

HOW TO

VERSION 2.0

BLOG

* WITHOUT SELLING YOUR SOUL!

BUILD AN AUDIENCE,
BOOST YOUR TRAFFIC
AND KICK-START YOUR
BRAND OR BUSINESS*



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1. INTRO- DUCTION

WHY BLOGGING IS THE BEST WAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAND OR BUSINESS

In the movie "The Social Network" young Mark Zuckerberg played by Jesse Eisen gets dumped by his girlfriend and goes home to publish some pretty rough stuff about her on his blog.

According to the real Zuckerberg, none of this is true but the image of the blog as a venting-platform for nerds and other socially awkward personalities has prevailed in many people's minds.

Blogging is like diary-writing, only public. The more personally revealing, funnier, angrier, the better. Right?

Well, there's blogging and then there's *blogging* and **blogging**.

Diaries Vs In-Depth Coverage

The Huffington Post would have never been sold for \$315 million dollars, if it weren't for the bloggers. (Also, its founder wouldn't have been sued, had she paid them better. But that's a different story.)

Journalistic blogging provides one of the best forms of in-depth coverage of any event, especially if the blogger is independent and free from editorial board constraints.

So, there are the vengeful nerds and angry geeks blogging about the highs and lows of their daily lives. This is the *subjective* approach. Then there's journalistic bloggers. That's the *objective* approach. But there's a **third kind**, as well.

Whereas the first form (blogging as public diary) and the second (blogging as news coverage) imitate earlier media, the third kind cannot be compared to any previous way, shape or form of expression.

I'm talking about the audience-builders, attention-magnets and opinion-shaping folks.

Bloggers of The Third Kind

Those are the people who use the medium of blogging unlike anyone else. They use it as an unconventional extension of their personality in a very conscious and focused way, thereby...

- creating an audience
- spreading their influence
- generating leads, sales, fans, etc.

Some people believe it's "immoral" to use blogs for business. After all, a newspaper, ok, but who would want a diary with ads in it?

That's a misunderstanding. This third kind approach to blogging is not about simply publishing sales-letters and calling them blogposts.

Instead, it's about **providing readers with as much helpful information as possible**. Period.

The business part happens when you get readers hooked. They know from experience that you deliver. This creates trust. And they are more likely to purchase products or premium services you offer or follow recommendations.

But you don't have to be a Seth Godin to benefit from this approach to blogging.

Anyone can do it. Sure, it's not easy. Especially at the beginning. But if you want to drive traffic to your homepage, get more people to sign up for something or purchase products or services, this is *way* better than spending thousands of dollars on Adwords clicks.

Why?

- **(almost) zero cost:** If you're already running a homepage somewhere, adding a blog won't cost a dime. Also, whether you write one post per week or 100 (easy, there!) won't have any impact on your wallet. If you're planning to start a new one, basic hosting packages start at around 5 dollars per month (more about this further down)
- **increased creativity and focus:** Blogging increases reflectivity about what you do.

By writing a professional blog you'll get more ideas about what you do and how to present it from as many angles as possible.

- **networking:** Facebook & LinkedIn are great, but writing a blog and connecting to your readers and other bloggers *directly* is priceless. It's the difference between running in between one-room apartments in a tenement building or throwing a pool party.

HOW TO GET STARTED: THE PREPARATION

If you look at one of the many books or blogs on blogging, what you'll find repeated over and over again is this little word: **niche**.

They tell you to find your *niche*, to research keywords based on your *niche* and network with people in your *niche*.

But what is that supposed to mean? Let's have a look at the **dictionary**:

A *niche* is...

- 1. A recess in a wall, as for holding a statue or urn.**
- 2. A cranny, hollow, or crevice, as in rock.**

"Wait a second... I don't want to network with people that **live in a rock**...", you might say.

Of course not. This is why a niche is also a "*situation or activity specially suited to a person's interests, abilities, or nature*" or "*a special area of demand for a product or service*".

The word originally comes from the old French word *nichier* which means to nest.

Why does it matter?

Here's what a lot of "Make Money by Blogging" guides say:

1. Find a special area of demand for a product or service that is suited to your interests, abilities or nature -> niche.
2. Build a blog around this niche, slap on some advertising and market the hell out of it.

There are at least two problems with this approach, here:

1. If you're reading this book you probably *already* have a special field of interest, product, service or artwork that you'd like to bring into the world
2. This book is not about making money from advertisement. Instead, it is about using

your writing *in place of* advertising, presenting what you're about and connecting to potential clients, customers or fans

Now, the term *niche* can also refer to a "gap in the market". For example, maybe the whole world is just waiting for a solar-powered electric toothbrush that reads you the morning news in the voice of Luke Skywalker. Okay, maybe not...

But people say that if you can find one of these gaps or "market niches" and fill it, you can make money, a lot, preferably.

As long as we're thinking in terms of physical products and novelty items, this is fine. But we're in the information business, here.

Blogging is about communication.

And communication does not work based on **supply & demand** or other market models. (At least not the kind of communication we're speaking about, here.)

The reason for this is that information is infinitely reproducible. In this respect, information is like energy: constantly changing form but never disappearing. (See also: Law of *Conservation of Energy* which states "that the total amount of energy in a system remains constant over time.")

In other words: Communication is the action which *moves* and *shapes* information while the total "budget" of the system stays constant.

It doesn't work on a scarcity model, where there is just never enough for everyone, although admittedly on a micro-level there are a lot of information gaps all over the planet.

But this is an educational problem, not an economical one.

One informational item, let's say the name of the Queen of England or yesterday's lottery numbers can be broadcasted to millions of people simultaneously, after which they all "have it", so to speak. The information itself doesn't get weaker through reproduction, although human communication often misshapes it.

What does that all have to do with our topic?

Let's bring it back:

For example, maybe there are already ten thousand blogs about a certain topic. That doesn't mean that you can't bring your own voice to the table and excel.

It's about the way you *shape* the information. In other words: The *how* rules over the *what*.

In total, there's never *too much* or *too little* information on any given subject. (The limitation is only imposed by time: *too much* or *too little* at a given moment in time. More about this further down.)

This is why, at least for our purposes, the term niche doesn't apply to blogging, at all. In short: Don't try to find or create a "hole in the information market". This is not how it works.

Here's an alternative suggestion, instead:

Before you start building a blog, ask yourself:

- **"Why am I doing this?"**

So, you want to build traffic, gain more potential customers and clients, make more money, etc. but beyond that - What value are you contributing? Maybe you want to provide people with materials containing tips about physical exercises and eating, enabling them to feel more comfortable in their bodies and ultimately increase their life expectancy? Maybe you want to help people reduce stress at the workplaces and offer audiobooks and other materials to increase their well-being? Maybe you want to sell music that makes people scream and shout and feel alive? Whatever it is, there should be something that you care about, personally.

This personal motivation is important because it will determine what you are going to write about and how convincing your writing is going to be.

If you're just writing something half-hearted in order to make money, this is not going to work and you might be better off doing something else.

Writing is hard work. And readers are getting pickier every day. If you don't care deeply about the topic of your writing, don't expect them to.

CONCLUSION:

Forget about thinking in terms of *niche*.

Instead, ask yourself about the personal motivation *behind* your product or your service.

It doesn't matter how big or how small the answer.

Nobody just wants to "make money". There's always something else behind it. Even the most hard-headed economist isn't making money for money's sake but for the freedoms and securities it enables.

The better you can pin-point what exactly it is that makes you excited about your products, services or artworks, the easier it'll be to blog about it.

This is a long-term process, of course. That's why it's good to start as early as possible.

HOW TO GET STARTED: THE INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Selecting A Software, Service Or Platform

There are many blog-software or so called CMS (Content-Management-Systems) that you can use.

This could be Typepad, Movable Type, Drupal, Wordpress, etc.

For most people, **Wordpress** is the best-choice.

Here are a few reasons:

- It's free
- It's simple to use and yet you can make it do almost anything by using the
- endless variety of plugins and themes, both free and premium leading to
- It fits both a beginner's needs and the world's most popular blogger's requirements, this is why
- 9 out of the TOP 20 Blogs in the world use Wordpress.

	Blog	Software
1	The Huffington Post	Movable Type
2	Gizmodo	Gawker bespoke software[1] ↗
3	TechCrunch	WordPress
4	TMZ.com	WordPress
5	Engadget	<i>Blogsmith</i>
6	Mashable	WordPress
7	The Corner	Drupal (Same CMS as National Review)
8	Boing Boing	Movable Type
9	Hot Air	WordPress
10	Gawker	Gawker bespoke software[2] ↗
11	Think Progress	WordPress
12	The Daily Dish	Typepad
13	The Daily Beast	<i>Unknown</i>
14	Newsbusters	Drupal
15	CNN Political Ticker	WordPress
16	Ezra Klein at Washington Post	<i>Unknown</i>
17	Breitbart.tv	WordPress
18	Big Government	WordPress
19	ReadWriteWeb	Movable Type
20	Matthew Yglesias	WordPress

Data: Technorati, as quoted on Wikipedia ([source](#))

IMPORTANT:

There's a difference between **wordpress.com** and **wordpress.org** and it makes up for a lot of confusion.

1. Wordpress.com is a platform where you can sign up for a free blog on *their* servers
2. Wordpress.org is the place where you can *download* the Wordpress software to use on *your own* server

Therefore a question that many beginners have is:

Should I sign up for a blog on their servers or should I host it myself?

Here's my answer:

I'd recommend signing up for wordpress.com only as a way of quickly checking out how Wordpress works. So, yes, if you have never used Wordpress before, it's simple to just head over to wordpress.com and set up a new blog. This way you can learn about the difference between posts and pages, how to use tags and categories and all the other basic stuff.

But for the long run you should definitely host the blog yourself because:

- hosting it yourself means 100 % control over each functionality and design element. (It also means more responsibility to keep it secure and running.)
- you can set up one (or more) top-level domains like *myawesomeblog.com* - Wordpress.org gives you only subdomains: *myawesomeblog.wordpress.com*. They're harder to remember and while there are offers to upgrade and attach a domain, it can be both cheaper and more convenient to host the whole blog yourself

Also it's not free, yes, but it isn't expensive, either: For roughly \$5 dollars per month you can run your own blog or website.

That's about the price of a really good coffee.

And it's really not as complicated as it sounds. In fact, self-hosting a Wordpress blog has never

been easier, since modern hosting packages come with a "one-click" install button for Wordpress. Before you sign up for a hosting service, make sure they offer this. For example, I have often used [Hostgator](#) to set up my Wordpress installation in just a few minutes. Here are two screenshots:



This is a lot easier than it used to be! When I first installed Wordpress a few years ago, I had to manually download the software from [wordpress.org](#), upload all the files to my server, create a database and then painstakingly connect it all by editing the configuration file.

As you can see in the screenshot, now you can do it all automatically with just a few clicks.

In a Nutshell:

Wordpress is one of the best ways to blog.

It's easy to use and simply looks great.

Go to wordpress.com to give it a try.

Then, find a good web host, come up with a domain-title and install your own Wordpress with one click by using a web host like [Hostgator](https://www.hostgator.com).

2. Dressing It Up

The standard theme the latest Wordpress version comes with by default is actually very good.

- It has good Typography making the text as easy on the eye as possible
- It comes with a nice header image and menu
- It has a sidebar for widgets

If you don't like it and you're into programming you can use this standard theme and modify it by editing the files in the `/wp-content/themes/[name-of-theme]` folder.

If you need help with that you can take coaching sessions with the Learn Out Live [Media](#) department. I have been coaching people myself in this matter and will continue to do so as long as my calendar allows. In the past we've seen huge successes with this program: Students/trainees have built whole online businesses from scratch in just a few months. The way it works is that people simply tell me what they want to accomplish and then I walk them through the process, step by step.

The beauty of such a one-on-one training is that

- instead of going through manuals hoping to find the answer to your question you can focus on what you need to get done as mini-projects (e.g. a customized menu, sidebar, etc.)
- instead of hiring someone to do it for you, you can learn how to do it yourself from then

on

If you want to find out more about this program, click [here](#) or book a free 20 minutes consultation session.

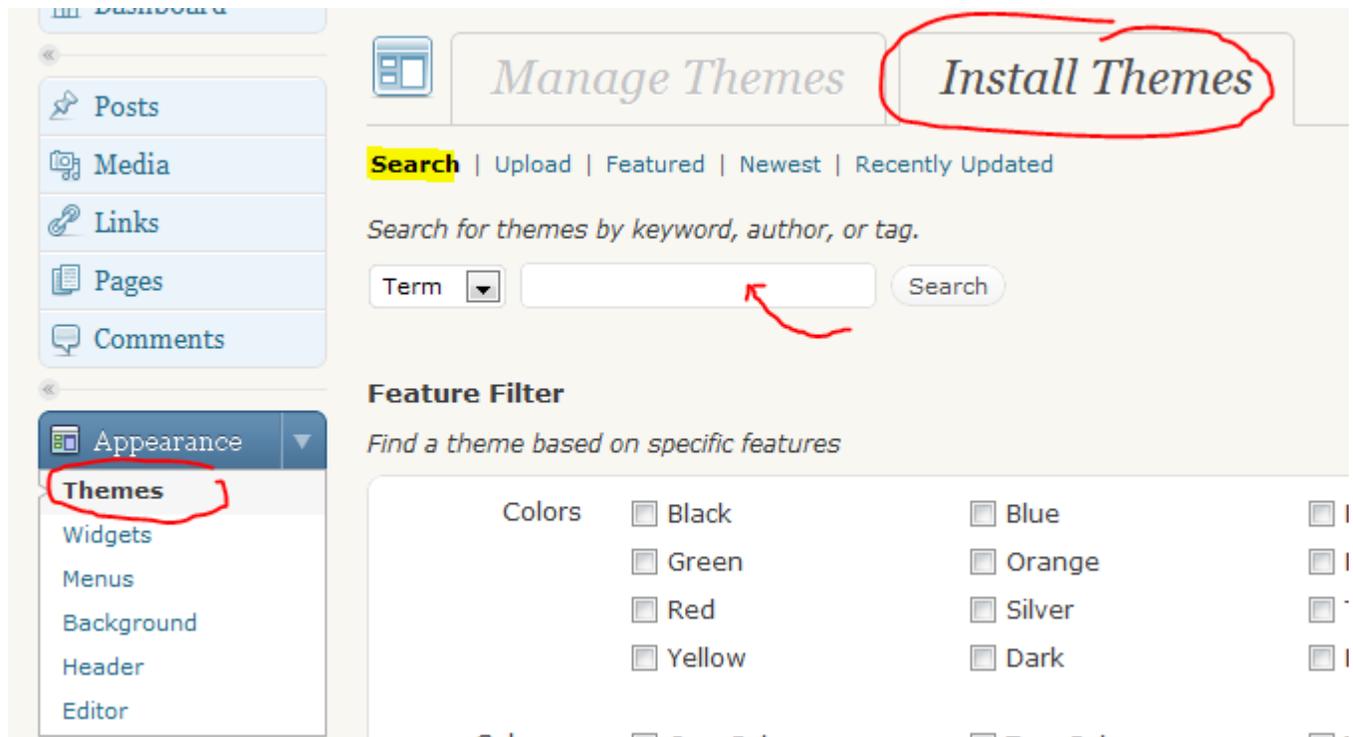
But even if you don't want to mess with the code yourself, there are lots of beautiful themes available for Wordpress. Just go to the official [directory](#) or Google "Wordpress Themes". You'll find some that are free and some that cost a few dollars.

