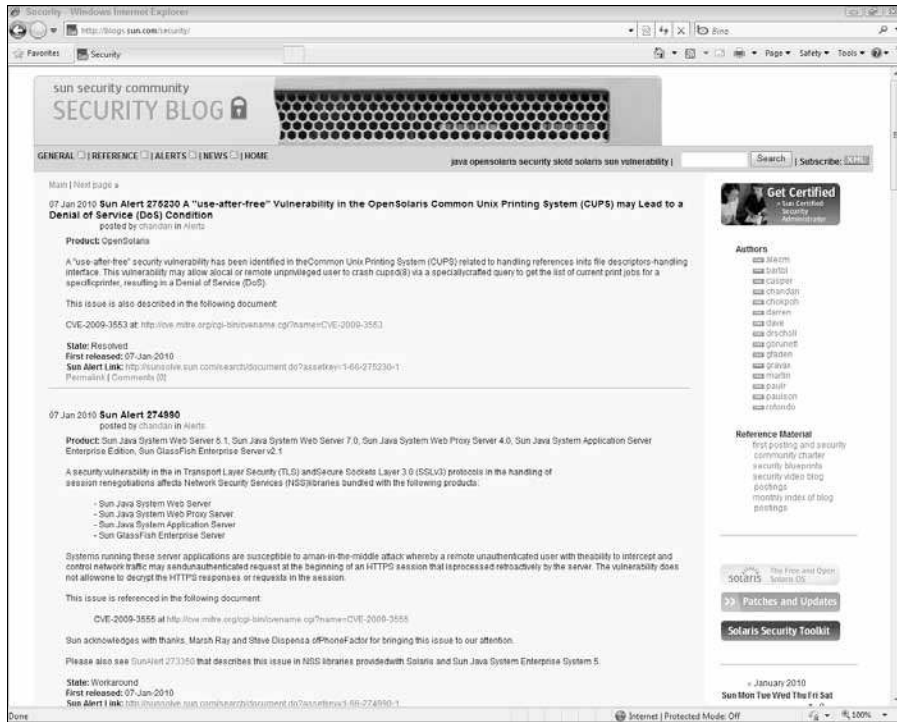
**Figure 3-1:**  
The impressive  
homepage  
at Sun  
Micro-  
systems.

The blogs at Sun span every portion of the organization, including the Sun Security blog that communicates software vulnerabilities in real time and promotes Sun's certification, software, patches, upgrades, and toolkits in the sidebar. (See Figure 3-2.) This blog communicates issues directly to customers and promotes the openness and customer care that Sun provides system administrators.

## *Estimating Your Return on Blogging Investment*

*Return on investment* (ROI) is the common name for the equation the industry uses to measure whether a strategy is worthwhile for a business to continue pursuing. Simply put, return on investment is the percent ratio of total revenue and total savings versus total expenses.

$$\text{ROI} = (\text{total revenue} + \text{total savings}) / (\text{total expenses}) \times 100$$



**Figure 3-2:**  
Targeting  
customers  
and prospects  
in the sidebar  
on Sun's  
Security  
Blog.

Here's an example:

Cost of blogging (software-as-a-service): \$15,000

Employee cost for writing daily posts over a year: \$6,000

Total cost: \$21,000

Savings in customer service: \$12,000

Revenue acquired through blog: \$120,000

ROI =  $(\$120,000 + \$12,000) / (\$21,000) \times 100$

ROI = 629% Annually.

Determining the total revenue is simple — it's the revenue gained from the blog through direct purchases, leads that were acquired through the blog and closed, and leads acquired indirectly from the blog through speaking engagements and other blog-related referrals.

The total savings is evaluated by the reduction in human resources required to support call volumes and other support requests.

The total expenses for a blogging strategy may be the most complex to measure. Your expenses need to include the hourly human resource cost for content creation and support + infrastructure cost + software cost + design cost + optimization cost.

### ***Evaluating cost per blogging lead***

Understanding what your cost per lead is prior to starting is incredibly important so that you can fully understand whether blogging is reducing your cost per lead. Cost per lead should equal your marketing and sales costs divided by the total leads that are acquired.

A *cost per blogging lead* is the cost of your blogging program divided by the number of leads that are provided to your sales team for closing. Companies should never abandon advertising and marketing efforts that have a positive return on investment, but recognizing the cost per lead through each of the mediums they use will help them determine where to focus their effort.

