

## How to make money out of blogs

### Part 1: I don't read blogs

For years people have phoned me and said, "I don't read junk mail". Which is a bit curious because most of my business involves selling direct marketing services.

"Why are you calling me then?" I ask politely.

"Well I read your stories about the Toppled Bollard," comes the reply.

"Ah," I say (I am good at saying "ah".) "The Toppled Bollard. The name of a pub that I invented and used for a few years in some direct mail I sent out. So, you never read direct mail, but you can remember the name of a pub that doesn't exist, and which I put into a few mail shots..."

The fact is that many people claim not to read blogs and not to read direct mail or email adverts when in fact they do.

Of course, not everyone reads direct mail and not everyone reads blogs. But enough people do to make the project worthwhile, even if they don't really realise that they do. I write several blogs – one of them is about the daily activities of a football club 100 years ago. It has been running for two months. 20,000 people read it last month.

The fact is, it doesn't matter if you read blogs or not. The fact is that some people do. Some people read email. Some people watch highly obscure satellite TV channels that you might never have heard of and will certainly have never watched – which is why those channels have adverts on too.

That's the point of marketing today. The market is fractured, and if you want to reach a wide range of people you have to use a variety of media – direct mail, email, blogs, permanent website articles, magazine articles... Different people read different things.

### Part 2: The advantage of blogs

Some people read the same blog each day – they become part of the party. Most don't ever reply or join in the conversation, but they read the headline and take a glimpse at what the writer is saying. They do it because the writer seems to be involved in or interested in the same things as them.

Other people drop in and out. Since most blogs retain old articles they can go back and catch up if they want – or just read the bits that are of interest.

Different people, different reasons for being there, different reactions to the piece. Put them together and you can get a large number of readers.

There are other advantages to blogs. No one restricts what you say. No one tells you to keep the number of words down. No one stops you pushing one point of view. You can do what you like. Since the audience can be measured so easily, you will soon know if you don't hit a chord with an audience, and you will be able to change direction.

What you certainly don't have to do is pander to all tastes. For nine months I wrote a blog called "The Diary of a School Administrator", under the pseudonym "April First".

We got around 10,000 readers a month to the story – about 20% of all school administrators in the UK. The rest of them clearly didn't like the bizarre humour of the piece, but they were catered for in other forms of advertising.

### **Part 3: So how do people find a blog?**

Several ways. Firstly, by searching on google or yahoo. Whereas five years ago most of us searched using one or two words, these days the average search is seven words. If you have those seven words in an article then you will be found.

Secondly, by having "alerts" which flag up any article that turns up with specific phrases of relevance to what you do. I discover a lot of blogs that way – many I never return to, others I bookmark. I also discover all the people who quote my blog.

Thirdly, through references elsewhere. My company also runs news groups, we email people, and we direct mail them. We refer them to our websites (which mention the blogs) or we refer them directly to the blog (which mentions the website).

Fourthly, through accumulator sites. These are sites that gather up the articles that appear on particular subjects hour by hour as the day passes. People use these to track the news – if your blog appears there with an article the chances are people will click on it to read it – and you have another reader. We are currently looking into developing such a site just for classroom teachers.

Fifthly, by other people mentioning you. Stay on good terms with other blogs in your area of work, and you can mention each other. If you run a blog on the history of the civil war, a blog that covers the 10<sup>th</sup> century might just happen to mention you in passing one day as it refers to parallels between the two time zones. A few will click on the link, and you've added a few more readers. This is what blogs are about – adding a few more readers.

I have had blogs that have grown very slowly and then suddenly taken off, plus blogs that have taken off at once – and those that have got nowhere at all. Until you do it and try every avenue, you just don't know.

As an experiment in September 2009 I started a blog which simply carried copies of adverts for teachers that had appeared on emails that my company had sent out. Within a month we had 20,000 individual readers. There had been no advertising anywhere, no listing on accumulator sites, no exchanges of data. The only way people had found it was through searches and alerts. It just shows – find the right topic and you can fly.

Once people have found you they might subscribe by RSS feed to get copies of everything posted. They don't have to go to the blog each day – they just get the data as an email. And then of course they might pass on that email to a colleague – and so viral marketing is born. But you have to produce the good blog story in the first place.

The football blog I run which has over 100,000 readers a month has been used to promote the blog that is about football 100 years ago. Then the football club I write about picked up on it, and I did a deal which got me a page in their club programme (circulation 160,000). So it goes.

### **Part 4: So what makes a good story?**

It varies, but generally, something with a great headline, and something other people are not covering on the same day. Here's a list of some of the things I have learned:

- Originality – as I just said, don't cover what everyone else covers
- Good writing – it is always better if you really are a stylish writer
- Having a clear topic – one topic per blog gets much higher readership figures
- Good headline – spend a few weeks studying newspaper headlines. They are not as obvious as you might think.
- Be clear and quickly into the point – don't make the reader work to find out what you are talking about – unless you are deliberately running a humorous blog.
- Consistency – have a style or approach which you stay with. If you want to go somewhere else, start another blog.
- Conversation not diktat. Talk with your readership, don't lecture them. Don't use bullet points – don't SHOUT AT THEM (unless you are writing an extremist political piece).
- Don't pretend you are a paper and that all your readers will be getting their news primarily from you. They won't – they will be looking to you for news that is not available anywhere else. So if the front page of each paper is covering a story that fits in with your topic, find the news behind it – don't just re-run it.
- Be lively
- Recognise that many of your readers will be experts in the subject, so they need to believe in you. Don't give experts platitudes or simple answers.

#### **Part 5: How to make money**

You can slip in adverts for your product on the banner headline, down the side of the text, or within the text – but don't overdo it. If the readers think this is just your method of advertising, they will switch off. Advertising on blogs is different from other forms of advertising (just as TV advertising is different from direct mail) and you need to take advice or experiment.

Remember if every other blog is already selling the same products as you, you won't get many sales.

#### **Tony's blogs...**

Not all of these blogs are running all the time, and several of them are set up as experiments – trying out ideas just to see what sort of readership each piece gets. The first item on the list is the football blog that now gets over 100,000 individual readers a month.

[www.blog.emiratesstadium.info](http://www.blog.emiratesstadium.info)  
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