But no matter what style you are looking for, there will be something for your project, too.

Having said that, here are a few things that you should look for in a template, free or premium:

- the chosen fonts should be comfortable to read because the core content of a blog is writing
- the main layout shouldn't be too cluttered, containing too many columns or extra widget areas that will distract people from the core content: the writing
- some themes come with special Theme Options, making it easier to control pre-selected color-schemes, columns, inserting a logo etc. without editing any code. While that isn't necessary, it can be a big plus, especially for beginners.

NOTE: The easiest way to install or search for new themes is directly from within Wordpress. Simply go to **Appearance -> Themes -> Install Themes** and upload your theme file or use the search function to find and install more themes directly from there.



3. More Features, More Fun: "There's A Plugin For That"

What you can do with Wordpress right out of the box is a lot. In fact, it covers most of the things you'll do in your day-to-day blogging.

Nevertheless, there are a few things it doesn't do:

- It doesn't allow readers to subscribe to your blog via email
- Depending on your theme, there might not be any buttons for sharing your posts through Social Networks
- There's no contact form through which people can, well ... contact you

There are of course a million different functionalities and features some people need, want or wish for their particular blogs.

But for most of them, there's a plugin.

Here's a quick list of plugins that I'd recommend for starters:

- **All in One SEO Pack**

optimizes your posts and pages for search engines

- **Akismet**

protects your blog against spam

- **Contact Form 7**

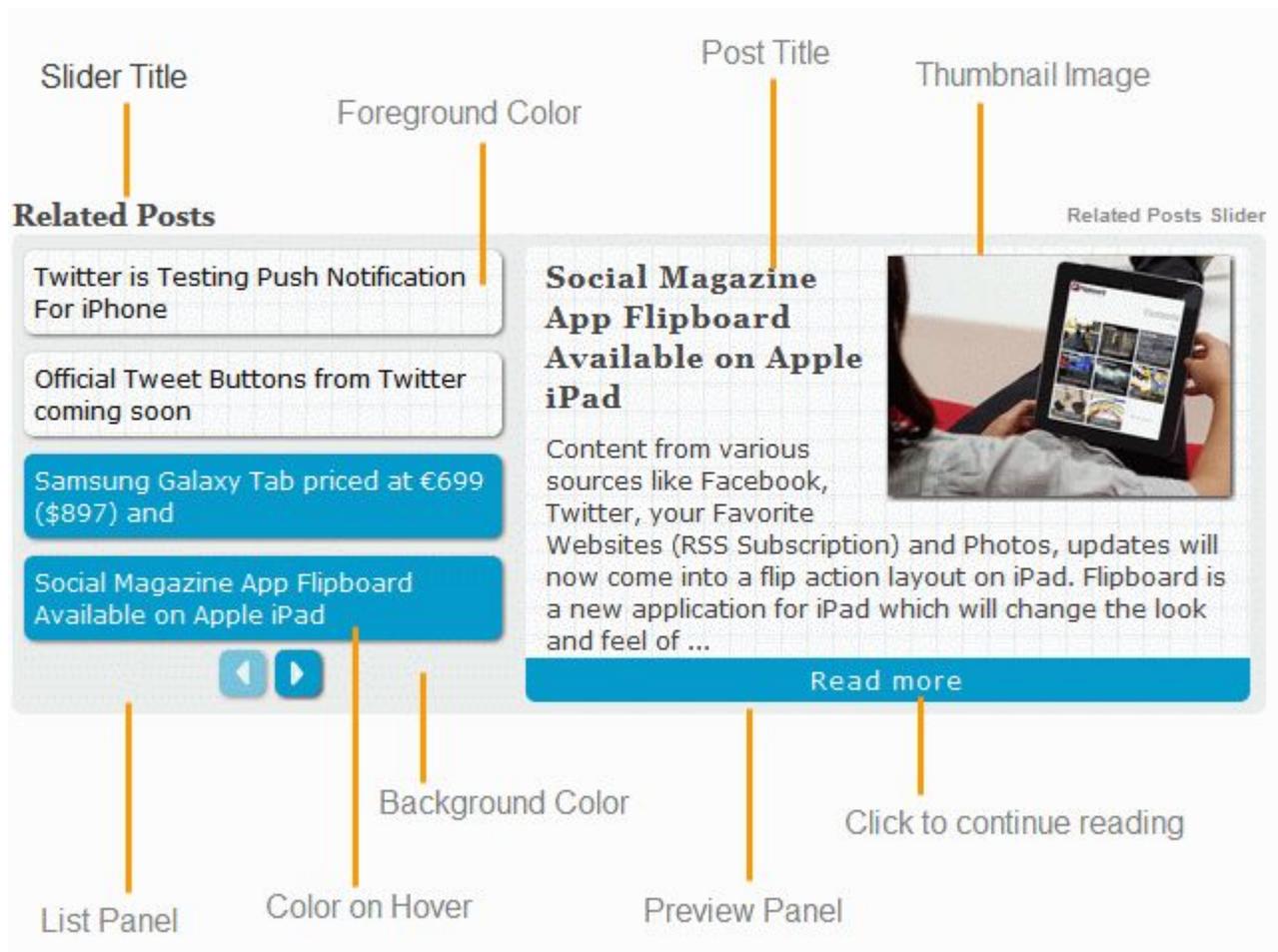
highly versatile contact form

- **Sharebar**

a simple way to add all kinds of Social sharing buttons

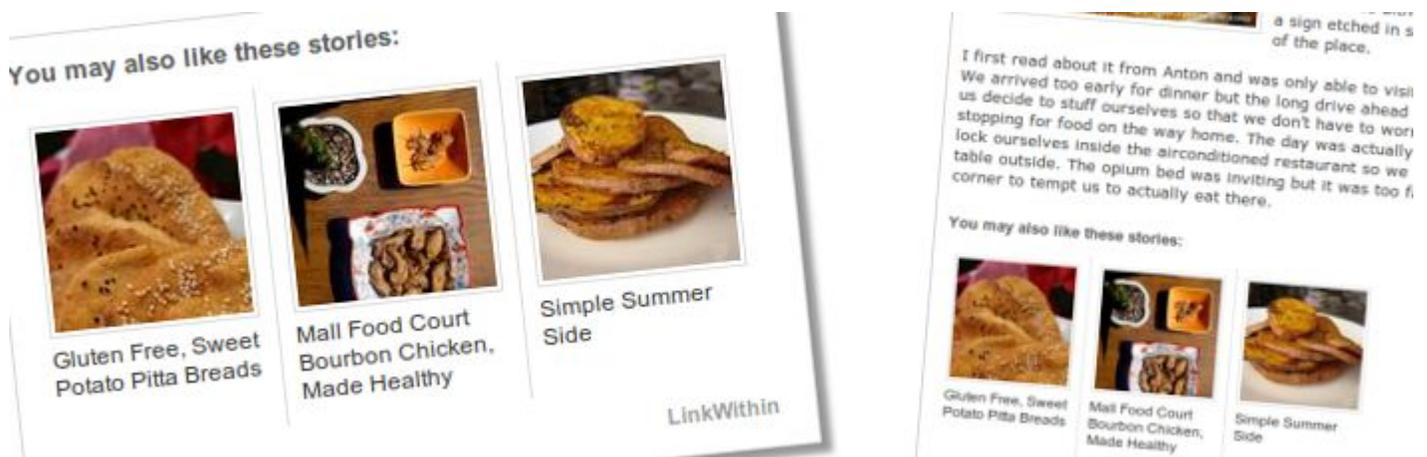
- **Related Posts Slider**

creates fancy thumbnail-galleries or advanced sliders (see official developer's screenshot) to your other articles so that visitors will even find these old gems lurking somewhere in your archive. It's a rather advanced solution, requiring a few preliminary installation steps: click here for **a manual**.



- [LinkWithin](#)

same as above but a lot easier to install - perfect for beginners. Must have! (see official screenshot from linkwithin.com)



- **Subscribe to Comments**

when a person makes a comment it allows him to enable receiving emails when other people comment on the same article. Very important for creating debates, discussion, etc.

- **W3 Total Cache**

the bigger your site gets the more important it will become to keep it running smoothly. caching plugins are a great way of reducing server load and increasing performance. W3 Total Cache is the most complete solution to all caching needs. Note: Many options will not be necessary and/or overly complex at the beginning but even with standard settings you can see huge improvements.

- **Widget Logic**

very important little plugin which adds an option of specifying for each widget (content or design elements in your sidebar) where and when to show up: Example: Maybe you want that "Recent Posts" widget only to show up on the homepage. Simply enter `"is_front_page()"` into the WidgetLogic field in the editing options (see screenshot). For a complete list of functions, consult the official "**Conditional Tags**" list.

Automatically add paragraphs

Widget logic `is_front_page()`

Delete | Close

Save

NOTE:

The easiest way to install any plugin is to go to **Plugins** in your Wordpress dashboard, click **Add New** and then use the search function. Once you've found something, you can install any plugin with one click. Couldn't be simpler. But remember to **activate** your plugins, too.

Here's how it looks like.

1. Search for a particular plugin



2. This is what the results for the search-term "Contact Form 7" would look like. Simply click "Install Now" to get started.

Search | **Search Results** | Upload | Featured | Popular | Newest | Recently Updated

Term Search Plugins

Name	Version	Rating	Description
Contact Form 7 Details Install Now	2.4.6	★★★★☆	Contact Form 7 can manage multiple c The form supports Ajax-powered subm Plugin's Official Site Contact Form 7 (http://contactform7.c Docs - FAQ - Support Contact Form 7 Needs Your Support

3. After the installation is finished, click "**Activate**"

 **Installing Plugin: Contact Form 7 2.4.6**

Downloading install package from <http://downloads.wordpress.org/plugin/contact-form-7.2.4.6.zip...>

Unpacking the package...

Installing the plugin...

Successfully installed the plugin **Contact Form 7 2.4.6**.

Actions: [Activate Plugin](#) | [Return to Plugin Installer](#)

IMPORTANT:

As for the email subscription I mentioned earlier you don't really need a plugin, although there are plugins for that, too, like [Subscribe2](#).

But the easiest way is to just use [Feedburner.com](#).

The most important thing about an email-subscription is stability. Feedburner is owned by Google so you generally don't have to worry about down-times. If you choose to manage subscriptions yourself through a plugin, sure, you can gain more controls over the minute details of it, but you also have the responsibility of keeping yet another thing running smoothly because each and every mail and update will be handled through your own server.

This is why, Feedburner will be the best choice for most of us, at least in the beginning. You can always export your list, later, if you like.

Here's how you activate Feedburner's email option:

After you've added your feed to feedburner on feedburner.com, go to **Publicize -> Email Subscriptions** and click **ACTIVATE**

Then, select all the code feedburner gives you in this box and **copy** it.

Analyze **Optimize** **Publicize** **Monetize** **Troubleshootize** My Feeds

↓ SERVICES

- Headline Animator**
Display rotating headlines
- BuzzBoost**
Republish your feed as HTML
- ✓ **Email Subscriptions**
Offer feed updates via email
- Subscription Management
- Communication Preferences
- Email Branding
- Delivery Options
- PingShot**
Notify services when you post
- FeedCount**
Show off your feed circulation
- Socialize**
Publish to the social web
- Chicklet Chooser**
- Awareness API**
- Creative Commons**
- Password Protector**
- NoIndex**

Email Subscriptions

Give your biggest fans another way to keep up with your blog or podcast feed by placing an email subscription form on your site.

Subscription Management

Subscription Form Code

Select which language you want to use in the window that appears when a potential email subscriber signs up. The selection you make immediately modifies the code to copy and paste below.

Language: ⓘ

Copy and paste the following code into any web page. Your subscription form will be automatically inserted each time the page is loaded. From there, readers can subscribe to receive daily email with your newest content.

```
<form style="border:1px solid #ccc;padding:3px;text-align:center;"
action="http://feedburner.google.com/fb/a/mailverify"
method="post" target="popupwindow"
onsubmit="window.open('http://feedburner.google.com/fb/a/mailverify?uri=LanguageNetXXY', 'popupwindow', 'scrollbars=yes,width=550,height=520');return true"><p>Enter your email address:</p><p><input type="text" style="width:140px"
```

Back in Wordpress, under **Appearance** -> **Widgets** drag a new "Text" widget onto the sidebar and **paste** the code inside it.

