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11 Steps to Building an effective Blog for Business!

Firstly, let's make it clear we're talking about a blog for business here! So it's much easier to start with what a business blog is not.

A business blog is not a what am I doing and feeling today blog. That is a personal diary entry blog, which is absolutely fine if you want to create a blog around you as a person and your experiences, but it won't do so well if you want to turn your blog into something that can make you money!

A business blog is there primarily for you to sell you products, so that you can feed yourself and any children or cats you might have, so you can carry on making whatever amazing products you make and then continue blogging about them, to sell more products and so on!

That doesn't mean you have to strip the 'you' out of your blog. You are your unique selling proposition, so we definitely need to see the 'you', but just you in the business sense!

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Step 1 – Discover your Ideal Customer = finding your niche!

Who are you talking to? I'm talking about your Ideal Customer here.

Who are you selling to? Who do you most want to work with? What problems do they have that you can solve? What are their hopes & dreams? Are they young or old, tired or excited, live in the city or countryside? Are they slowing down or speeding up? Do they need a confidence boost or new skills?

I'd recommend spending an afternoon or so really getting to grips with this concept. There's two ways you can look at your Ideal Customer. You can think about demographics, are they a young single mum who doesn't know how to cook good nutritional meals, or a man in his 50's who can't work out how to use wordpress? Get specific, really figure them out, what makes them tick, what are their pain points and how you can solve them.

Or you can look at emotions. Is your Ideal Customer a tired, frustrated entrepreneur who longs for a system that will save them time? Or an excited traveller who wants the ultimate planned holiday somewhere exotic? By looking at emotions you don't need to be as specific on age and gender as we all have emotions that cross those barriers.

Or we can swing this around and talk about finding your niche. Which is:

1 – I love communicating and building relationships with others

2 – I'm skilled at marketing and social media and enjoy sharing these skills with others

Plus – I love working with women in business who are creative to boot.

The idea is that you can't serve everyone and neither would you probably want to. You can't talk to everyone – your messages will be bland and middle of the road. You want people to find you and think 'god damn, they know me, the bloody well know me, they understand what I need and they have the solution'. This will never happen if you don't niche and speak directly to your ideal customer.

Getting creative can really help here. In my Ideal Customer workshop, we get A3 sheets of paper and paste words and images from magazines that brings our Ideal Customers to life. It often creates new deepened understandings and brings an element of creativity into business.

This works for all businesses.

Hans Zimmer is a German composer. He's composed some of the most recognisable movie scores of our time; The Lion King, Pirates of the Caribbean, True Romance, Thelma and Louise and most importantly the theme tune for Going for Gold. The list goes on.

Now Hans writes everything for his perfect customer, everything. Not for Hollywood execs, for one person. She's a single mum, she's got 2 children and she's poor. She saves up her money and takes the Kids to the movies (or herself) for 2 hours of escapism and listens to the music of Hans Zimmer. Every score is almost a love letter to this woman.

If Hans the composer can create a powerful perfect ideal customer, so can you. Who do you want to serve?

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2. What is the content?

So you've spent some time thinking about your ideal customer. Now you need to spend some time thinking about what you are going to be writing about.

We're going to be talking about pain here. What pain is your ideal customer in? What problems do they have that you can solve? What questions do they ask themselves? What are their challenges? What are their hopes and dreams?

This is what you write about. You write to solve their problems. Sit down and write down answers to these questions – when you think you're exhausted, write some more. At least 30. And if you're not sure ask people. Ask people who are your ideal customer, why did you come to me, what difference did I make, or what problems are you facing right now.

You also write about what you know. This is your place to flex your brilliance muscles! So think, you run a business, you network, you create products and services, you serve people, maybe you run a business and look after your children – and so does your ideal client. Think about what you do on a daily basis. Some of the things you do may seem obvious to you, but they won't necessarily be obvious to your customers. I love sitting down and writing, I don't see it as a skill. But it is and people tell me it is all the time. It generally things we automatically do without thinking that other people need to know. Put yourself in a position where you know nothing about a state and think what you could share.

I know that for a lot of the people I work with time is an enormous issue. Which is why I'm so keen to support people to plan, set goals and get strategic – this way we know where we are going, we have a plan, a map, so we don't waste time going around in circles or talking to people who aren't ever going to buy our products. So in my blog to do's there are lots of ideas around making marketing more strategic and saving people time.

Think of it as those mad google searches that we all do. 'Help, I'm a terrible mother' – comes up with lots of blogs and books on how to be a better parent, a better listener – some of which I've gone on to buy. 'What can you buy for a 50 year old man', also comes up with lots of suggestions. Think about those questions and answer them. This blog answers the question 'How do I blog effectively'.