As an example, many companies use paid search (pay per click) to acquire leads. You may pay upwards of \$200 per lead through this advertising medium. Your blogging strategy might lower that cost per lead under \$100 over time. If your blogging strategy is acquiring great leads at half the price, this will help you decide the effort you wish to put into each of your marketing mediums.

Over time, you'll find that you're attracting more and more leads so your cost per lead on a blog will eventually decline as long as your traffic and conversions are increasing.

### ***Measuring the value of search traffic***

Additionally, it may be worthwhile to measure the value of the traffic your blog acquires through organic search traffic by evaluating the same cost for that traffic via paid search. Organic search traffic is the traffic that your blog acquires by showing up naturally in search engine results. Paid search traffic is traffic that is acquired by bidding on keywords and having small advertisements placed on a search engine results page (SERP).

Google and other search engines freely distribute keyword data for advertisers to use to develop paid search campaigns. Each keyword is tracked for the number of searches per month, the competitiveness of the word as well as the average bid to win that word. Because so many companies participate in paid search, it's an accurate means of evaluating keywords and the associated traffic that those keywords produce.

This is accomplished by using a combination of Google AdWords and viewing your analytics traffic by search keyword.



Multiplying the value of the keyword (cost per click) by the number of visits you received from that keyword provides you with the value of that traffic.

As an example, if companies bid \$0.50 per click for a keyword, that visit is worth \$0.50 for a company. If you would like 10,000 visitors, you're going to spend \$5,000 in your paid search campaign. With a targeted blogging strategy, if you rank well and acquire 10,000 visitors for a specific keyword via your blog, it may have cost you a fraction of the cost per visitor. Perhaps it was a single blog post that cost your company less than \$100 in time to write and publish!

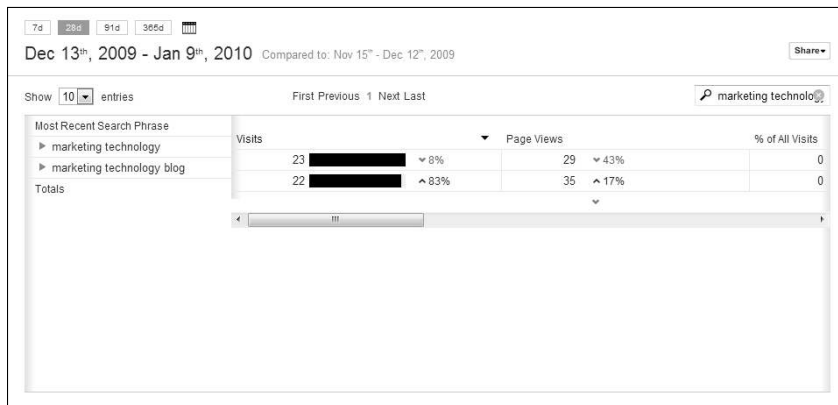
Understanding relative cost of the traffic you're acquiring via organic search can help you recognize the value of the overall program to generating traffic to your site without having to calculate and track the return on investment.

Just follow these steps to calculate your own:

1. **Using your analytics program, identify the keywords that drove traffic from search engines to your blog.**
  - a. Log in to your analytics application.
  - b. If your company uses an enterprise analytics application such as Webtrends, search for *Phrases* in the report search. The keyword information you're seeking is in the Most Recent Search Phrases (All) report. If you are utilizing Google Analytics, the report is available in Traffic Sources→Keywords.

Figure 3-3 shows the number of visits from the term *marketing technology* is 23.