Text

Title:
Subscribe By Email

PASTE YOUR CODE HERE...|

Automatically add paragraphs

Widget logic

Delete | Close Save

Give it a title like "Subscribe by email", click save and that's it.

Here's how it will look like to your visitors:

Subscribe By E-Mail

Enter your email address:

[Subscribe](#)

Delivered by [FeedBurner](#)

If you add a bit of styling with CSS (advanced users only) you can turn it into something more appealing like this:

Enter your email address:



[Join Us!](#)

 **1059** subscribers

[more info ->](#)

But no matter how it looks like, anyone who's interested in receiving updates from your blog can simply enter his email address, click the button and then get a confirmation-email containing an activation link.

Now, every time you post a new article, everyone who is subscribed to your blog will get an email. Couldn't be simpler.

And since we're talking about it, already, let's look at the difference between email blog subscriptions and mailing lists.

EMAIL SHMEMAIL: NEWSLETTERS AND AUTORESPONDERS

One thing that every book, course or blog about "online marketing" tells you is that you need a mailing list.

The idea is simple: You build an email-list of potential customers by

- adding people who've done business with you before
- adding people you are in contact with that *might* be interested
- giving new people the chance to sign up for your mailing list

Then, every once in a while you send them an email about a special offer, event or other opportunity to open their wallet.

The larger your mailing list, the higher the chances to generate sales by this method.

There are (at least) three problems with this approach:

- It borders on spam if the only emails people receive from you are promotional, even if infrequently
- You need a huge mailing list for this to work out well
- There are only two ways for people to react to these emails: Either they are interested in the offer, or they aren't. The latter immediately delete the mail or unsubscribe and even a significant quantity of the first won't actually whip out their credit cards

In other words: It's completely unsustainable, especially for very small businesses and individuals.

A far better alternative is to simply offer an email subscription to your blog. It's very different.

- Subscribers get your articles delivered straight into their inbox
- These articles are helpful, informative or entertaining and free

- Once in a while, within these articles there will be a mention of your new album, product launch, etc. offering people to buy

So, whether people buy the stuff you offer once in a while, or not, you will not lose them because you provide value on a continuous basis.

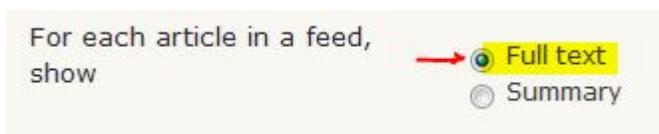
And there are other benefits, as well:

- By writing articles people get to know you and they develop trust, so that when you got something to sell, they'll already be interested because you've built yourself a reputation.
- If people don't buy, they will stay subscribed because they want to receive further articles in the future
- With each great article you write, more people will subscribe. This way your list grows itself.

NOTE:

In order for this to work you need to make sure to

1. install a form for people to sign up for updates. (see last chapter for feedburner example)
2. make this form as visible as possible
3. make sure that people always get the full article as an email, not just a summary or stub. This increases the likelihood of people actually reading what you write. In Wordpress go to **Settings** -> **Reading** and make sure "Full text" is selected where it says: "For each article in a feed, show"



There are premium solutions for organizing your mailing needs, e.g. Aweber or Mailchimp but feedburner will be enough if you just want to send out your blogposts via email.

TIP:

Especially in the beginning it can be hard to increase your subscriber count and get the blog "off the ground".

A quick way to get started is by simply offering an incentive to subscribe.

What it means is that you offer a free ebook, course or mp3 but ask people to *subscribe* in order to get it.

But you don't want to do this manually and send out a link each time there's a new subscriber.

Instead, you can use what is generally called an "Autoresponder".

What this means is simply that when people sign up for your blog they automatically get an email containing the link to the free goodies.

Advanced autoresponders come with Aweber or Mailchimp but even if you don't want to pay for a premium mailing service, there's a way to do this with feedburner, as well - which might not be perfect but I've seen it grown a list from 0 to 600 subscribers in just a few weeks!

Go to feedburner. Select your feed. Click on **PUBLICIZE** then **EMAIL Subscriptions**, and then **COMMUNICATION** Preferences. Not only can you edit the opt-in message there that people receive when they first sign up for your blog, also you can add any kinds of links, there!

The screenshot shows the 'Publicize' tab in the FeedBurner interface. The 'Email Subscriptions' option is highlighted with a red circle. The 'Communication Preferences' section is expanded, showing the following settings:

- Email "From" Address:** awesome@awesomer.com
- Confirmation Email Subject:** Activate your Email Subscription to: NEWBLOG
- Confirmation Email Body:** Hello there, -> FREE DOWNLOAD ---> [link here] You recently requested an email subscription to NEWBLOG. We can't wait to send the updates you want via email, so please click the following link to

A red arrow points to the '[link here]' placeholder in the email body text.

Again, it's not really perfect because some people might just download the free stuff without bothering to actually activate their subscription but if you want a "real" autoresponder simply sign up for Aweber, Mailchimp or similar.

CONCLUSION:

Don't waste time and effort building your email-list by hand.

Instead, focus on writing and providing great content and let people sign up for more.

Use free ebooks, guides or other downloads as an incentive to subscribe.

5 WAYS TO SELL YOUR DIGITAL GOODS ONLINE

There used to be a time when the only way to make a living as an author or musician was to go through publishing houses and labels that would help you create the work, package it, distribute it and sell it.

This way still exists but with the disappearance of **book stores** and physical music storage media like the CD, a new way of doing things is slowly emerging.

Connecting Creator & Customer

Imagine you get rid of offices filled with accountants, call-centers and marketing drones. Then, you abandon the CD factories and book printing presses. Last but not least, you throw your contract to the wind along with its deadlines.

What are you left with?

The bare minimum: An individual who creates stuff – and a world that is always hungry for awesomeness.

Since we don't have a factory anymore, there is no physical artifice.

But this is no problem because as a writer or musician you'll probably use computers as part of your creative process so that even before the physical product, there's the ***Digital Download***.

From Conception to Consumption

Now, the question is how to get the good stuff out to the people who want it.

There's no marketing department. No advertisement budget. No sales people. You're on your own.

And it's not that bad, actually!

You simply have to come up with an alternative that maximizes the effect while using as little time and effort as possible.

Blogging can be a great way to drive attention without spending a dime on ads.

But once the attention is there, how to actually sell your goods?

There are many ways. Here's a small selection:

5 Services That Let You Sell Your Digital Goods

tinypay.me

If you're just looking for a quick way to sell something, tinypay is a simple solution.

There's no need for a user account (you can collect payments by PayPal) and there are no fees (it's free, at least for now)

Also, there is no customizable shopping cart, all customers have to go through the tinypay website.

But it's a great way to start!

pulleyapp.com

This is another minimalist approach. It's not free (starting at \$6 per month) But it comes with an embeddable "buy now" button that you can put anywhere. Your customers will never even notice that they're going through pulleyapp. All they do is pay and get the goods delivered automatically in a customizable email.

getdpd.com

Digital Product Delivery is a complete digital goods solution with all the bells and whistles. It starts at \$5 dollars per month and it supports all major payment providers from Paypal to Google Checkout, 2checkout and AlertPay. On top of that they offer complete mailing list integration, their own WordPress Plugin and allow you to run your own affiliate system and much more. It's one of the most comprehensive digital sales services I've seen, so far. To be-

ginners, the multitude of different options and features might seem overwhelming. But if you want to go pro, DPD is a good choice.

e-junkie.com

E-junkie is another comprehensive solution, also starting at \$5 dollars per month. Its user-interface isn't as streamlined as DPD and its features are fewer but focused on the essentials. E-junkie supports all major payment services, offers coupon codes and its own affiliate and newsletter service. Where DPD might seem to have too many options, e-junkie's user-interface is a bit confusing – but it *does* deliver once you've understood how it works. Essentially, it's a rather minimal approach but with all the major features.

digitaldeliveryapp.com

This is another allround solution starting at \$9 per month, making it the most expensive in our list but also it's the only service that doesn't charge you if you don't sell anything! Also, they have all the features one could wish for from subscription based access to testing your products before even creating them, PDF stamping and much much more. Personally, I think their interface is very nice and clean, organizing the many features in a way which is not too overwhelming.

Conclusion

What's the best one?

It depends on a) what you are trying to do and b) willing to pay per month.

If you're just selling one item, the first two easier solutions might save you some time and confusion.

If you are planning to build your own little digital warehouse and offer a variety of different products in different combinations with discounts and all the rest, you should pick one of the last three.

Most of them offer a free trial, so you can get acquainted with all of them before you pay for something.

NOTE: Even if you have selected one of these services, learned how to use them and integrated them into your webpage, this doesn't mean that your products will automatically sell. You are going to need some kind of strategy to get the word out. And the most solid way of doing this is by writing! Yes, you heard right. But not just any kind of writing....

2. WRITING

HOW TO WRITE YOURSELF OUT OF OBSCURITY

The Internet allows almost anyone to say almost anything.

This is why it can be very hard to get *heard*, sometimes.

There's quite a lot of *noise*.

For each wildly popular website there are tens of thousands that lie in obscurity.

But what is the difference between those that succeed and those that fail?

The answer: good writing.

Yes, despite the stereotype of the “poor starving writer” or the lamentations about deterioration of language due to texting and Twitter, good writing hasn't faded out of fashion with the Internet.

In fact, it has become more important than ever before.

Advertisement Is Dead, Long Live The Written Word

When I first started publishing things online back in the 90ies I often had the feeling that whatever I put on the Net just sort of sat there and caught digital dust.

Unless I told my friends to go and visit my webpage, nobody even knew it existed.

This was before the word *Google* was the answer to everything.

And with Google came online advertising in a scale never dreamed of before.

Since now there was a search engine that everyone was using, you could pay them to show your webpage when people searched for something.

But the more knowledgeable people became about using Google, the difference between advertised listings and “real” findings based on their keywords became more and more evident.

This and the fact that more and more people were advertising made it harder and harder to get great results for your advertisement money.

Especially for small companies and individuals it is unrealistic to spend hundreds of dollars on advertising costs every day.

Luckily, there is an alternative: Instead of paying for advertising that wastes your money and your time, you can **let your writing do the talking for you.**

If Content Is King, Copy Is Crown

A person who writes texts that get people to do specific actions is called **a copywriter.**

It's not a flattering title, is it? Like the term *ghostwriter* it implies something second-handed or outright shady.

After all, “a person who gets people to do things” – that sounds rather manipulative, doesn't it?

But it has nothing to do with hypnosis, neither does it have to be unoriginal or based on dubious ethics.

Good copy-writing makes the difference between a text that's merely informative and one that makes the reader want to jump in and participate.

It's a craft, a type of writing, not as glamorous as writing novels maybe – but just as important.

Because by learning this craft you can promote everything from the next concert of your best friend's band to that novel which is sitting somewhere in your drawer. (Does anybody actually *do* this anymore?)

Blogging Up Steam

Now, there's a common misconception that copy-writing is a form of writing which is hiding its real intentions, that it's just buttering up the reader with sweet words while simultaneously

eyeing his wallet.

We all know these kind of texts. You can find them everywhere from supermarket brochures to hotel descriptions.

And this is where the narrow term or definition of *copy-writing* broadens into the more dynamic *content-writing*.

If copy-writing is text that makes you click on a button and buy something, content-writing is the kind of text that is

- as informative as an encyclopedia (but narrowed down to the essentials)
- as entertaining as your favorite TV-series (but without the canned laughter)
- as helpful as a conversation with a good friend or coach

It is this kind of approach to writing that can virtually promote anything without either coming off as promotional or pushy.

Two years ago, I stopped fooling around with paying for advertisements altogether and have since then been increasingly relying on *content writing* as way to help spread the word about my online projects.

The good news: It works a lot better *and* brings not just more customers and readers but is also free.

Still, writing is hard work, of course.

BRILLIANT TOOLS FOR DISTRACTION-FREE WRITING

"Too much of a good thing is not a good thing."

Recent studies show that the brain can only focus on two given tasks at the same time. Also, those tasks mustn't be too distinct.

We are in fact very limited.

But it doesn't stop us from doing too many things at the same time like talking on the phone while driving a car, drinking coffee, playing with the navigation device, listening to music and shifting gears, or does it?

Where did the Road Go?

Did it ever happen to you that you got distracted by an incoming instant message or a popup notification so completely that you totally forgot what you were doing at the moment? (We won't tell anyone if you say yes.)

It happens to be the best of us.

And it's a guarantee for becoming agitated and unproductive.

It's not impossible to stop the habit of being constantly distracted in the name of "keeping tabs" on too many things at the same time. But it takes time. And discipline. Lots of.

And Deliver Us from Uncontrolled Multitasking...

Every once in a while, there comes along a little piece of software promising to help us in our daily struggle against the lifestyle of distraction.

WriteMonkey is such a software. It's free. It's simple. And it promises one thing and one thing only: Distraction-Free Writing.

How does it look like? Well, it doesn't.

It's just an almost black (super-dark green) screen with olive letters. Yes, it does remind of early computing terminals and has a nice side-effect of nostalgia and if you like you can even enable typewriter sounds. There's nothing like that satisfying **ding** after hitting Enter, is there?

But don't be mistaken. This is not a clumsily put-together toy with zero substance:

If you pop the hood you can change any of **WriteMonkey**'s gazillion settings from obvious stuff like font-settings to more complex options like character-sets and jump masks.

