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## Writing a Business Blog

The last article discussed what a blog is and why you should incorporate this new medium into your business toolbox. If your interest was sparked, you may now be ready to get started with blogging. You have hopefully identified your audience (from the section *Creating and Nurturing a Community* in last month's issue) and are thinking about what to talk about. Here is a list of ideas to seed your thought process.

### BUSINESS BLOG TOPICS

- Frequently Asked Questions: Capture the questions that you receive from your prospects, owners, residents, vendors, etc. Post these questions with your answers.
- Showcase People: Provide background information on the people that make up your business—staff, owners, suppliers, etc. Pick members of your community/target audience.
- Conduct an Interview: Ask a resident, owner, supplier or employee if they would agree to be interviewed for your blog. Most people enjoy the online exposure, and the interview approach can provide a look inside your business. Select a format with sample questions that can be reused.
- Guest Articles: Invite members of your community to contribute an article. Add a question to the end of your interview (see last suggestion) asking if they would like to contribute an entry to your blog.
- What's New: Highlight anything new with your business—office expansion, changes to your website, new services or procedures, new/updated properties, etc.
- Promotions: Use your blog to spread the word about special deals and other incentive programs you offer.
- Community Information: Identify things to do, special events, and other happenings in your community.
- Best Practices and Tips: Include informational articles relevant to your community/target audience. Who does not want to learn from the experiences of others?
- What's Next: Generate interest in future services or projects by sharing details on your future plans. The blog archive feature will allow your reader to follow the progress of these activities. Turn on the blog comments feature to obtain input and suggestions before implementation.
- Photo or Video Gallery: Use images and videos to supplement your writing. The proverbial "picture is worth a thousand words" certainly applies here and can be very compelling. If photography is not your thing, consider sources such as Flickr. Many photographers provide a Creative Commons license allowing you to use their photos as long as you acknowledge the source. Utilize Flickr's advanced search feature and check the "Only search within Creative Commons-licensed content" box. Review the license agreement associated with the content you select. Always credit the owner of the media and include a link to the source. Do not attract the negative traffic that will result from ignoring these suggestions.
- News: This is probably the most common business blog topic. Report on items of interest to your target audience.
- Lists: David Letterman and *People* magazine have further popularized the human attraction to lists. Include lists in your blog that help your community members or perhaps just have some fun. A few examples: "top ten items to consider in choosing a property manager" or "five do's and don'ts related to signing a lease."
- Reviews: Position yourself as an expert by reviewing products and services of interest to your target community.
- View Similar Blogs: Follow other property management blogs and get additional ideas for topics from them. Consider linking and exchanging posts with those sites that are most similar to your blog. We have compiled a list of active blogs in the property management space you can access through <http://bloglist.propertyboss.com>.

## MIXING IT UP

It is easy to get stuck in a rut, rehashing the same information over and over again. I found the following blog post by Rick Burnes using the food metaphor—an entertaining but helpful way to think about mixing up your blog articles:

- Raisin Bran – Useful, Everyday Posts: Most of your posts should be raisin bran. They are very practical and usually framed as how-to advice. Serving owners? How should they work effectively with a property manager? Serving residents? What is the most effective way to request maintenance? Work hard to make sure you are good at these posts; you should easily be able to whip them out and have your readers engage with and like them.
- Spinach – Healthy, Thoughtful Posts: These posts establish your business and your blog as a thought leader. They are posts that probe new developments and changes in your industry. They are a little longer than typical posts and take longer to write. Add these from time to time, but do not do them too often. Your readers will get tired of too much spinach.
- Roasts – Big, Hearty Projects: These posts take a lot of time, but get a lot of attention and inbound links. Due to their exceptional traction, a roast introduces your blog to new audiences, expanding your reach. The challenge with a roast is to pick the right project. It is a lot of time to invest in a single article, so make sure you are producing interesting, unique information.
- Tabasco – Articles That Start Fires: Every so often, you should write an article asking tough questions. These posts might upset a few readers, but they also launch important, valuable conversations. People are more likely to link to the article with posts of their own. You cannot do these posts every day, but they are an important part of your overall blog mix.
- Chocolate Cake – The Sweet Stuff: Every blog needs fun stuff that goes down easily and shows that you do not take yourself too seriously. These types of posts come in all sizes, shapes and forms. The key is simple: have fun!

## BEGINNER MISTAKES TO AVOID


The following common mistakes beginning bloggers (or would-be bloggers) make are excerpted from a blog post by Dharmesh Shah.

- Not Using Your Own Domain: If you are going through the trouble to start a blog, get started right. Even if you decide to use one of the many popular free blogging services, register your own domain name. There are many reasons for

this, but the most important is control over your website URL. This is one of the few decisions about your blog that will be difficult to fix later. Trust me on this one, the price is worth it.

- Spending Too Much Time on Design: Do not let the design of your blog get you bogged down. Pick one of the many existing templates out there that are free (or close to it) and get started. You can always change templates later. Besides, blogs are fundamentally about content. Aesthetics help, but your main focus should be on authoring great content.
- Not Telling Anyone About It: The best way to get a new blog launched is to tell people that you have a blog. Many people are reluctant to do this because it seems vain or boastful. As long as you are sending the notification to people that have an interest in your topic, there is nothing wrong with it. Talk about it in your company newsletter, share it on Facebook and LinkedIn, and include your RSS feed on each of your profiles. Spend time finding ways to get the word out!
- Getting Discouraged Too Early: Most things in life worth doing take time. Blogging is no different. You should give yourself six months (perhaps even a year) to determine what kind of interest there is before giving up due to lack of traffic. Early momentum is hard, but once things start moving, lots of things will start working in your favor.
- Too Many Blidgets: Given how easy it is to add various blog widgets to your blog, it is tempting to go overboard. Resist the temptation. Focus on the basics: content, comments, categories and perhaps a blog roll. Save the fancy stuff for later.
- Never Actually Launching It: This is likely the most common mistake. You have been meaning to get your blog kicked off. You may have even authored your first article. Guess what? It is not a blog until you actually publish something.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

It is most important to get started. Consider queuing up a few articles in advance to help maintain a regular posting schedule to fill in the times you are busy or have writer's block. Include calls to action in your posts—appropriate offers that supplement your content. This is how you obtain business value from your efforts. 

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