**Figure 3-3:**  
Viewing  
Webtrends'  
Most  
Recent  
Search  
Phrases  
(All) Report.



**2. Utilizing Google AdWords External Keyword Tool, look up the value of the keyword.**

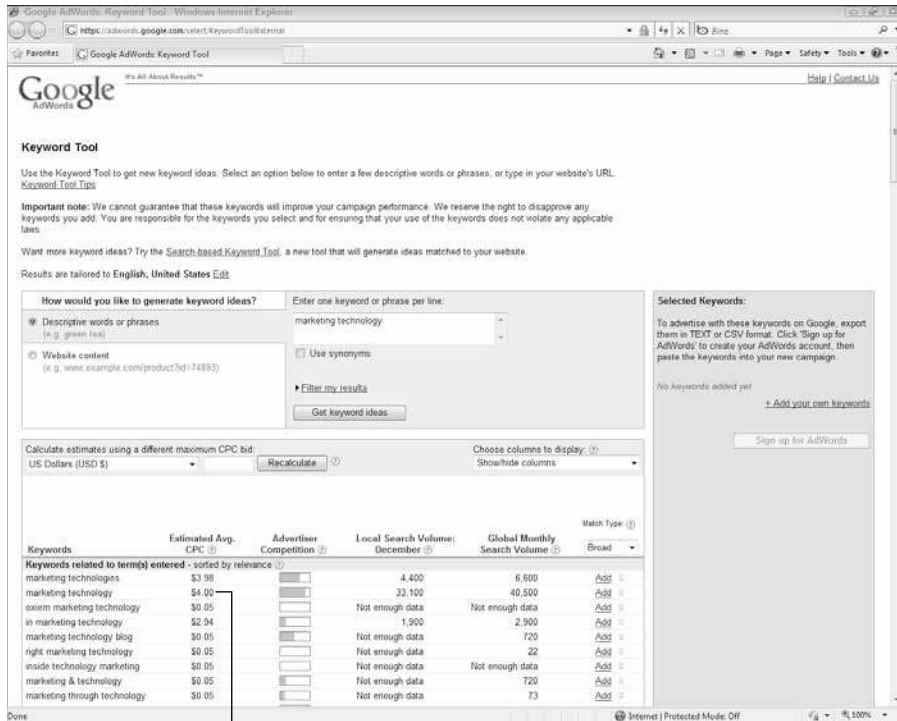
Figure 3-4 shows the estimated average cost per click (CPC) for *marketing technology* was \$4.00.

**3. Multiply the quantity times the average cost per click.**

23 visits per month  $\times$  \$4.00 = \$92.00 per month or \$1,104 annually.

**4. Repeat for each of the keyword terms that is driving traffic to your blog and get a grand total. This is the value of the search traffic that your blog is attracting.**

By using this technique, you'll be able to evaluate both your paid and organic search efforts. Paid search may be more expensive at times, but has advantages like being able to "turn up" your volume of inbound leads when you need to. Blogging is more of a long-term strategy and not always as predictable.



**Figure 3-4:** Looking up a keyword phrase in Google AdWords' External Keyword Tool.

The CPC of "marketing technology"

## Visits, pageviews, and conversions

What's the difference between a visit and a pageview? A *visit* is a unique person who has arrived at your site. A *pageview* is a single page viewed by a visitor. If five people visit your site and look at two pages each, that equates to five visits and ten pageviews, or an average of two pageviews per visitor.

A *conversion* is a step a visitor takes that brings them closer to becoming a client. Ultimately, a

conversion is a prospect who becomes a customer, but along the path from prospect to customer, many independent conversions occur. A search engine user clicks a search result and converts to a visitor. A visitor registers for a Webinar and converts to a lead. A lead is called by your sales team and is converted to a customer.

As well, some companies have found it very advantageous to “own the search engine results page” on both paid and organic search. If your company is listed in organic and paid search results, there's a far greater chance of acquiring that visitor from the search engine.

When you can accurately identify which keywords are actually converting traffic for you, you can narrow your focus and content strategy, increasing your overall return on investment.

## *Measuring conversions to improve your content*

When your blog begins to attract attention, you can see and measure how those visitors are getting to your blog, determine how effective each referring source is, and adjust your strategy accordingly.

### *Segmenting your traffic by source*

Analytics applications segment your visitors four ways:

- ✓ **Direct traffic:** These are visitors that have bookmarked your blog in their browser or typed in your Web address (URL) and arrived directly.
- ✓ **Referring traffic:** This is traffic that comes to your blog from a link on another site.
- ✓ **Search engine traffic:** This is traffic that comes to your blog from a search engine.
- ✓ **Other traffic:** This is traffic that comes to your site from other programs like e-mail marketing newsletters.