Customizing until the Cows Come Home

Here are a only a few of the many awesome features:

- You can set it to **autosave and auto re-open** whatever you were last working on so that you can focus on the writing while WriteMonkey takes care of the rest.
- Every good article needs **structure**. Sub-headers, emphasis with **bold** and *italic*, etc. Instead of having to click something or enter HTML codes, WriteMonkey comes with its own markup language, which takes a bit to learn but rapidly increases productivity. Hit F1 (help) at anytime to see the complete syntax
- Despite of the adrenaline rush good writing can bring, it is work. Hard work. Write-Monkey comes with a **progress bar** (deactivated by default) so that you can track how far or close you are from that 600 word goal by watching an unobtrusive line grow at the bottom of your screen.
- **Spell-Checking**. Yes, it has. None of this annoying squiggly red-line business though. Simply run it when done. Replace words. Voilà!
- Something not so obvious is that it comes with a pre-configured set of so-called "**lookups**" so that if you mark a word or phrase in your text and hit a certain hotkey configuration a browser window pops up showing you the Wikipedia or dictionary (or any other site's) entry related to what you marked. Without you having to type in anything. Pretty awesome, huh?

A Serious Software For Serious Writers

When I first fired it up I looked a bit deeper into the options that **WriteMonkey** has to offer. And this is what you have to do as well if you want to use it to its fullest extent

In other words: WriteMonkey is a simple but **serious software for serious people** who have only one goal: **getting good writing done**.

That doesn't mean that you can't use it just for fun, enjoying the rush of *typing*. And in this respect I would recommend WriteMonkey to everyone who would *like* to write but feels difficulties to get started: It's a matter of practice, sitting down everyday and just writing. So it's a good exercise to just start writing without bothering about the outcomes at first. In this respect, WriteMonkey is a perfect training tool, as well.

My experience with it is very positive so far and I'll continue using it for now. In many ways it's not WYSIWYG and feels like a step back into archaic times before graphical user interfaces, so it does take some time to get used to.

But it does deliver. It's good on the eyes. Formatting has never been more hassle-free. And contrary to most Office softwares it actually *motivates* you to write!

So far WriteMonkey is only available for Windows. You can download it [here](#). It doesn't need an install. So it's completely mobile. If you're on a Mac you should check out **WriteRoom** by Hogbaysoftware, instead.

Time to say goodbye to distraction and step into *the zone*!

P.S: Keep in mind that if you want to use WriteMonkey for blogging there's no direct way to publish to the Net. You'll have to copy and paste to Wordpress. If you study the formatting options of WriteMonkey (you can make something italic by writing `_italic_` and bold by `*bold*`, etc) and practice a bit you can do all of this without changing a single letter, afterwards.

7 WAYS TO WRITE EYE-CATCHING HEADLINES

A good headline is what makes the difference between an article being read or ignored.

Even more so, if you are writing blogposts.

To Click Or Not To Click

The headline is the only part that most people will ever see of your writing! It might appear in their Social Stream, in their email inbox or somewhere else and in the few split seconds of skimming it, the fate of your article gets decided.

If your writing is solid gold but the headline is less than mediocre, you're actively blocking it from being read!

A great headline is like the store-front of a restaurant. It's meant to get people to *come inside!*

But what are the mechanics behind a good headline? And how to write them?

Training, Not Talent

Bill Walsh, copy chief at *The Washington Post* once said:

“ *Writing headlines is a specialty - there are outstanding writers who will tell you they couldn't write a headline to save their lives.*”

While there is a certain truth to that, it's not entirely like that, of course.

Like anything else, writing headlines can be learned.

Here are a few pointers to get you started.

1. Stirring Interest And Rolling Out The Red Carpet

The most important aspect of your headline should be to generate interest. Don't be afraid to try something funny or a bit controversial. Almost anything goes, here, as long as you don't

mislead readers. Nobody wants to eat at a restaurant that promises "The Biggest Steaks in Town" on the outside and sells only vegan mock-up meat inside, or vice versa! But more about this in the next point.

2. Making a Promise And Sticking To It

At the core of each headline there is a simple **promise**. This is why "How-To" headlines are so effective: They promise **specific information** *inside*. Furthermore, they imply a simple **process** that anyone can follow as in "How to Fix A Broken Tire". Another popular way to start a headline is with "Why", as in "Why Most People Fail At Chess". These headlines clearly promise to give answers.

But even if headlines don't start with "How To" or "Why" they all still dangle a carrot in front of the reader's eyes. Whatever you do, make sure to deliver on your promise! At least in some way! A good way to do this is to...

3. Write your Headline First

This is a no-brainer but very effective! The reason for writing your headline first is that once you have set up a precise promise you can cater to it directly, word by word, whereas if you write the article first you might get a headache later, trying to find out just what kind of promise it is you're catering to...

4. Three Reasons Why Lists Always Work

Another sure-fire way to write headlines that work is to use lists. Yes, you've seen these everywhere. For a simple reason: They work. But why don't content writers ever seem get tired of them?

- a list sets up a promise that is very easy to fulfill. (Readers might not agree with the "five reasons" or "7 steps" you give but at least they don't feel misled)
- it implies a bullet-point list with clear digestible information
- it promises the reader that she doesn't have to read the whole article but can skim over the bullet-points

5. Simplicity

This is actually one of the most difficult parts. Don't write headlines that contain too many "big words". Not everyone knows that the word oxymoron has nothing at all to do with a moron, for example. As a general rule, if you write at a 8th or 9th grade level you can make sure that most of what you say will be understood. This is not just true for headlines, by the way. Sometimes, it's better to simplify your vocabulary, especially if you are writing for a big audience. Most ideas can be expressed in very simple words, so there is no excuse to hide behind the dictionary.

In the same vein, avoid puns in your headlines, as clever as they may seem to you. Again, for most people the headline will be the only part of your article they'll ever read. Irony can easily fail when seen out of context. Instead, write headlines that spell out the promise as clearly as possible without complicated words or ambiguity. If you couple this principle with offering answers to questions that many people ask themselves, your headline will be a sure success.

6. Message In A Bottle

I've said this before but I want to repeat it: Your headlines will mostly be read outside of your blog. They will be squeezed in between a million other unrelated bits of information by other people. It has to be able to stand and *walk* on its own.

Therefore, when you write the headline, use the "Message in A Bottle" scenario and ask: What would a person think that reads this, somewhere far away without any hints as to who wrote this message or in which context it belongs. If you can come up with clear answers, there's a good chance that your headline works.

7. Examples, Examples

Look at what others are doing. Develop an eye for headlines. What works for you? What doesn't? Look at newspapers and blogs all over the place. Then, look at some more. Imitate, modify, experiment. Click [here](#) for an interesting study on how Copyblogger, a famous copy-writing blog, uses headlines.

3 QUICK WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

A good friend of mine once said: **“Every day I write is a good day.”**

And after more than ten years of writing I still agree with this statement.

Writing is great. But it’s also hard work.

According to **Malcom Gladwell**, to become an expert in anything you need to invest at least 10,000 hours. While that is somewhat an arbitrary number and implies that genius or expertise can be manufactured according to a formula, there is a certain truth in it, nevertheless:

In order to become good at anything, not just satisfactory but really good you need to invest a lot of time and effort.

1. Regularity

“ Unless you’re disciplined, all you end up with is a lot of empty wine bottles. All through my career I’ve written 1,000 words a day – even if I’ve got a hangover. You’ve got to discipline yourself if you’re a professional. There’s no other way. J.G Ballard

If you want a formula that separates serious writers from those who prefer *calling* themselves writers to the actual writing-process, this is it.

I would add to this that it doesn’t really matter how many words you write or what your interval is.

You could write 500 words every second day or 200 per day, the main thing is that you stick to *some* kind of discipline.

In other words: If you’re not working according to a deadline provided by your publisher or employer, set yourself one.

It will become a *life-line*.

Sometimes, it won’t be necessary to follow the pattern because you’re doing it automatically.

But there will be other days on which you'll want nothing less than to sit down and write.

These are the days where it matters most.

The result doesn't have to be excellent. The main thing is to *keep going*.

On good days you'll effortlessly shoot beyond your self-imposed word-count, on others you'll struggle to even reach it and gladly put the pen down (or close the lid of your laptop) once you're done.

In any case, this discipline gives you an important yard-stick to measure your performance, not its quality necessarily but its continuity.

2. Less Internet

The problem with over-using the Internet or computers is not that it's necessarily bad for the eyes or that too much sitting will kill your back, although this is probably true, as well.

There's a deeper reason why, if you want to write professionally, the Internet can become your worst enemy.

Services like Facebook let your executive brain off the hook:

“ The planning and execution of any task involves the processing of information by multiple brain regions and circuits acting in parallel. Cognitive tasks require the brain to select and configure the appropriate data processing resources; a 'task set' controls the moment-to-moment processing of data involved in the execution of a particular task. ([source](#))

Put simply, if you keep clicking *Like*, *Tweet* or *Stumble* too many times a day, your brain will enter a passive mode where there's little or no conscious decision, evaluation because **reactivity rules**.

Remember the saying:” Google before you Tweet is the new think before you speak”?

For more information about this, see also [A Mindful Guide To Social Media](#).

3. More Books

“ “I cannot remember the books I’ve read any more than the meals I have eaten; even so, they have made me.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

This is simple but powerful. The better the quality of the input, the better the output, at least in theory.

It doesn’t mean that if you read 100 pages of Shakespeare every day you’ll become a Shakespeare, yourself.

No. It’s more like this:

By putting high quality material into your brain, it challenges the processing, thereby improving it.

Seemingly simple, reading is an infinitely complex procedure.

The way we process words into feeling and images is developing the more we nurture it.

In other words: If you are constantly engulfed in great writing, the way you process words will be sharpened and alert, a tool that you can apply to your own sentences to diagnose why one thing works and another one doesn’t.

HOW TO MEASURE GOOD WRITING?

While the intrinsic quality of a text cannot be measured quantitatively without asking people directly, there are certain factors to be taken in consideration. Here are a few:

Traffic

Everybody wants traffic. Let's say you write an article and it gets a lot of hits.

While that is always nice, it doesn't necessarily mean that the article is being visited for the writing.

I've seen examples where a certain article suddenly started receiving lots of traffic but when I looked into the statistics it turned out all the hits were coming through Google Images! Meaning: my article was ranking high for the search-keyword of the image (let's say it was an image of a hat called *brown_hat.jpg*) and while lots of people were looking for "brown hat" and finding my site, statistics showed that the average duration of visits was below 2 seconds and most of the visitors were leaving immediately after looking at the hat or downloading it for their own purposes.

Another case would be where you have an article about a person called "Timothy Thomas" and lots of people start visiting your site because another completely unrelated person who also happens to be called "Timothy Thomas" suddenly hits the headlines. Also here, while the visitor-count may be high, duration of visit will be low and most visitors will drop off immediately after finding out your article is about another person.

CONCLUSION:

Traffic is nice. But more visitors don't necessarily mean more quality interest in your content.

To find out more about your visitors use a tool like [Google Analytics](#) to look deeper into the numbers *behind* the visitors. I don't recommend over-doing this, though. It's a science for itself and it should not overshadow the actual writing and commitment to provide quality content. If you need help with using Analytics, check out this [Beginner's Guide](#).

While the cases stated above seem somewhat irregular they are actually very common. People will stumble over your articles from every corner of the Net. And very often, there isn't even a connection. Imagine how many times you do a search and find a page which in some way is just irrelevant, so you close it immediately.

The same holds true for your visitors.

Therefore, hunting traffic shouldn't be the highest aim.

It's better to have low visitor-counts where a significant quantity actually *reads* and browses your site than thousands of hits that "jump ship" immediately.

Comments

Comments are part of what is generally called "Social Proof", meaning if a blog has a lot of comments it must be somehow worthy of attention, so people will be more ready to read it.

But there's a problem with that:

A lot of comments don't prove that the content is great.

It could be the complete opposite! There are some videos on YouTube, for example, that according to the number of comments (and views = hits) are very popular but if you first read the comments and then watch the video you'll find out that the number of comments is so high because the content-quality is so low!

Put simply: If you upset people on your blog either by the way you write or through the images you use, there will be a lot of comments. Part of them will be by people who are upset. Part of them by people who will respond to the latter. When the frequency of comments dies down you can jump in again and cause more inflammatory messages.

NOTE: This is not an invitation to upset people! It's true that a little controversy can go a long way. But it's not true that bad comments are better than none at all.

It's a common practice of bloggers to write in an open-ended way in order to invite readers to complete the piece, add their opinions, etc.

While this *does* guarantee a certain likelihood of more and (hopefully) qualitative replies it's not necessarily a guarantee for great writing, either.

It's like when your history teacher gives you an F, saying: "Your essay about the Civil War was well-written but you completely forgot to mention the British." and you say: "I deliberately left this out to invite reader participation."

Of course there's a difference between writing for a teacher or your audience. But the point is that whatever you left out, you cannot claim having thought of, later.

Your article has to be taken at face-value.

If the author left something out, for whatever reason, it's his responsibility.

Personally, as a reader I don't want to rely on an author's readership to complete an issue. That's like relying on an opera-house audience to complete the lyrics that are missing on stage.

If on the other hand you *did* make sure to write a complete article and a commenter finds a serious error or important missing link, don't worry about it. Simply say thanks and edit your post, adding the missing information marked by a little "**update:**".

CONCLUSION:

If someone reacts with a well-written comment it means that she considers the issue important enough to add something of her own. That's great! And you can reply to these comments once in a while by answering questions or addressing the issue from a different angle.

Nevertheless, different people consider different things "important". Therefore it's easy to get comments by writing about what celebrity X did on the weekend, for example.

Also, it feels good to receive little "Thank You" and "Great Article!" comments once in a while.

But writing for comments should never be the aim.

Social Media Shares

Another way to measure popularity is by looking at Facebook Shares, Likes, Tweets, etc.

The problem with those is that the threshold of clicking Like or Tweet is significantly low.

And since the required effort is minimal, people tend to do it a lot, even without ever having fully read the article - just because someone else posted it or because they like the image or what they imagine the headline to be about.

Social Shares are great because they distribute your articles across a wide range of potential readers, eventually reaching the right people.

But if comments are low-hanging fruit, Social Shares are even lower.

It's easy to post a half-funny, half-offensive picture with your blogpost and make it go "viral" with likes and tweets.