Be really creative about the kinds of gold nuggets you could be sharing. Get pen to paper or try a tool like mindmeister that helps you to map your ideas out. Think of a subject you could blog on and then try and break that down even further, to another 5 things. Before you know it you'll have loads to blog about.

You could also blog about case studies if there is a good before and after, share testimonials

Try sitting down and mapping out all the various things you could blog about and split them into categories and further still – using mind maps here is a really useful tool. You can quickly see all the different areas you could cover.

Once you've got all this out and on paper, try and come up with 12 to 24 blog topics that cover your area of expertise. That's your blog titles to the next year!

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3. Good Design

We're not talking about fluffy design here colour schemes and side bars – although having an overall look is important – but we're not going into that here.

We want to think about what you want your reader to do after they've read your amazing blog post?

We call this the call to action. It could be one of many things. Buy your product, check out your services, book a place on your workshop, share your post, add a comment, download a free gift, visit your twitter page or any number of things.

A number one requirement should be getting their email address, or at least get them to follow you on social media. People rarely buy on the first visit and you'll want to keep in touch with them once they've left your site.

That way you can keep communicating with them. Once they've left your site, their heads will be filled with hundreds of other things and unless you have some way to keep popping up and saying hi, how on earth will you be at the front of their brain when they say 'hey, I really need a cute birthday card for my niece'. And you keep in contact with them through sending them links to your regular blog!

Get their emails and you can contact them for life, unless you get a little annoying and they unsubscribe – but then they probably weren't your ideal customer anyway!

So make sure everything on your blog page has a purpose – pick your call to action and make sure it's clear. You could post it within the header bar, in the side bar, at the end of your blog post or all three.

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4. Give value

Your blog should be full of interesting information. Don't be afraid of giving away trade secrets; you're writing a blog to show your expertise and knowledge. We've all spent time reading other people's blogs, learning how to do things, create things, experiment with things. Return some of that love back to the internet.

You may worry that if you give away all your secrets no-one will want to buy your products. And you're right some people will read your blog and never buy your products and that is just fine, it's not the right time for them to invest in themselves, or they're not the right fit.

But there will be those who read your blog and think 'By golly, if they're giving this much away for free imagine what would happen if I went on their course or bought their book – how much more could they teach me', or if you're a creative 'Wow, we're so connected, I love the way she does x, or uses these materials, I'd love to make my own cup and saucer but I'd never have the time, so I'll invest my money in this marvellous woman who makes me smile every Monday morning'.

And you don't need to give away all your secrets – just enough so that they know you're the expert...

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5. Be the expert

You want your blog to shout 'authority' all over it! Whatever you're doing, be the best, research, show that you care. This is your place to flex your brilliance muscles. So if you're blogging about the effects of loneliness on elderly care patients, get some facts, refer to other articles, tell a personal story, give it some depth.

If you're getting excited about your new jewellery product launch, give us blogs about where you got inspiration, how you choose the materials, artists that inspired you, the value of your pieces, pictures of people wearing it.

Make people reading your blog want to work with you or buy your product, because you know what you're talking about. To be the expert you need to be generous!

Think about questions that people ask you about your area of expertise. For example if you sell jewellery it could be 'how do I look after my jewellery?'. Or if you are a business coach it could be 'How do I pick a coach that's right for me?'.

Grab a piece of paper and try and fill the page with questions people ask. If you're not sure what questions people ask, get a notebook and start noting them down as people talk to you.

Facebook groups are also a fabulous place to find out what people are asking.

Write these questions down and then answer them in your blog.

You want to become a trusted source, the place people come to for advice. So your future customers get to know like and trust you.

You become someone who only sells to someone who gives value and friendly advice.

Another way to think of it is – what do people search for in the midnight hour when they are feeling a little mad – you know those mad google searches – 'what do I buy my boyfriend for his birthday?', 'why can't I stop shouting at my children?' 'how can I get more customers?'

If you are answering these questions, the dream is that when people google the question, your blog pops up with the answers.

If you feel a little lost and want a heads up here are a few websites that can help you think around your subject:

<https://www.storybase.com/>

<https://www.mindmeister.com/>

<http://answerthepublic.com/>

<https://www.hubspot.com/blog-topic-generator>

<http://www.contentforest.com/contentideator>

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6. Tell a story.

Remember content is all about storytelling, so tell a story – weave it into your blog, it will make them remember you and your content. Stories stick in our brains a lot easier than facts.

Watching the most watched TED talk of all time by Sir Ken Robinson, he gives us lots of facts, but the thing I remember the most is the story of the little girl, who today would be diagnosed with ADHD, but in the 50's was diagnosed as a dancer and when onto to choreograph many famous musical including Cats. How powerful is that? Now I have a story to hang my knowledge on and can easily communicate the essence of his talk to others – plus I really have remembered it.