Understanding the source of your visitors is the first opportunity to begin determining where you need to focus on traffic. Segmenting your traffic by source provides you with an understanding of the value of those sources. The following steps show you how to view traffic sources in Google Analytics:

1. **Log in to your Analytics account.**
2. **Select your account and site.**
3. **Choose Traffic Sources → Overview from the left sidebar. (See Figure 3-5.)**

If you find that specific keywords draw the most business, focus your content in those areas and abandon keywords that don't attract any business. Keywords often change over time so be prepared to adjust accordingly. For example, fewer than 10 years ago, the world referred to the Internet as the *World Wide Web* or the *Web*, but now only rarely so. Try to keep up with changes like these.



**Figure 3-5:**  
Viewing  
Traffic  
Sources  
Overview  
in Google  
Analytics.

### ***Tracking visitors with analytics and Google Webmasters***

Many bloggers focus their strategy and attention on analytics only. Remember that analytics only measure the visitors that have actually clicked through and have landed on your blog. You may be showing up in many search results but not acquiring the traffic because visitors aren't compelled to click through.

Most blogs with an effective search engine strategy acquire over 50 percent of their traffic from search. If you'd like to monitor and improve the volume of visitors you're acquiring from search engines, you'll need to dig deeper into the way your blog is showing up in the search engines.

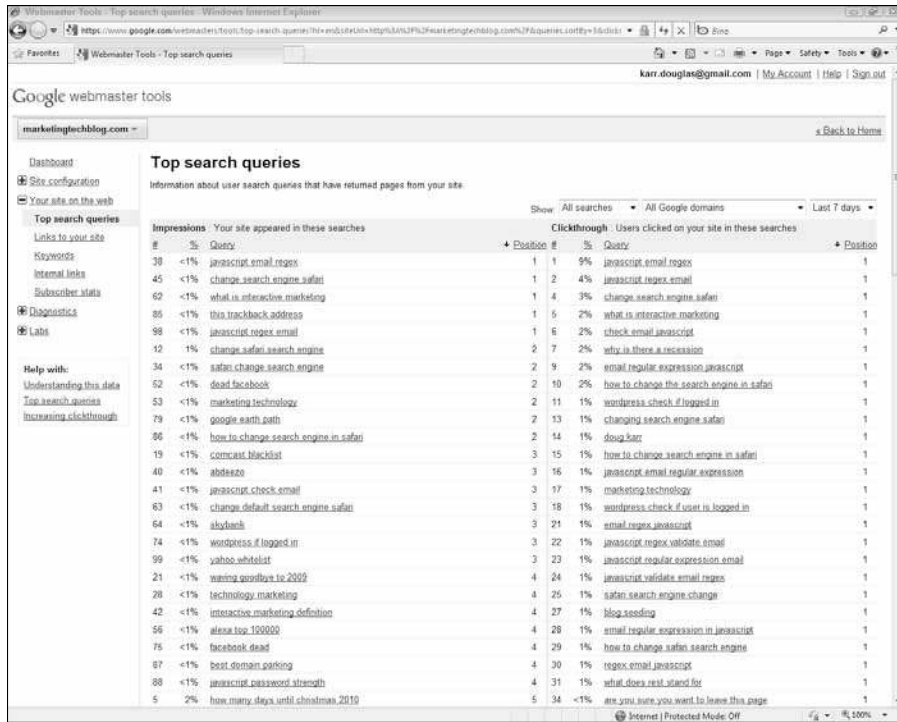
You can monitor your ranking and click-throughs using Google Webmasters, Bing Webmasters, and Yahoo! Site Explorer. All of the major search engines provide you with information on what content is being found in search results, where it's ranked, and how often searchers are clicking through on your results. As important as analytics is to measure your visitors' behavior on your blog, Webmasters is key to measuring your visitors' behavior in search engines.

Although the traffic you're getting from search engines is important, the traffic you're not getting may be more important. Google Webmasters provides you with keywords and how your pages rank. You may find that you rank very well for certain keywords, but you're not getting clicks for those search queries. Follow these steps to view your traffic click-throughs in Google Webmasters.

- 1. Log in to your Webmasters account.**
- 2. Select your site.**
- 3. Choose Your Site on the Web ⇄ Top Search Queries from the left sidebar.**

The left column (see Figure 3-6) lists the searches that your site appeared in. The right side (see Figure 3-6) lists the search results that actually generated traffic to your site by visitors clicking them. Sort these in ascending order by clicking the Position link.

To increase that conversion rate, you may wish to write more compelling post titles and meta descriptions so that the viewable information in the search engine drives more click-throughs. If the keywords you're ranking high for (say, in the top three) aren't getting clicked, that's a sure sign you need to rework the content.