But even if you get a lot of shares, it doesn't mean that people actually care or that they will remember it a few hours from then.

Subscribers

If there's a number to take as a yard-stick for your blogging success, your subscriber count is a more dependable figure.

If someone subscribes to your blog he has made a conscious decision to "want more".

Whether it is via a feed-reader or via email, by subscribing to your blog a reader is basically saying: "I've read what you've written before. I saw value in it. Therefore, I trust that you will deliver the same value in the future."

This is the ideal situation, of course.

There'll always be people who subscribe and never read the updates.

But from all of the above factors, the subscriber count is one of the more reliable ones, espe-

cially if you want to track the growth of your audience.

To be more precise: Taking all the factors into consideration - traffic, comments, social shares and subscriber count - is still the best.

There are certain patterns and situations that can be used for troubleshooting.

Examples:

- a) If your traffic is high but there are almost no comments, social shares or subscribers - maybe you're ranking high on Google for the wrong keywords and most visits are accidental.
- b) If your social shares are very high but you never get any comments or subscribers, maybe the content-quality is too low to push people over a certain threshold of action
- c) If you get a lot of comments but your subscriber count isn't growing, maybe people aren't leaving those comments for the best of reasons.

18 WORDPRESS SHORTCUTS THAT WILL HELP YOU TO WRITE MORE AND CLICK LESS

Have you ever looked over the shoulder of a photoshop-wiz?

The best of them never even touch the upper menu with their mouse cursor but accomplish everything with esoteric short-cut functions that (sometimes) include intricate finger-ballet and often look like being dangerously close to muscle-cramp!

But it's not just Photoshop. The productivity of any creative software can be radically improved by learning a few simple shortcuts.

It's the same with WordPress.

Here are a few shortcuts that allow you to continue hacking away in a flurry without ever having to move your hands out of their ready-set-type position.

Quick And Easy

Bold: CTRL+b **example**

Italics: CTRL+i *example*

Underline: CTRL+u example

(NOTE: These three are supported by most Office and text-processing software, as well.)

H1 Header: CTRL+1

H2 Header: CTRL+2

H3 Header: CTRL+3

etc...

(depending on your stylesheet not all of them may be supported)

Undo: CTRL+z

Redo: CTRL+y

Link: Alt+SHIFT+a

Intermediate to Esoteric

Strikethrough: Alt+SHIFT+d example

Blockquote: Alt+SHIFT+q (again, depends on the stylesheet)

Read More: Alt+SHIFT+t (creates this little “read more” link)

Unordered List (ul): Alt+SHIFT+u e.g. lists with bullet points

Ordered List (ol): Alt+SHIFT+o lists with numbers

Align Left: Alt+SHIFT+l

Align Center: Alt+SHIFT+c

Align Right: Alt+SHIFT+r

Insert img URL: ALT-SHIFT-m

PLEASE NOTE:

Depending on your WordPress version and browser, the functionality of these shortcuts may vary. I tested all of the above on Chrome and apparently there are even more but some of them I couldn't get to work so I didn't list them.

To be quite frank, usually I never use more than those listed under Quick & Easy, myself. But having that bold, italic and underline button right at your fingertips plus being able to quickly insert headers makes the formatting a lot easier.

P.S:

All of the above shortcuts work only on the edit post or page screen. There are also special shortcuts for moderating comments. See [here](#) for more.

P.P.S:

If after all of that you still can't get enough of shortcuts for WordPress, check out this [plugin](#).

Happy Typing!

3. DESIGN

HOW TO CREATE A CUSTOM WORDPRESS THEME IN 7 MINUTES WITHOUT ANY CODE

Anyone who has ever set up a WordPress site knows the challenge of finding the right theme.

There are basically three options:

1. Go theme-hunting on Google. Wade through endless galleries of (mediocre or worse) themes until your eyes hurt or you find the right one.
2. Buy a premium design that (hopefully) doesn't look like all the rest
3. Design your Own

If you want complete control, the last one is obviously the best.

But the learning-curve used to be pretty steep.

Choking Hazards & Coding Horror

When I was working as a web-designer I used to receive sketches by clients and then transferred these to WordPress.

It took me a few years to learn how to do it because it requires:

- solid knowledge of CSS
- ability to produce valid XHTML
- deep understanding of core WordPress structures
- general grasp of PHP and how it pertains to WP

I suffered countless sleepless nights before I got the hang of it.

Simply knowing CSS, PHP or HTML is not enough. The trick is to know how to fit all the pieces together in the WordPress environment.

In my job as a **WordPress coach** I teach people exactly that.

And, to be quite frank, with absolutely no coding knowledge it takes years before a person is able to create a complete custom WordPress theme from scratch.

So most people just stick with their free or premium theme and do a bit of customizations here and there. It's a step-by-step process. Learning as you go along: How to change that darn background color, how to move the menu, remove the footer, etc.

But there is hope...

And, no – I'm sorry, you can't simply download the gamut of knowledge into your brain like Neo does in The Matrix.

If you want to become a real pro, you'll eventually have to deal with code.

If not, you can still create your own basic custom WordPress theme, however.

Creating A Custom WordPress Theme Without Coding

Recently, I stumbled over a website that promises (like many others) to enable creating WordPress themes without any coding knowledge.

There are many scams in this field, trying to make a quick buck based on half-baked scripts.

This one is different, though. It actually delivers. And it's free!

The website is called Lubith and its developer writes:

“ Lubith came to life because of my desire to optimize my work as a web programmer. I wanted to find a faster way to create layouts for web sites according to the graphic provided by the web designer. I had a browse for solutions on the internet but the instruments I found were not good enough.

It seems to me that this is what makes **Lubith** special: The drive behind it is to make developing custom themes easier, not to pull money out of people's pockets.

What I've seen of it so far works very well. So well, in fact, that you wonder why it's free...

Maybe it won't in the future...So go and check it out now.

Lubith allows you to do almost anything necessary to produce a nice theme or at least the basic layout of one you can later spice up with some fancy scripts.

When you're done designing, simply download your packaged theme and beam it up to your WordPress server.

Please note that Lubith mainly deals with the broader aspects of your template. If you want to change the way your comment section looks, add author profiles, create dynamic sidebars or work with different page templates, may the Coding Gods be with you... If you need further assistance or help, [click here](#) to visit our WordPress Coaching department. (20 mins free consultation session included)

Having said that, Lubith is a great way to get something up and running fast.

The way it work is simple. The buttons are fairly self-explanatory.

However, I highly recommend watching this [tutorial](#) first!

A PICTURE SAYS MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS

It's a cliché, I know.

That doesn't make it less true, though.

Whereas the headline is the only thing most people will ever see of your article, the image is a close second.

Here's an example:

Your reader sees the headline either in his Social Streams, in his feedreader, inbox or search results.

If the headline is both well-composed and matches what he's looking for in that given moment, he will click through.

But the moment your page is loading, another crucial decision is being made based on visual information.

If the text *looks* too long or somehow *cluttered*, at best he might start reading but will lose interest along the way.

At worst, he will just close the page immediately.

While it is important to have a clear layout without too much clutter both outside the article in terms of the general design and inside of it in terms of sub-headers, etc - a little picture in your article goes a long way of talking straight to your reader's emotions.

That implies, of course, that you did include an image in your post in the first place.

Here's why you should always add a photo or illustration to your articles:

- it can help make the process of reading seem less daunting. After all, people read a lot during the day and looking at a huge block of "naked" text can be discouraging.
- a picture can help to set the *tone* of your article, either in terms of *mood* or by con-

veying a core idea or concept. This way, a reader can decide "at a glance" whether she wants to read the whole thing or not.

- when sharing your article across platforms like Facebook, an image can help distinguish your articles among the flood of status updates, holiday photos and whatnot
- an image is the non-verbal part of the article, underlining, contradicting or extending the ideas within your words. In this respect, it should deserve just as much attention as the actual writing, itself.

How To Select A Good Picture

Which kind of picture you are going to choose for your article depends highly on the actual content of the article, of course.

Nevertheless, there are certain principles:

- pictures with a certain sense of "warmth" always work well. That means, try to select pictures in terms of *feeling*. Sometimes the general mood of a picture is more important than its actual content.
- don't try to enforce a linear connection at all times: Sometimes, if you write about mountains you'll find a great mountain-picture (1:1 relation), at other times an image of clouds, sky or something completely different might be a better choice. Again, look for the right *mood*, first.
- humorous images are always great (unless your topic is super-serious, of course). This could mean using a comic, illustration or photo with a funny aspect that can pave the way for your article.
- the best images are those that encapsulate a core statement or insight of your article in an almost symbolical way. It doesn't always work but sometimes image and text just *snap*. An interesting approach to this is looking at how language creates visuals as in sayings like "go the extra mile", "as sick as a dog" or "flash in a pan". The connection between the explicit meaning of these idioms and the images they use to express them seems rather arbitrary at first. There is a connection, of course. But it's not linear. Coming up with metaphors (both in words and images) can help communicate more ef-

fectively and shed some of the heaviness that comes with too many words.

Where To Get Good Pictures

Maybe you are a professional photographer and know how to shoot cutting-edge photos that convey the right mood with the right amount of lighting, exposure, etc.

Most of us aren't, and we can still get a better selection of high quality images than any photographer could ever shoot in his lifetime.

Where it's still hard to get high quality video and audio material that you can use in your projects without paying high royalties, the situation for images is a lot better!

The keyword here is licensing.

Of course you could just go to Google Images or similar and use any of the images you find there and slap them onto your blog.

And while a lot of people do this, it's not always fair to the original creators of the images (many consider it illegal) nor does it guarantee the best selection.

Luckily, there's the alternative of creative licensing.

There's a lot to say about it. Let's keep it short and practical, for now:

1. License: Public Domain

Limitation: None

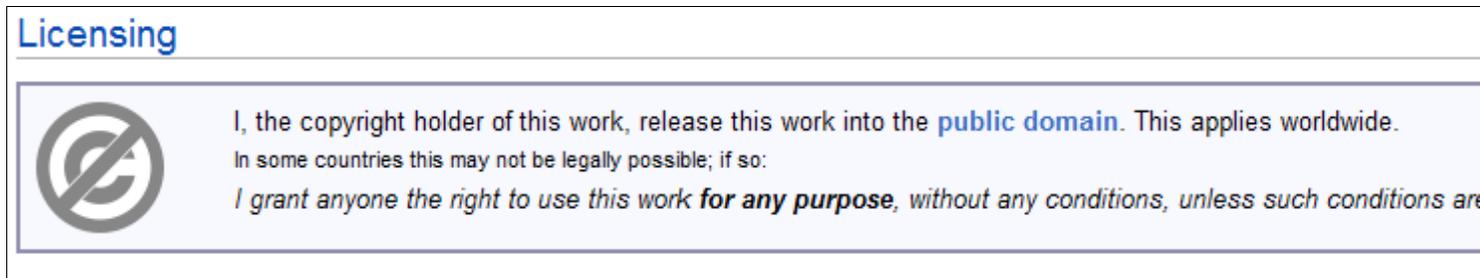
“ Works are in the public domain if they are not covered by intellectual property rights at all, if the intellectual property rights have expired, or if the intellectual property rights are forfeited. Examples include the English language, the formulae of Newtonian physics, the works of Shakespeare and Beethoven, and the patents on powered flight. - Wikipedia

Any image in the public domain can be used without any limitation, depending on your country. You can (mostly) use these images wherever and in whatever way you like without having to say where you got them from.

Places where you can find public domain images:

commons.wikimedia.org

NOTE: Not all of the images on Wikimedia Commons are in the Public Domain. Look for the following banner under the image and its description:



2. License: Creative Commons

Limitation: Depending on the Type of CC license

Creative Commons describes a certain set of licenses designed to enable both the free sharing and use of materials and guaranteeing original creators to be mentioned.

While browsing for CC-licensed materials always make sure to check what kind of license it is and what it allows you to do. Most of these licenses are easy to understand without being an expert in legalese, so that for example with an *Attribution 3.0 Unported (CC BY 3.0)* type license you are allowed to share, remix and make commercial use of the work under the conditions that you attribute (mention) the original creator!

For more information about the different licenses go to creativecommons.org

Places where you can find top-quality CC-licensed images:

Use the advanced search of [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com)



Tip: Find content with a Creative Commons license.
[Learn more...](#)

Only search within Creative Commons-licensed content

Find content to use commercially

Find content to modify, adapt, or build upon

SEARCH

3. License: Other (Free) License

Limitation: Depending on the license

Besides the CC-type licenses there are many other models designed to enable free sharing such as the GNU/GPL license which is very common at Wikipedia.

Also here, if you have found something you like, always make sure to double-check exactly what the license allows you to do and what it doesn't. Always better to be safe than sorry, later.

