



Michael Mino is president and CEO of PropertyBoss Solutions. He became a landlord in 1977 when he purchased his first rental units. A serial entrepreneur, he has started a number of software technology firms. For more information about Michael or PropertyBoss Solutions, visit propertyboss.com or call Michael at 864.297.7661 x26.

Introduction to Blogging

By now, you certainly have heard the term “blog,” a blend of the words web log. Blog can be used both as a noun (the web log itself) or as a verb (to blog, referring to adding entries to a blog). When a blogger posts a new entry, it is known as “blogging.” According to Pyra Labs, the company that coined the word blog, “A blog is a web page made up of usually short, frequently updated posts that are arranged chronologically—like a what’s new page or a journal.”

Blogs typically fall into three main categories:

- personal blogs (online journals or diaries),
- topical blogs (focused on a specific subject), and
- business blogs (promoting or enhancing the communication of an organization).

This article will focus on the use of blogging as a tool to advance your business. Let’s start with describing the various elements of blog.

ANATOMY OF A BLOG

Reference the page from a sample property management blog as you read this section (*see opposite page*). The various components have been identified to correspond with the descriptions.

Blog Name: Located at the top of your blog web page, this is how your blog will be known. Choose your name carefully—your selection will affect the success of your blog and reflect your brand. It should be descriptive, unique, concise, and memorable. Think about your intended audience, what tone/voice you plan to use, and how you will distinguish yourself from existing blogs.

Blog Entry: The essence of a blog is its entries, which in blog speak are called posts. Each post starts with a descriptive title (keep it brief and use relevant keywords liberally) typically followed by the date and time of the entry. Depending on the display format, the body of the post is either displayed in its entirety or only the first few lines are shown followed by a link to view the rest of the post.

Entry Author: With business blogs, you will see a variety of approaches relative to the authorship of a post. There may be multiple authors with each “signing” their own entries or they may sign by the company name or brand (Intuit or QuickBooks). Sometimes a senior member of the company takes ownership of the blog and entries are signed by their name or title.

Internal Links: Most blogs are designed to provide a set of convenient links on all pages. These typically include links to recent or popular posts, a permalink (permanent link) to the current entry that is guaranteed not to change. This enables readers to bookmark or share a link to the post. The date may link to other entries posted in the same time period. An author link could lead to other posts by that person.

External Links: Most blogs are rich with references to related content on other websites. A list of similar blogs, a “blogroll,” is a great way to expand your community and help drive traffic to your blog. Very often, a blog you link to will reciprocate with a link back to your blog. By providing your readers with links to other content they might find interesting, you are providing them a valuable service which helps foster a sense of loyalty.

Category: An attribute of an entry used to organize your posts. Identify a small number of categories and assign each post to one of these categories. Some sample categories include: renting, buying a home, selling your home, etc. It is less common to assign a post to more than one category, and you will observe some bloggers using the unnamed “uncategorized” category. Think of each category as a folder where the posts are filed. The sidebar will generally list all of the blog categories, linking them to a list of all of their members.

Tags: The keywords you assign to your posts. Unlike categories, you are encouraged to assign as many relevant tags as practical. All of the associated tags are

At right: Blogging can develop an online buzz about your company and contribute to that all-powerful word-of-mouth promotion.

listed at the end of each entry. Each tag is hyperlinked to other posts with the same tag. Readers of your blog will use both tags and categories to locate your entries. Some sample tags include: rental, investing, property, management.

Tag Cloud: A visual representation of tags assigned to your blog entries. The tags are arranged in alphabetical order with the font size of the displayed tag related to the number of entries using the tag.

RSS Feed: A method of distributing links to your posts by providing a list of your entries that a RSS reader can understand. This list is in XML format and contains the title, description, and web link to the individual posts in your blog. The web feed icon is a link to this list that can be used by visitors to subscribe to your blog and, therefore, be notified of new entries as they are posted. The abbreviation RSS has a few interpretations: “Rich Site Summary” and “Really Simple Syndication” are the most commonly known.

WHY BLOG?

Now that you have a better understanding of this new communication media, you may ask, “how does blogging affect my business?” There are two ways to look at this question: (1) what is being said on other blogs (both positive and more critical) about your business? and (2) how can you use a blog to advance your business?

Your response to being blogged about is easier to understand—you should identify and subscribe to blogs important to your business. You should understand the impact of what is being said about you and answer appropriately. The worst response to a critical blog about your business is to fire back with a harsh response. Instead, your response should build confidence in the reader that you are a reasonable, honest business who may not have deserved the critical comments on the blog.

Your company blog can help advance many of your business objectives: improve owner and resident satisfaction, increase quality prospect flow, and advance your brand. Blogging can develop an online buzz about your company and contribute to that all-powerful word-of-mouth promotion. The ultimate goal is to build relationships with your business partners and establish a community.

A sample list of property management blogs will be provided in the next article to get you started looking at blogs related to your business. We will also identify the more popular readers and how to use them.

CREATING & NURTURING A COMMUNITY

The first step in creating a community is to determine who you want as members. Are they your property owners, residents, or future tenants? You can focus on creating a community for a single group or build a community of people with different interests. A mixed group of members presents more challenges in addressing their different interests in a single blog. Through the selection of the topics of your blog posts, your objective is to foster an emotional connection with your readers. Make the conversation very interactive and encourage them to join in. Feedback from this group will be extremely valuable for your business. Cultivate their sense of “being in the know” because they are part of the community you are building. Widen your audience by connecting with other social media tools like Twitter and Facebook.

GETTING STARTED

Hopefully, you now have a better understanding of what a blog is and why you should incorporate this new medium into your business toolbox. In next month's *Technology Matters*, we will provide some suggestions on how to get started with blogging. 