**Figure 3-6:**  
Viewing  
keyword  
ranking  
and click-  
throughs  
in Google  
Web-  
masters.

After visitors are on your site, it's much easier to track them with your Web analytics package. All analytics packages have conversion tracking and goal tracking that you can customize to properly track a purchase made from a visitor to your blog.

### *Adjusting your strategy to increase conversions*

Tracking the referring sites and keywords that drive conversions allow you to adjust your strategy and push more content on keywords that drive the most traffic, or make changes on ones that are driving traffic but not conversions.

To increase conversions within your blog, you can deploy a number of tactics, including the following:

- ✓ **Link directly to the conversion source within your blog posts.** Many companies simply put a call to action in the sidebar of their blog and forget to actually promote from within the blog post. You may even want to add a line to your blog post with your phone number for prospects to call you directly.

- ✔ **Test and swap out your calls to action in your sidebar to figure out what works.** Improving your calls to action can have a huge impact on your conversion rates.
- ✔ **Simplify your landing page.** After visitors click a call to action, they are typically brought to a landing page. Landing pages sometimes have high abandonment rates if they have a form requesting too much information, have unnecessary navigation, or aren't written with compelling language.

Your blog posts are the best chance you have of driving traffic and conversions. Monitor your analytics and find out what's common with blog posts that are driving the most conversions and those that are not. Sometimes, it's the day of the week, sometimes the author, sometimes the post title, sometimes an image in the post or a conversion link. It could be any number of things that motivates a visitor to connect with you.



Many bloggers within the industry determine the success of their blogs by visitor *engagement* — meaning the number of comments visitors leave. However, you should always measure engagement as the effect your blog has on your business and the return on investment it generates. For business blogs, comments don't equate to dollars in any way, shape, or form, so don't gauge your blogging strategies success by the number of comments.

Corporate blogs often produce no comments at all. Even on a popular blog, very few readers will actually come forward and comment on a blog. Many times, the blog post content itself has to be highly charged to solicit a response — something you may not wish to risk on a corporate blog!



Don't be discouraged if you're not seeing huge growth or huge numbers! You may see other bloggers getting thousands or tens of thousands of visitors or subscribers each day. This is very important for blogs that publish content for advertising revenue.

Publishers need to have large numbers to attract advertisers. As a corporate blogger, your goal is not advertisers, your goal is revenue. A couple hundred visitors may be all your company needs to fully realize a positive return on investment. After you optimize for conversions, growing traffic is your next goal.

Don't make the mistake of focusing on the referring sources that provide you with the highest number of visits. Instead, focus on those sources that provide you with the highest number of actual conversions.

## *Reviewing objectives and measuring results*

Just as with any marketing campaign, your blog's administrator should be reviewing analytics and measuring your program's performance on (at least) a weekly basis. Monitoring analytics to see the keywords that are driving the most conversions, the content that is driving the most traffic, how social media is driving traffic to your blog, and even which days of the week drive the most results helps you fine-tune your strategy.

On a monthly basis, evaluating how many leads you've acquired and the associated conversions and revenue per conversion helps you stay on track. On an annual basis, measuring your return on blogging investment, cost per lead, and comparing your blogging strategy to your other marketing efforts will help you plan your next budget. (For more on these evaluations and on analytics, see Chapter 15.)

These reviews also give an administrator an opportunity to praise or encourage staff members who have done well.

Jeremy Fairley, for example, is the head of Interactive Marketing at Tampa Bay & Company. Jeremy administers the Visit Tampa Bay blog (<http://blog.visittampabay.com>) and has a team of bloggers throughout the organization whose primary duties aren't blogging — they manage sponsorships, corporate relations, events, promotions, and consumer relations. Blogging is something Jeremy's team has to fill in between all their regular duties. It's working, though, and his team has been recognized as a leader in the travel industry, driving traffic and attention to Tampa as a great city for companies to hold their events.

Jeremy makes it a point every week to write an e-mail to his blogging team that highlights the highs and lows of their performance. (See Figure 3-7.) He publically praises those on his team who attracted a lot of attention with great content. He also loves to take playful jabs at his bloggers that haven't performed well. The motivational e-mail is just what the program needs to keep his bloggers having fun and ensuring they keep the great content coming.