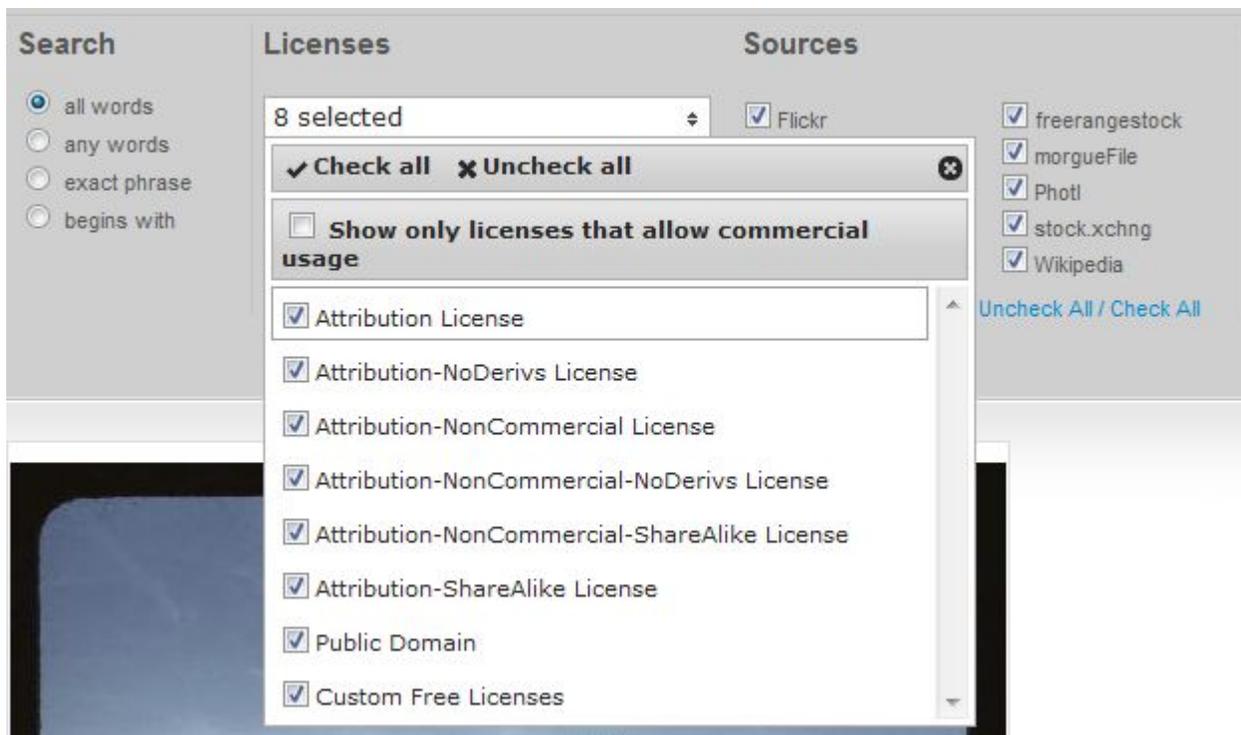
Places to find other free-license materials:

morguefile.com

You can use the images for any purpose and while mentioning either the license or the creator is not obligatory, it's still a nice way of saying thanks.

everystockphoto.com

Their advanced search function allows you to do a meta-search of many different photo-websites and filter the results according to licenses (see screenshot)



5 SIMPLE STEPS TO INCREASE YOUR AUDIENCE THROUGH BETTER DESIGN

Have you ever heard someone say: "I'm not creative."?

What does that actually mean?

If you dig deeper you might find answers like "I have no imagination." - "I'm a structural person" or: "I'm not talented."

Whatever the answer may be, **creativity can be learned.**

To be more precise: **Imagination has to be trained.** Structural is not mutually exclusive with "creative". And **talent does not replace training.**

Having said that...

I feel that many people in online education (one of the fields I'm active in) could radically improve the effectiveness of their course materials and webpages by taking design more seriously. The same holds true for many other kinds of online businesses, of course.

I'm talking here specifically about websites, blogs, powerpoint presentations, ebooks and learning Materials.

Some people (especially the *educated* kind) seem to believe that if you're teaching let's say English, only the grammar, vocab and speaking/listening practice matter while the font-type, color, size and use of design elements are just some kind of fancy gimmicks.

Guess what: They're not! Have you ever thought about why companies invest a lot of money to get an awesome webpage? It's not (always) just corporate vanity. They know that **good design creates a) identity and good reputation and b) sells better than bad design.**

No matter which way you turn it, there really is no excuse to burrow yourself in the conceptual part of your brain and refuse to think in colors, shapes and textures.

There are of course - and this is a popular argument to avoid any real growth in this area - examples of glossy design with little or no substance. But the examples of great content which is poorly packaged are far more common and painful! Think of diamonds wrapped in greasy BigMac paper packaged in coffee-stained shoe-boxes. Most people wouldn't even take it for free. *Their* fault? Maybe.

And it doesn't have to be a diamond. But if your product, course material, ebook, etc. is worth *something* you should package it in a way that reflects its value! I had a creative writing teacher once who used to tell us: "It's your *baby*. You *sweated* it out!" - meaning our first stories. So, if you put all your heart and hard work in it, please do yourself the favor of *letting it shine!*

If you settle for bad design you keep people away from discovering your value. And, let's face it - over years and years of exposure to glossy advertisements, magazine layouts and polished web-pages people got accustomed to certain quality standards, so that if something is *below the standard* they will consciously or unconsciously be repelled by it. (For the language-geeks: Bad design is like bad grammar. It's distracting and annoying!)

Luckily, there's always something that can be done. And with help of the Internet, creative licensing, tutorials and open-source software we are in a position like never before to create things that simply **rock!**

Here are some quick guidelines:

1. Research: "The Hunt is On!"

Take a look at what others are doing in your field. But please note. Design it *not* about taste. **Good design is like language. Either it communicates effectively or it doesn't.**

So when you look at what others are doing, you might find things that seem very successful but you don't *like* them. Then there may be things that suit your *taste* but have no traction.

There's always the problem of measuring success in some way. I don't believe there are absolutes, but you can look at what other people are saying about the product or webpage. What's

their activity and user-count on Facebook or Twitter. etc.

If you find a website or an ebook that people are raving about all over the place but you think their homepage is "cheesy" or "not serious" - maybe you should **double-check and re-consider** their approach. Again, you don't have to *like* it but if they have a button positioned at the right place, with the right color and millions of people are happily clicking it, you might want to do something similar.

2. Imitate, Compare, Derive!

This often gets a bad rap. But creative people know that **there are no ideas which aren't based on other ideas**. So, if you like the way this and that design uses colors, fonts and headlines, imitate it! This doesn't mean being a copycat, if you just use it as a basis from which you develop something completely original. After all, nobody *owns* a certain color or relation of font-sizes and design-elements! (Not yet, at least...)

A very practical approach to this is using styles for your documents, themes for your homepage and templates for your presentations. You can find **great stuff that is both free and cutting-edge** if you look a bit deeper! (If you don't have the time or the nerve, awesome templates can easily be purchased!) So, if you have seen something somewhere you like, chances are huge that you'll find a template or theme that you can build on to do something similar.

Two common mistakes: a) People either refuse to start with something professional while lacking the skills to do something better themselves or b) they just take on the theme or style without any further changes and thereby make their product/page look like all the others who chose the same: If you're doing it right you'll use the prepared theme or template **only as a starting point** and **customize it beyond recognition** into something which you can call "your own".

How to do it, specifically?

The quickest way, for example, if you're using a theme that many others are using, too, is to simply google its name. With a little bit of luck you'll find tons of people who want to do similar things and you can learn from their questions or add your own. Also, what always works is

to just google your question directly: Questions like "How to change the background color in Wordpress" or "create custom menu in Wordpress" often yield surprisingly clear instructions.

Sounds too simplistic? Try it! You'll be surprised.

3. Get Feedback

So you've looked at thousand of examples. Loved some. Hated others. But opened your mind to possibilities. Then you worked very hard to implement some of what you've seen. Thought that was difficult? The toughest part is yet to come: **Showing your hard work to others and processing their feedback** without getting hung up on criticism or praise. There are a few factors here to make this process effective:

- **Ask the right people!** Some people might be very biased (positively or negatively) to your work, because they know you as a person. They don't always count, unfortunately. You can ask them but their feedback might not be the most reliable if you want to take your product and webpage and be successful with it in a world where people *don't* know you, yet.
- When getting feedback from people who don't know you, **make sure they are really saying what they think** and not just trying to be polite or make you like them. For example, undifferentiated praise doesn't really help, at all!
- When you get radical feedback "This doesn't work at ALL!" be just as ready to forget it as to seriously consider it!
- Diversity: If enough people from various backgrounds share a similar opinion there might be something to it.
- Don't settle for "it's great" or "it sucks" but always **look at why something works and why it doesn't.**

In my experience, giving great feedback takes just as much skill and experience as being able to process it. The best feedback is respectful and constructive, focusing on details instead of undifferentiated praise or dismissal.

4. Improve! - The Sky is The Limit

Rinse and repeat! Keep updating. Keep improving. Don't fall asleep. Always be on the lookout for new input. Learn new skills. Even if your design works great, how can you improve it?

The worst thing you could do is going on for years with the same approach without seeing any real breakthroughs and blaming it on the audience. As a rule of thumb, in many cases it's not *their fault* but **miscommunication based on bad design (or content)** - which is not your "fault" but *your responsibility!*

Also, there is a problem of over-optimization and losing the bigger picture, becoming completely wrapped up in shades of blue or questions of "a few pixels up or down". In this case, it's high time to ...

5. Take A Step Back

Do something completely different. Forget about the design-aspects. Work only on the content for a while, completely ignoring the design. Go on a holiday! When you come back, it *will* look different! Your worst fears might be proven right and it really looks as bad as you thought, but more often than not, the opposite is the case, so that when you return you realize "Hey, it's really not that bad!"

In the end you can ask yourself: What are the web-pages and products that are well designed in your eyes? What makes them outstanding?

And: What is design, anyway? Is it really just the "wrapping"?

**4. SOCIAL
MEDIA &
BLOGGING:
A PERFECT
MATCH**

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T BASE YOUR BUSINESS OR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE ON FACEBOOK ONLY

The Internet is a big place.

Sometimes it feels so big that we get tired of exploring, ploughing through endless fields of data, looking for fertile ground to build our businesses and grow personal relationships.

Which makes us look for that comfortable corner, a familiar place where we meet our friends. And can return to many times a day.

Welcome to the world of Facebook. A 500+ million userbase, but a corner of the Internet, nevertheless.

Free Residency For Everyone

“ We lived on farms, then we lived in cities, and now we're going to live on the Internet! - Sean Parker, *The Social Network*

We can dispute whether it is *good* that people live online. But that train has already left. Much of the world's population is *already* living online, uploading photos of their puppies and family reunions as if there was no tomorrow.

Social Media has made it so easy to share our daily life, moment by moment, that many times the sharing *becomes* our daily life.

This is where Facebook comes in.

If the Internet is a foreign country, Facebook gives everyone a free visa and what seems to be your personalized virtual real-estate: Your Profile. It is the entry card to the Facebook Empire where you can read what your friends are doing, follow bands and brands, upload photos and write your own "blog" (*Facebook Notes*).

In short: Facebook is its own "ecosystem". It has its own laws, rules and regulations. It's like an Internet within the Internet.

But it's *not* the Internet.

Only after this is clear can we make the most of it. First, let's look at the business side of it. Feel free to skip this section ("Business Opportunities") and jump right to the end.

Business Opportunities

If you are doing business online, you probably already have a Facebook presence. If not, it's about time to get one. Check out this [comprehensive guide](#) by Copyblogger.

Facebook is great for doing business. You can engage prospective clients and customers or simply spread the word and do networking in what is generally called your "niche" (not that cranny in a rock, again!). So, whether you are a freelance language teacher or a used-cars salesman, get yourself a Facebook *Page* (in addition to your Profile) and learn to use it the right way. If you need help with technical details or strategies, again, check out the [Copyblogger guide](#).

So, let's say you have built a great Facebook page with all the bells and whistles. Thousands of *likes*. Dozens of comments daily. Once in a while you get someone who calls the phone number you listed under "Info" and asks about your product or service. You start to make a bit of business here and there.

It takes a lot of time to maintain your Facebook page. You have to respond to questions. Delete the spammers. Write updates.

And the more time and effort you invest, a nagging thought is beginning to take hold in the back of your mind. "What if I lose my page?" - "What will happen to all the hard work I put into it?"

- there is no *backup* function
- you have no option to export your contacts
- if Facebook gets nuked (for whatever reason) your page goes down with it
- if someone gets access to your profile and deletes your page, it's gone for good
- Also, apart from certain customizations you have no control over how the page appears

- Facebook will suddenly change things, like it has done so many times before.
- If you try to contact customer support, good luck.

...

This is of course every online publisher's nightmare. To lose everything in a freak accident. Nobody is safe from it, be it inside or outside the Walled Garden of Facebook.

But I said above that Facebook is great for doing business, no?

It certainly is. But only as an *addition* to your blog or webpage. Contrary to what some people say, Facebook did not and will not "*kill the webpage*".

It's a matter of perspective. You can build a great Facebook page but it's not enough. **First and foremost you need a great webpage!**

It might involve a bit more learning and a bit of costs for your personal domain and webspace: As we've discussed above, there's no excuse to settle for a .wordpress, .blogspot or other free subdomain. If you're serious and believe in what you do, you will find ways to get the ~5 dollars per month it takes to run your own basic server somewhere.

Hopefully you consider yourself worth more than *that!* Think about it. This is your own real-estate. You can do on your webpage *whatever* you like (as long as you don't break any serious laws). You have complete control over how your site looks and how it works. You can change it anytime you like. You can backup and save all your data so that when something goes wrong, you can pick up just where you left!

A Facebook page can not replace that.

To summarize, one of the commenters on the above-mentioned guide put it perfectly:

“ Facebook isn't a place to build a business. It's a place to attract traffic back to your own site and business.

Home Sweet Home

Even if you aren't doing business online, you should not give Facebook too much importance.

Sure, there are friends there who comment on what you do or give you "likes" - they give you attention! - but as we all know, it can become quite addictive.

On the other hand, nothing is worse than having a lonely blog somewhere that noone visits, right?

"On Facebook, at least people *care* about what I do!"

This is the impression. But it comes at a price:

- **Reactivity over Creativity:** The Facebook experience doesn't encourage creating new stuff. It encourages commenting and liking. There is the option to write *Notes* but it's laughable compared to what you can do with any free blogging system like Wordpress because you have virtually no control over how it shows up in the end! Sick of that Facebook blue? Want to change the font or margins? Good luck.
- **If you use it too much you will begin to feel that you're living your life as a spectator.** If you're uploading too many photos and writing too many updates on what you're eating that's a sure sign of it. Your life is becoming a spectacle. People react. While you turn into a ghost.
- **Automization:** Over-use of Facebook makes people mechanistic. It's already problematic enough that we're dealing with machines all day long but in Zuckerberg's Empire your very relationships to your family and friends are becoming mechanic nodes in the Facebook Machine. It's an either/or world. Either you are friends. Or you are not. Either you *like*, or you don't. Over-use of those systems creates grooves in our brains, mental patterns and we come to think and behave accordingly. But the complex dynamics of human relationships can never be reduced to a binary either/or principle.