Remember a story has a beginning, a middle and an end. Generally stories start with someone in difficulty, a saviour comes along and makes a change and there is a happy ending.

If you can weave some story into your blogs that will help people to remember and even out themselves in the protagonists shoes, and if you can position yourself as the Yoda character then all the better!

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7. Make it easy for people to buy your products.

Remember that you are blogging for money. Right? As lovely as spending your time blogging is, we really want to be making some money with this blog.

So see where I mentioned I run workshops up above? And at the end I'm going to tell you how we could work together and I could help you pull your marketing together strategically, so you save time and make more money. I might also add the url link to my contact me page, or tell you to get in touch on twitter if you liked the article or tell you that I work one to one with lots of start-ups and have been told by many people it's the best money they've ever spent.

See what I just did! And I didn't do it in a terrible way. Profit is not a dirty word. We all need pennies in the bank to help us lead the lives we deserve.

So when I read your blog, I want to find up where I can buy your amazing print, or where you will be speaking at next, or how I can enrol on your creativity and business course. I'm enjoying reading your blog, I've got more than half way through – I want to know how we can work together.

Remember people out there are already looking for you and what you do, you are the solutions to someone's problem – your blog is a way of helping them solve that problem, so don't be frightened about talking about what you do.

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8. It's all in the name!

So you've written your blog, your happy with it. What are you going to call it? How are you going to make people read your blog? The title is the calling card.

You could ask a question or intrigue them and get their curiosity, give them a number of facts. Remember your blog is answering someone's pain points. You could turn it around and say something like '7 ways to twitter failure' or

Go back to the mad midnight google search and answer that questions. You do want it to be picked up by google and improve your SEO, so try to include the key words that people would be searching for.

If you're not sure about a title have a play around. Try a few on for size. Twitter is a really good tool for this. You could post out a few different titles and see which ones get the most response. Go with the most popular, re-name it on your website and voila!

If you're unsure what would be the best words to use for your title to get the best out of google searches, you can test out a few variations on google trends.

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9. A picture says a thousand words

Now you need a great picture to go with your blog. You'll want to think about using an image that fits with your overall branding. You might even want to use filters and font that compliment your scheme. Also try to find an image that compliments the overall message, not something completely off the wall. There are lots of places to find images. Google image search is the first stop. Make sure the image is labelled for re-use, by clicking 'search tools' and then 'usage rights' – don't use images that aren't available to use or you may end up with an angry photographer chasing you!

If you click free images in google you'll find a lot of sites, some with free images and some with paid images. You can also use your own images, which you could edit with a free tool like picmonkey.

Some great free sites are pixabay and unsplash.

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10. Share it, share it, share it!

Now your blog is written, you've waited a day, you've re-read it, you've picked your perfect name and now you want to share it. Really, what is the point if people don't read it?

So there are several places you can share your blog and most of them involve social media. So assuming you're already on some platforms and have or have started to build your community of people interested in you and your products – share it there! But don't feel the pressure to be on all platforms....so here's a quick guide to sharing on different platforms:

Twitter – you can share your blog more than once, you can share the title, pull bits out of the text and share those too – your golden nuggets. Make sure you also include the image as this makes your tweet more likely to be shared.

Facebook – facebook posts are sticking and stay around for longer than twitter -so posting once is fine. If the blog post is really good you may be able to post it up again further down the line. You want to tease your readers, give them some of the blog, just enough so they click through to your site.

Instagram – if you post your blog image here, remember the hyperlink won't work in the text, so you may want to direct people to your bio – where you could post your link

Pinterest – this platform is all about the images and a fantastic place to post your blogs. Make sure to link back to your site where they can read more.

LinkedIn – there are 2 options here. You can share your blog as an update, where it will go in the usual newsfeed with a link to your site, or copy and paste in its entirety and publish as a post. The second is my preferred method as you'll get some great analytics, readers can comment, all those following you will get a notification that you've posted and your blog post will be stored as part of your bio for future customers to peruse.

Google+ - with its smaller but very dedicated audience, posting here is great if it's your preferred social media site.

Newsletter – you'll also want to let everyone who loves you know that you've just written a blog post. Blogging and sharing via a e-newsletter is the best way to keep in contact with future and past customers. You get to flex your brilliance muscles, remind them you're there and invite them back to your website and hopefully encourage them to buy a product. Email is still King when it comes to conversions, so make sure you are emailing out all your best content.

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11. Be consistent

Be consistent – make them hunger for your next email and blog post. It doesn't have to be once a week, it can be once a month, but consistency build trust and reliability and reliability and trust builds customers.