**Figure 3-7:**  
Keeping  
your bloggers on  
track.



## Identifying Marketing and Promotion Goals

An integrated marketing strategy with a blog as part of a larger promotion strategy can maximize your results. Publishing your latest blog posts on your Web site can help with search engine optimization. Repurposing blog content in your e-mail newsletter can save your staff time. Additionally, promoting events through your blog can increase attendance.

Don't relegate your blog to a blogger that sits in the back room with no connection to the rest of the organization. Put your blog at the center of your communications strategy, and when you start a promotion ask, "How can we leverage the blog on this?"

## *Building authority in your industry*

*Authority* is a word that's used to describe the level of expertise that a company, blog, or individual has in a given industry. Authority requires first that you are either educated or have a proven history of experience.

Even with education and experience you're not an authoritative figure, though. You must be acknowledged by other authoritative figures within the industry. The Internet provides a great platform for accumulating authority. The currency of authority on the Internet is measured with mentions and backlinks.

Writing a compelling industry blog that drives a lot of attention will drive your company's authority or the authority of employees within the company. That authority can open many doors, from speaking at industry events to writing a book.



Authority doesn't have to begin and end on your blog, either. Participating and adding valuable feedback to other industry blogs will garner attention from those bloggers. Stay involved in online industry networks, on Twitter, and on LinkedIn Groups. Be sure to get your company's name out there.

## *Search engine goals for keyword ranking*

Search engines are honestly not that intelligent. Although the challenge of organizing billions of pages of content and displaying a search result is an incredible achievement, the quality of the results still stinks.

Think about how many times you've done a search and how many results you had to read through before getting the correct result. Think about how many times you had to search over and over with different word combinations. Search engines display multiple results and pages because you may not find what you're looking for in the first result.

Recognizing this as an issue, the search engine optimization industry has exploded in growth. *Search engine optimization* is the act of incorporating best practices across your site to ensure content is properly found and indexed properly by search engines. eMarketer reports that search engine optimization is an industry that will grow from \$1.5 billion in 2008 to over \$3.8 billion by 2013.

Search engine optimization is a necessary practice to ensure that your content is found where it should be by the target audience seeking it. Search

engine optimization helps to overcome the severe lack of intelligence that search engines have.

At its core, a search engine “crawls” your site, identifies keywords, and makes an educated guess on the search keywords your site should show up for. They also account for the keywords employed when you’re linked to from other authoritative sites, how long your site has been around, and any problems actually locating your content.

If you want to be found for specific keywords, you must use those keywords effectively in page titles, post titles, headings, content, and meta data. If you present the content appropriately to the search engine, there’s a better possibility that your content will be found by the people you want it to be found by.



The key to being found in search engines is to answer a searcher’s question — and to be found within the search engine results pages. Knowing the keywords to use that will drive traffic and sales is important, but don’t forget to monitor how your pages are ranking for those keywords.

For more on improving your search engine ranking, see Part III.

## *Setting Goals for Customer Relationship Management (CRM)*

Customer relationship management (CRM) has been the rallying cry of the last decade and it was going to change the world, making it much easier for us to automate and communicate with fewer resources. *Customer relationship management* systems are software platforms in which companies maintain a history of all contact with prospects and customers. By maintaining this information, a company can maintain effective communications and a full profile of each of their customers.

CRM helps companies better understand key metrics with regard to customers — such as retention, satisfaction, customer service, sales goals, and so on. CRM also helps companies better manage the relationship with the company, communicate with them automatically at key times, and provide employees with the information they need to better manage the clients.

CRM requires companies document and record all interactions with customers. Some companies spend more time configuring and entering data in their customer relationship management system than actually helping customers.

Blogging offers a platform for you to speak to all your customers at the same time and offer them a means to respond. If you want to improve your relationship with customers, managing an effective blogging strategy that responds to their needs and provides them with additional value may provide you a much better return on investment in the long run.

## *Using blogs to communicate with customers*

Compared to pricing in the past, modern companies often sell products and services at a fraction of previous costs. Being able to produce much more with fewer resources, many companies have huge volumes of customers but lack the human resources to commit to great service because the price of the product or service simply doesn't allow for it.