The idea behind things like Facebook rests on certain worldviews and patterns of thinking.

At the core of it is the notion that humanity is a system. Like a machine. Therefore all of humanity's actions must be able to be described and understood from a systems view. It's the Geek's Ultimate Dream!

This has become such an ingrained way of thinking that it's hard to detect. (See also: "[All](#)

Watched Over by Machines Of Loving Grace" by Adam Curtis)

To summarize, I don't think it's necessary or even possible to live a media-abstinent life. Avoidance is not a solution.

Instead, I would recommend a more eclectic approach.

In short: Always use different media and approaches in a well-balanced mix. This will keep you from over-reliance. If you do business online, focus on your blog **first** and use things like Facebook in a peripheral way.

If you want to share photos don't just dump your private life into the black hole of Facebook. Go to Flickr, get feedback on photography techniques, and if you like - allow others to use your photos for their projects by making them available under Creative Commons licenses - If you want to write, do it on your self-hosted blog. If you're fascinated by status-updates, use Twitter.

In any case, don't let only **one system** dominate the way you spend your time online!

WHAT IS STUMBLEUPON AND HOW CAN WE USE IT TO DISCOVER STUFF AND BOOST TRAFFIC?

StumbleUpon is one of these tools that may not get as much attention as Facebook, for example - and yet the total of traffic it generates ranks second worldwide and is even higher than Twitter and YouTube, making up for 18.26 % of worldwide Social Media traffic. ([source](#))

This is amazing because in comparison to No 1 Facebook's 750 million users and Twitter's 200 million users Stumbleupon has only 15 million users.

How do they do it?

Discovering Stuff You'd Never Find By Googling

The first reason why StumbleUpon is so successful is that you can use it to discover content you might not find any other way.

Googling is great if you know what you're looking for but sometimes we don't.

Sometimes, we just want to be surprised, to discover something out of the blue, that special moment of serendipity.

The quality of the content you get via Twitter, Facebook and G+ is based on the people you follow, friend or circle.

If these people share awesome stuff, you're lucky. If they just post baby photos and Farmville statuses, then this is what you get.

In other words: **What your tribe doesn't share you don't see.**

StumbleUpon is entirely different.

Here, you select one or multiple topics that interest you and then hit the "Stumble" button. Based on its *Recommendation Engine* it shows you a website or video that (hopefully) matches your interest. By using the thumbs up and thumbs down button you can tell the En-

gine what you like and what you don't so that over time the results get better and better.

The cool thing about it is that you don't even have to click through websites. Defining your interests and hitting "Stumble" will take you directly from site to site.

They offer a toolbar but it's not necessary. You can stumble and vote directly from within your browser without installing anything.

And when you've found something that gets you excited you can share it with your tribe on Twitter, Facebook, etc.

In my experience this recommendation engine works very well because

- it shows both breaking news and articles and websites that date back until the early 90ies
- you can find a lot of alternative information on virtually any topic
- anyone can introduce content into the engine

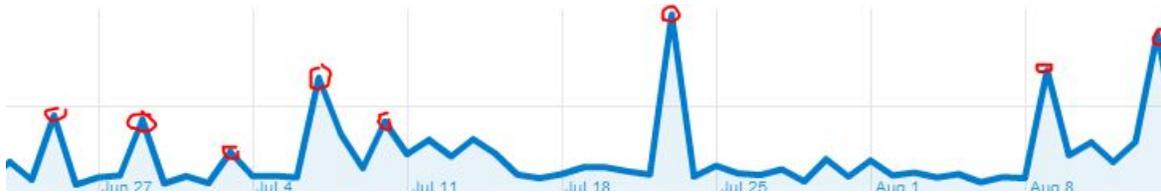
How Content-Creators Can Use StumbleUpon To Spread The Word

At first I was only using StumbleUpon to find these pieces of highly unlikely information and share it with people in other networks. It was only later when I found out that StumbleUpon was a perfect way to get my own content out to the right people!

Sure, Google is the obvious way for people to find something specific. But for this they already have to know what they're looking for. Discovery doesn't always work like that. There's always an element of the unknown. Sometimes you only know what you've been looking for when it stares you right into the face.

Also, posting something to Twitter and Facebook is great. But it's very temporary. If the right people aren't online at the right time, chances are they'll never see it.

Here's a screenshot to illustrate:



You see these spikes?

This is when something gets “stumbled”, receiving thumbs ups and views by the StumbleUpon community.

As you can see it tends to double the traffic on any given day and sometimes even multiplies it by up to ten times!

As with discovering stuff (online or offline) there’s a mystery component here, as to what gets stumbled.

But it seems there are a few things content-creators can do to increase the likelihood of “getting stumbled”.

- write or produce content that is great, not just satisfactory. It should have some novelty factor and be presented in an accessible and direct way.
- don’t just put every URL you got into the system but only the best
- select the right keyword(s). Tip: Research before tagging how many people are actually following that interest. Example: Here’s the page for the Interest “Cyber Culture” <http://www.stumbleupon.com/discover/cyber-culture/> You could replace the keyword at the end with any other one or google something like “psychology stumbleupon” to find the given page.
- use the [su.pr](#) URL shortener. It will add a stumbleupon button to the top, making it even easier for people to rate and share the page. As a way of saying thanks for using their system, StumbleUpon will send extra traffic your way.

Apart from the su.pr URL shortener, StumbleUpon also offers other tools for publishers that you should definitely give a try. Go [here](#) for an overview.

Conclusion

If you're looking for inspiration, new insights or just things that are a bit different from what's going on in your Newsfeed, Timeline or newspaper of choice, Stumbleupon is a great alternative.

And if you are a content-creator, be aware that StumbleUpon is a force to be reckoned with.

It works differently from Twitter and Facebook. So there'll be some trial and error at first.

But when you start seeing those spikes for the first time, you'll be amazed at how effective it can be.

WHY MARKETERS ARE LIKE MOSQUITOES AND HOW TO GET MORE "EGGS" BY USING TWITTER

Despite their short life-span – adult mosquitoes only live for 4-8 weeks – they are masters of annoyance!

They normally don't cause much harm. But they're just that.

Annoying.

Incidentally, many self-professed "Internet Marketers" and "Social Media Experts" share those exact characteristics with these buzzing and nerve-wracking "little flies" (that's what the Spanish word *mosquito* literally means)

Filling Your Plate With More Than You Can Swallow

Dunbar's Number states that any given person can only relate meaningfully to about 150 people. In other words, Social Networks are great but if you cross that threshold, you won't be able to **relate to anyone**.

Facebook caps at 5,000 "friends", as if that wasn't mind-numbing enough, already!

On Twitter, instead, you can follow hundreds of thousands of people. But to what purpose?

You can tell yourself whatever you like. If you follow more than a few hundred or even thousand people, you aren't in it for "connecting to people". You're in it for yourself.

Which is not a problem. If you don't pretend otherwise.

The Maths Of Egg Production

While male mosquitoes usually feed on juice or nectar, the female requires blood to lay its eggs.

If you are a marketer, this "egg" is your goal. And it goes through different states: First you

need to drive traffic, then you generate leads resulting in the sale or conversion or vague sense of fame – which is the egg!

Like the mosquito, the Social Media Marketer needs a **constant supply** of blood, which – in our example – simply means **traffic or clicks**.

So she follows thousands of people, in the hope of them “following back”. Those who don’t follow back, she quietly drops after a while.

If done consistently this results in a 1:1 ratio. A person has 18,000 followers but only because he follows roughly the same amount of people.

Also it’s utterly meaningless and **a waste of time!**

Here’s why:

A person following more than 230, the absolute maximum according to Dunbar’s Number, can’t possibly keep up with what all these people are doing, no matter how noble her intentions!

Claiming to listen is one thing.

Actually doing it, another.

After a certain number, no matter *where* you mark it, it becomes a **biological impossibility**.

The only thing we get are millions of “monological broadcasters”, senders – not receivers, in other words.

Imagine a room full of people all talking at the same time, not listening to anyone but expecting everyone else to listen to *them*.

It’s a closed circle. Mosquitoes feeding off mosquitoes.

The result: no eggs.

An Alternative to The Hive Mind

But what if you really need those eggs, these clicks hopefully leading to more readers and eventually more sales of your product or service?

First of all, you need to gain trust.

A great way to do this is by **answering questions**.

That's right. Feeding people instead of feeding off them.

If you're really good at something, share your knowledge with no strings attached. Don't send people links to your stuff. Just be helpful!

How to find questions?

If you go to search.twitter.com you'll see that, like Google, you can actually use quite a few operators to refine your search.

So, let's say you know a lot about baking cakes.

Go to search.twitter.com and type:

how to cake -filter:links ?

What this does is filter out all tweets containing links (the stuff of nasty mosquito marketing) and the question mark only lists questions.

I've prepared a link for you [here](#) that leads directly to the search. You can bookmark the query and experiment with it.

If you do this on a consistent basis and have some valuable expertise to share, people will appreciate it since you're not trying to get something from *them* but giving back!

As for the "eggs", I got good news for you: A recent [study](#) showed that 64% of people were more likely to make a purchase from a company who answered their questions while 59 % grew more willing to follow a brand.

Ready to do some spring cleaning?

Let's drop the mosquito marketers and their approach.

If you want to find out more about how to use Social Media more effectively without getting hung up on distractions and skewed promises you can also read the ebook "[A Mindful Guide to Social Media](#)"

WHERE'S YOUR HOME ON THE INTERNET? OF REFUGEE CAMPS AND (B)LOG CABINS

One could argue that a part of humanity is already living *parallel* or "second" lives online, although these are much more complex than just mere "mirror" images or clones of our everyday existence.

Many people wake up and the first thing they do, even while still in bed, is to sign in to their *online life* on their mobile phones.

"What is happening there that's so interesting?" a bystander might ask.

It's like the morning newspaper, once the "window to the world", only now it has become a portal to the Data-World, a universe of information, where humanity ventures while waiting for the bus, eating lunch, before, during and after work.

Traveling Without Moving

We stop to "check in" to places with Foursquare. We stop to make an Instagram photo and upload it. We stop to tweet and like. Stop. Go. Click, touch and type.

Our life has become a *habitus interruptus* - constantly interspersed with distractions from this "other" world.

But are we just passing through this Disneyland of data like ghosts and restless travelers?

Or do we actually have homes, there?

The easiest way to find out if you have made a home online is to look at what's the first thing you do when you connect.

Do you go to Facebook? Google Plus? Twitter? The New York Times? Check your Email?

The Real Estate of Social Identity

What has made Facebook so big in particular is the way it buys our identities and sells them back to us as a "free service".

It wants to know when we're born, where we live, what we look like.

And no matter how much we feed it, it'll always want more.

What we get in exchange is officially a clean and satisfying representation of our social life but more often than not it simply turns into a mess of narcissistic reactivity: relationship statuses, photos of drunk people, babies and cats.

But all our "friends" are there, right? It's our home! Its red notifications are like the life-juice coursing through our veins. Get many and feel alive and wanted. Get none and feel dead and obscure.

Side-note: I'm using Facebook as an example here, but Google+, the Holy Grail that according to some shall deliver us from the fangs of the Zuckerberg Blues, is not much different.

These profiles and streams may give you the feeling of home. But the moment their service gets momentarily deactivated or god beware! you lose your profile or account, the insight will come crashing down on you with the weight of a thousand mammoths:

What you called home is nothing but a refugee camp.

Sure, it's free but neither do you have any property rights, nor can you change any of its layout or basic structure. And the moment the camp is looted or officially scrapped, all your stuff goes down with it.

It's like living within a drawing book that allows you to draw only inside of the lines whereas genuine creativity happens when you go beyond the pre-configured options and actions and do something unexpected and surprising, instead.

There *are* alternatives, of course - and as much as I painted it black here - if you use these *Social Networks* in the right way they can become a worthwhile extension of whatever you do. But they shouldn't be at the center.

Blogs Are The Log Cabins of The Internet

The basic housing unit of the Internet is your own website.

This is why it's called *homepage*, by the way...

For convenience's sake, let it be a blog. It makes being creative more intuitive than looking at impenetrable blocks of code just because you need to change a comma somewhere.

Also, paying a few dollars for it per month be daunting at first but if you think about it that for roughly the price of a coffee you can buy the *right* to do whatever you want to do, online.

You could build a business. Write a travel blog. Deal out dubious advice. Rant! Obsess! Let out the inner expert on North Korean collectibles... It doesn't matter what you do. Your blog is the equivalent of your own private four walls. It's a bit like Vegas. What you do there, stays there. And once in a while the masses will make pilgrimages to your blog to feast their hungry eyes on items that went from viral to epidemic!

As in the real world, with rights come responsibility. And with infinite freedom comes infinite responsibility.

But that's another question.

If you spend a lot of time on the Internet and don't yet have your own blog, do it now. That means: **Your own domain. Crafted and filled with content by yourself.** No cheapskates cop-out! Paying for your online real estate can also help to make a commitment.

Duplicating photos on Tumblr, doing personality quizzes on Facebook and talking about your cat on Twitter is all great, but if you don't do yourself the favor and start to build your own home, no one will do it for you.

5. SHOOT- ING THE TROUBLES

TOP 3 BUSINESS BLOGGING MISTAKES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

According to Pingdom, there are **152 million blogs on the Internet**, as counted by BlogPulse.

Doesn't sound so much, does it, compared to the whopping 600 million of Facebook "Likers"...

And how many of those 152 million blogs are actually well-maintained, receiving a steady flow of traffic and new content?

How many of those are what we called "third kind" approaches to blogging?

If you take a look at the top 15 blogs on the Internet, you mostly find blogzines like Mashable, TechCrunch, Lifehacker, etc.

The most popular blogs on the Internet are in the widest sense journalistic (Huffington Post is #1 at the time of this writing) and not personal blogs.

The majority of blogs on the Internet is invisible.

If you're running a blog somewhere, chances are very high that you might not get that much traffic, at all.

And while that sounds somewhat pessimistic, the good news is that there's always thousands of blogs that get less exposure than yours!

Wait... isn't that even more pessimistic?

How do you actually raise a blog out of the obscurity of majority and into the limelight, as it were?

Here's three things that you should watch out for:

Mistake No. 1: Irregularity

It sounds so simple but it's the number one reason why certain blogs aren't getting as much exposure as they could: They aren't updated regularly. And that goes both ways: You might have started a blog and were very excited, posting 10 new items per week in the first month but then other things in your life drew your attention and you didn't write anything for 2 months!

In other words: It's not just that people write *too little*, sometimes it's also they write *too much*. And then there's the magical question that you'll find repeated gazillion times on the Net: "**How much is enough?**"

And I have three words for you: **consistency. regularity. rhythm.**

If you choose to post 2 days a week, once a day, or every third day, it's irrelevant - but no matter what happens: **stick to it!**

Give your readers a chance to adapt to your rhythm. Sometimes their feed-readers and in-boxes might clog because they don't have enough time to read everything, at other times they read everything and are hungry and waiting for more. If you're following a regularity that your readers can follow, too, they'll know what to expect.

Since everything on the Internet is "on-demand" and 24/7 accessible, following a posting schedule (whatever fits for you) **re-creates that TV-moment** of "Your Favorite Show: On Mondays and Tuesdays at 8pm" and allows people to tune in and clear space in their schedule for reading your updates.

After all, people have lots of other things to do apart from reading your blog.

Whereas the first mistake is certainly true for most blogs regardless of their nature, the following one is particularly problematic for business or professional blogs.

Mistake No. 2: Irrelevancy

Who are your readers, actually? What would they like to read?

Many business blogs (as in: attached to a business website) seem to make the mistake of believing that everyone of their readers is interested in watching photos of their company picnics or hearing about the achievements of employees.

But the amount of people actually interested in this stuff will be relatively low.

Therefore, keep your audience as wide as possible and the individual posts as narrow as possible.

Paradox? Here's an example:

Let's say I'm a website selling T-shirts with cool designs. I'm no "threadless" but I'm doing fine and want to expand business by blogging: Instead of posting item after item about company-internal stuff or geeky details about my printing procedure, wondering why noone cares, I write **well-researched and helpful to-the point articles** about "How to Create Your Own Cool Designs In 3 Steps" or "Three Ways to Lengthen the Lifespan of your Favorite Tee", etc.

In other words: **If you want to reach a wide audience, address a wide audience.** But your posts should always have a clear, narrow and practical focus.

Mistake No. 3: Lost in Translation

Let's say I've found a blogging schedule that I'm comfortable with. I'm writing awesome articles with great headlines and people are actually visiting the site. What next?

I mean, it's all nice to see statistics going up and up every day. But what to do with it?

Writing a good blog is hard work so you want to make sure to "convert" all this traffic. I'm not much a fan of this term, actually. It always conjures up images of the Spanish Inquisition. But what marketers mean when they say this is that you want to make sure that you *translate* (maybe that's better) your visitor-count into actual clients, sign-ups, etc.

This is not just dependent on your blogging schedule and content.

In my experience, conversion is *almost never linear*. If people have never heard of your webpage and they suddenly stumble over it, in most cases they won't immediately become

customers or clients, except in very rare cases.

What's more common instead is that sales come from people who've been following you for a while, before.

Therefore, make sure to give readers a way to follow your blog email and make sure to remind people as often as possible, that if they like your stuff, they can get more by subscribing.

This is more important than getting "likes", "tweets" or "+1s" or whatever Social Currency is popular at the day of writing.

In short: Don't aim for quick sales. Aim for establishing relationships!

This is where new ideas, opportunities - and more sales - will eventually come from.

And talking about sales, they don't just happen magically. There are certain principles and dynamics.

Let's have a look at some basics.

THE "CALL-TO-ACTION"

Another term online marketers like to use a lot is "Call-To-Action".

The **Action** could be anything from

- signing up for a (paid) subscription
- buying a product
- paying for a service

The **Call** comes in many forms:

- a graphic
- a button
- a text-link

The good old "buy now" button is a well-known Call-To-Action, for example.

Calls To Action should be visible and unambiguous so that readers will know exactly what to do.

In a blogpost, for example, they often appear at the end of an article so that when the reader has gotten excited about the topic after reading he'll have something to do if he wants more.

But, unfortunately, it's not always that clear *what* to do.

The Good Old "Click Here"

It's so obvious to most web-designers or writers that the readers are supposed to *click* on this or that button or link, isn't it?

To tell the truth, it isn't always that obvious to the *reader*.

This is why you'll still find the clear and simple instruction "click here" all over the Net.

Also, if there's a graphical button, it might seem too obvious to tell people "click the button" but it works better.

If you've constructed an informative, entertaining piece of writing that people read to the end and then don't follow through, it is usually because the CTA is not *clear* enough.

Don't take any chances. Tell your readers *exactly* what to do.

It's not that they are stupid, of course, but we all read a lot of text during the day: Deep-reading, especially on blogs is rare. We all tend to skim and skip.

A clear CTA can stand out even when skimming.

How to Create a Good CTA

The best way to get started is by looking at what other popular sites do.

Here's what you'll find a lot:

- "Download NOW"
- "Join NOW"
- "Get it NOW"
- "Add to Cart"
- "Get a free.."

Note that what you'll find again and again is the word **now**. It adds a sense of immediacy and urgency.

Add to Cart is a classic as well, sites like Amazon use it all the time. But it even works for smaller businesses.

The wording is the most important. Research and experiment to find the right one for your particular project.

After the wording, the styling is important. This is not just something ornamental but instru-

mental.

In order to make the words visible you might want to use either a larger, colored font or wrap the message up in a button (most common).

To create good-looking buttons you can use a "button generator" such as [this](#) and [this](#).

NOTE:

For CTAs at the end of articles, use simple linked text to keep it from looking too spammy. Most themes will automatically color or underline a link so there'll be an emphasis by default. If not, you can color it, make it bold or underline it.

For other areas in your blog, you can go for something more visual like big fonts and buttons.

Should I insert a Call To Action in all of my blogposts?

It's a difficult question.

Answer #1: Generally, no.

First of all, you don't want to turn you blog into a collection of sales-letters. It can be done if you are a content-writing genius and produce articles that are so gripping that people don't mind being funneled into a CTA each and every time, but there's always a danger of *over-selling* and losing readers.

Also, your range of products and services is probably limited, so it will all become very repetitive.

Answer #2: Generally, yes.

The difference between a content blog geared for business and more amateur blogs is that a business blog will not just publish stuff for the sake of publishing.

Instead, each blogpost that you write will be another stepping stone with a clear intention to accumulate readers and build a reputation.

This is why, even if you don't have an individual CTA at the end of each article, there should be other calls to action on your blog.

Examples:

- **Subscriber-Box:** Ask people to subscribe to your blog. Good spots to do this are generally: In the sidebar (as a widget) or directly under each article.
- **Downloads:** If you're offering downloadable products, you shouldn't hide them somewhere in the archive but create a little image or message with a CTA. Also here, a good place for this is the sidebar (high visibility) or under each article.
- **Services, Events, Promotions:** The same can be done with all kinds of other things. Are you offering free consultation sessions via email or phone? Is there an interesting event coming up soon? Maybe you have a special discount for this or that product or service. Create a graphic or a little message that catches the eye and put it somewhere on your blog where it's really visible.

Now, especially if we talk about selling digital products online, one thing that you'll find repeated over and over again online is the use of so-called sales-letters.

SALES-LETTERS, SHMALES-LETTERS

One of the things on the Net that is as old as animated gifs or Geocities is the sales-letter, also known as the sales-page.

I've been stumbling over them ever since I can remember and loathed them for more than a decade.

CONTENT:

- they often promise you to offer secrets to "getting rich" if you buy their product
- they use social "proof" by putting up loads of (often fake) testimonials by "satisfied customers"
- it's basically one very long page trying to talk you into buying something mostly not worth the money

STYLE:

- huge headlines (often in red)
- yellow text-marker (or the digital representation thereof) all through the text
- hand-scrawled red arrows (or the digital representation thereof) all over the place
- dotted line boxes reminding of supermarket coupons
- huge "buy now" buttons

If you don't know what I'm talking about, here's a satire of such a [page](#).

But, seriously, is there anything we can learn from these often outrageously ugly and ludicrously lying sales-letters?

Surprisingly, there is.

37signals, a respectable company often applauded for their creative products and approaches, once made an interesting experiment.

They were wondering why certain designs or approaches to organizing information on a website worked better than others.

So they created a split test between a rather short page and a long sales-letter like page.

The result: The long form had an increase of 37.5% signups. (I need to say in their defense that their page, compared to so many other sales-pages was rather-well designed and written. See a screenshot [here](#))

So, if the sales-letter approach can work even for respectable offers and straightforward companies, there must be something to it.

And indeed, the fact that the sales-page is such an ancient and infamous online marketing practice is no accident.

Here are some pointers on how you can use the elements of a good sales-page without losing your face:

- a stand-alone text without too much clutter can help people to focus on what you have to offer
- in the reading-direction (top->bottom) you have enough time to make your points, clarify misunderstandings, etc.
- sales-page are skimmable: by using bullet-points and visible headlines, readers can easily take in a lot of information
- readers or potential clients are mostly not interested in features but in benefits. Therefore, sales-letter focus on benefits.

The sales-page, as a template, simply works.

The fact that most sales-pages are badly designed and built to sell low-quality products doesn't mean that *all* sales-pages have to be like that.

And if you approach it with a little bit of humor, you can come up with something that is both entertaining, informative and persuasive.

As I've said before, writing good *copy* is not easy. It takes practice. But it's an important skill

to acquire.

Also, we don't want to become masters of a kind of writing that sells over-priced goods with low or no quality.

If you do, good luck. That's the "selling your soul" aspect. The dark side of copy-writing: Lying to people.

NOTE: While writing this chapter I was trying to find some examples of spammy sales-pages and it turns out that they're getting rarer and rarer.

Yes, it seems that they're slowly but finally dying out. Not even the cheesiest "make money on-line" websites use them anymore. (Video seems to be the name of the game, there)

IMPORTANT:

If you want to sell an ebook, audiobook or other digital product, you don't necessarily have to come up with a sales-letter.

What is important is that your products are awesome and that you know how to describe their awesomeness.

Whether you do it in a vertically scrolling page, horizontally or simply fitting it all on one page with a nice "buy now" button, it doesn't matter much.

It's your writing that makes the difference, either indirectly, by having already gained a reputation elsewhere which makes people want to support you, or directly by being able to describe benefits in such a way that even people who don't know you immediately want to download your goods.

CONCLUSIONS

If you want to promote anything online, be it your music, your beauty parlor, your tutoring service or anything else, start a blog.

Write as regularly as you can. Find a rhythm that is realistic: Every second, every third or even every day. Don't let yourself off the hook. This is the most important part and I can't stress it enough: Write regularly. Some days it'll be easy, some days it'll be hard. There will be some articles that are better and some that are worse. But overall quality will be increasing with time as you check your progress against traffic stats, comment-counts, social media shares and subscriber growth.

As for the *content* of the writing, make your articles informative, entertaining, practical and easy to read.

Once in a while, insert a CTA that is either directly linked to a purchase procedure or a sales-page.

As for Social Media, definitely use it to connect to readers and other bloggers directly. But don't let it overshadow the efforts that flow into your blog.

IMPORTANT:

Doing all of this is *not* easy.

It takes a lot of consistency, discipline and long-term commitment.

There'll be times when you want to bang your head on the keyboard and curse the whole thing to smithereens.

But there'll also be small successes along the way when your traffic spikes and the first sales come knocking.

It's important to keep in mind that these things are just *candy* for the road.

The real benefit of blogging is learning: Learning about writing, design, pro-

gramming, networking and business.

And of course: The ultimate goal of creating an infrastructure that will allow you to a) make a living from all of this on a consistent basis and b) help others to do the same.

To say it with the words of Seth Godin:

“ It might take a decade to become an overnight success, but if you keep it up, if you keep building, the odds keep getting better and better.

6. AP- PENDIX

CONNECT TO THE AUTHOR

Visit André Klein's blog here (learnoutlive.com/blog) or follow him on [Twitter](#).

FURTHER RESOURCES

Web-Hosts:

[hostgator.com](https://www.hostgator.com)

[x10hosting.com](https://www.x10hosting.com)

Wordpress Themes:

Free:

[topwpthemes.com](https://www.topwpthemes.com)

[5themes.com/category/free-wordpress-themes/](https://www.5themes.com/category/free-wordpress-themes/)

Premium:

[templatic.com](https://www.templatic.com)

[woothemes.com](https://www.woothemes.com)

[studiopress.com](https://www.studiopress.com)

Coaching Sessions on Theme Customization:

[learnoutlive.com](https://www.learnoutlive.com)

Good Examples of Content-Writing:

[copyblogger.com](https://www.copyblogger.com)

[problogger.net](https://www.problogger.net)

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE

How to Teach Online Without Selling Your Soul: Essays about Online Teaching and Learning, Making a Living in Distance Education and Debunking the Myths of E-Learning [\[PDF\]](#) [\[KINDLE\]](#)

A Mindful Guide to Online Living: Ditch 9-5, Declutter Your Life and Create Sustainable Value [\[PDF\]](#) [\[KINDLE\]](#)

A Mindful Guide To Social Media [\[PDF\]](#) [\[KINDLE\]](#)

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