Blogs are a one-to-many, permission-based medium. Blogs also have robust search and categorization methodologies that make the content easy to find. Combined with search engines, blogs are an incredible platform to publish just about everything your company wants to publish. With a blog you can do any of the following:

- ✔ Promote upcoming Webinars, conferences, and other events.
- ✔ Promote Webinars, conferences, and other events while they are happening.
- ✔ Provide a synopsis of Webinars, conferences, and other events. This is a great way of showing non-attendees what they missed so they will come to the next event.
- ✔ List promotions and specials. This is a great way to increase conversion rates, upsell current clients, and find new ones. Often, a great special is virally communicated from a blog through social media.
- ✔ Publish releases, changes, and updates. This keeps customers up-to-date on what's happening with your company.
- ✔ List partner and industry news so customers are informed of additional opportunities.
- ✔ Promote upsell opportunities or cross-sell opportunities. This can impact revenue directly and increase your average customer value.
- ✔ Publish customer support issues and workarounds. This reduces the volume of inbound calls to your service department.

Bloggng can have a significant impact on cutting costs within your organization. Think about the last time you had to copy and paste a response to a customer about an issue that was previously raised. Through your e-mail or phone system, you may only be dealing with one client at a time. Through your blog, you may be able to prevent hundreds of phone calls by simply publishing common issues that used to take up time and resources.

## *Leveraging blogs for your organization's knowledge base*

Providing a searchable, organized knowledge base not only helps your customers, it also helps your company! Employees can educate themselves just as easily as your customers can. This knowledge base should include the following:

- ✓ **Frequently Asked Questions about billing, the company, the products, the employees, the services, and the support.** These are perfect topics that will reduce the dependence on your customer service, accounting, and sales departments. Proactively promote your blog as *the* place for customers to seek and find the information they need.
- ✓ **Industry best practices.** Distributing this information via your blog educates clients on how to most effectively leverage your product or service.
- ✓ **A glossary.** Blog content is an easy place to define industry terms and vocabulary — make it an education source for clients, prospects, and employees.



If you have a very large array of products and solutions, you may even want to deploy multiple blogs. Providing your customers with a specific path to the information they are seeking is important.

## *Sharing customer testimonials*

Perhaps the largest missed opportunity of corporate blogs is the opportunity to speak about the customer. Customers love sharing the spotlight and will promote your blog posts when you make mention of them. Customer testimonials are a powerful marketing message because it's not you speaking — it's your customers!

Corporate blogging platform Compendium built a feature, Web to Post, directly into their application so that customers could actually write their own blog posts and share their stories.

The system is used frequently on Carhartt's Tough Jobs blog (<http://blogs.carhartt.com/blog/tough-jobs>). Carhartt is a clothing manufacturer who makes tough, high-quality work clothing. Their customers are nuts about the product and proudly display their "Carhartts" where ever they go.

The Tough Jobs blog consists of direct submissions from customers, which include maintenance workers, fiberglass grinders, scrap metal operations workers, lumberjacks, monster truck crew chiefs, oil rig drillers, mechanics, and even some welders from the World Trade Center site in New York City.

Each shares their story of what they do for a living and why they love their Carhartts. This is an incredible strategy because Carhartt doesn't even have to write the content! Their customers are writing content that's being found through search engines and social media and turning that content into attracting new customers! (See Figure 3-8.)



**Figure 3-8:**  
Customer  
testimonial  
blogs from  
Carhartt.

If you don't have the means for customers to submit their testimonials directly, here are some tips for capturing them:

- ✔ Obtain permission from the customer to publish the testimonial.
- ✔ Tell the story behind the testimonial and be sure to include keywords.
- ✔ Use first names unless the person is widely known like President Barack Obama or Bill Gates.
- ✔ Write the story as if you were an observer or reporter and not actually working for the company. Refer to the company in the third person. This will put focus on the customer and not your company.
- ✔ Include some personal facts about the customer so they are humanized and not seen as some generic, made-up person.
- ✔ Include a photo of the customer. If it's a business, include a link to their site and include some information about their products and services.
- ✔ Include a call to action to offer the same products or services that the customer testimonial refers to. It may be as simple as a link to the product page.
- ✔ If a photo is worth a thousand words, a video is worth a million! Video testimonials are a fantastic way of conveying sincerity.

Having your customers speak and sell your product is the most powerful and effective means of growing your customer base. Make the collection and publishing of customer testimonials on your blog part of your blogging goals. Highlight these blogs in e-mails and promote them through social media.