

WHITEPAPER

Why brands should think bigger than the humble blog.

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Introduction

The blog – such a wonderful thing. It allows us to describe, inform, engage, persuade and inspire audiences through different content formats.

It's a way of putting knowledge, expertise and opinion out there to be heard, enabling us to build credibility, trust and authority amongst industry peers and spectators.

But the big question is – have we reached the peak fever pitch when it comes to the blog? You'd be hard done by not to find a brand across B2C and B2B spheres which currently isn't operating a blog platform of some form.

With the internet reaching business-blog-breaking point, the time has come to think outside of the box on how to make the most of owned content assets to build brand awareness, support in generating leads and enabling brands to become the authoritative voice within their sector.

But first, a little history lesson...

The birth and boom of the blog

1994. A year where Oasis changed the face of British music, Roberto Baggio smashed a penalty over the bar in the World Cup Final (or Diana Ross hitting one wide at the opening ceremony might be more up your street), and both The Shawshank Redemption and Forrest Gump were the big hits of the silver screen.

But perhaps more unbeknownst is that 1994 is heralded as the birth of the blog, as college undergraduate, Justin Hall, created a site called links.net. Referred to as a personal home page, Hall created a collection of HTML examples he'd found across the World Wide Web, and his legacy has reached such lengths that New York Times Magazine named him "the founding father of personal blog" ^[1] – quite the accolade, wouldn't you say. The personal home page became the weblog, then in 1999, with the help of platforms such as LiveJournal and Xanga, the term 'blog' was coined.

In the years which followed, the blog phenomenon exploded. The press and media began to embark on their own blogging journeys, vlogging became a thing and microblogging platforms, such as Twitter and Tumblr, came on the scene. In 2012, Medium was created – a blog platform which now has more than 60 million active users ^[2].

Today, the numbers around blogs are seismic. Globally, there are more than 600 million blogs on the internet ^[3] (that's 35.29 per cent of all live websites) with more than 6.9 million blog posts being published every day ^[4].

Responsiveness and aesthetics have grown in importance too, as the overall look, feel and functionality of the blog came into the spotlight. Both B2B and B2C brands are surfing the blog wave, with 86 per cent of marketers using these posts to help meet their brand's overall marketing objectives ^[5].

Blogging is a way of supporting organisations in generating leads, converting prospects and retaining existing customers, as well as attracting non-branded organic traffic through optimised search-focused articles. Content marketing spend from businesses is on the up, and blogging is at the epicentre of it ^[6].

The history of the blog



The birth of the blog

1994 - College undergraduate, Justin Hall, created a site called links.net. Referred to as a personal home page, Hall created a collection of HTML examples he'd found across the World Wide Web.

1994

The boom of the blog

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1999

A new Medium of blogging

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2012

A cultivated content plan through your blogging platform

Blogs have become an essential and powerful marketing tool – and shouldn't be dismissed as anything otherwise. The blog has been found to drive 55 per cent more visitors to websites which have one compared to those which don't ^[7], and creates 97 per cent more inbound links ^[8] (which are key indicators of authority for search engines).

But getting those sorts of returns doesn't just come from setting up a blog page on your website and posting whatever you like. The key to a successful blog is creating a content strategy which will resonate with your audience, to enable trust and authority to be built in your brand.

Curating a blog content strategy shouldn't just end at written content either – audio, visual and video content should all play an integral role within your content activity.

Catering to your audience's needs

You need to put yourself in the shoes of your target audience across all stages of the sales funnel and ask the following:

- What do they want to know?
- How do they want to digest it?
- What should their desired outcome be once they have read it?



Meeting Google's E-A-T requirements

Google strives to ensure audiences are being fed the most relevant content by the most relevant author using the pillars of expertise, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness ^[9] as its beacon of guidance.

Through strategic planning and creating high-quality relevant content, you can tick all three of these boxes.

One way of doing this is through developing content clusters to help aid the user journey, creating content across a topic and all relevant touchpoints to this overall topic, helping you become a vocal leader within your field.

Plus, blogs can be partnered with your other marketing activity, such as paid and organic social media and email marketing, to get the good word out there.

Did you know...



*96 per cent of B2B marketers have used
LinkedIn to distribute their content in the last
12 months*

Source: LinkedIn (January 2021)

The blogging paradox: Adding brand value vs writing for the sake of writing

For sure, the benefits of having a blog for all businesses are great – but if your content is bad, your blog is going to be bad and, unfortunately, you won't reap any of the rewards.

In some instances, these platforms of content marketing beauty are becoming polluted with content unintended for these areas. Company news, press releases, new starter appointment stories – these are designed for a company news page, not a platform which aims to inform, engage and inspire its audience.

Relevancy too is a huge factor for any blog content platform. Tenuous, irrelevant subject matter outside of your field of expertise can be the downfall of any blog. You wouldn't catch a software developer talking about the latest interior trends, nor would you expect an interior design brand delving deep into the world of coding – it doesn't offer your intended audience any value. We covered this topic off in our article around creating a competitive content strategy.

But perhaps most importantly, if you've got nothing to say it's best to say nothing at all. Poorly planned content which lacks information comes at the detriment of engagement, meaning your hastily thrown together blog is pointless.

Yes, undertaking content marketing activity should be a priority for any brand, but don't be fooled into doing it without any strategic thought behind it. These are all part of a blog platform's darkened underbelly, incautiously tarnishing your brand's reputation and damaging both its authority and credibility. Avoid these pitfalls and you'll be able to create a content marketing platform with purpose.

As the blog sphere exponentially grows however, businesses need to act differently to stand out from the competition. If a brand rests on its laurels, it runs the risk of being left behind.

Our opinion?

**You should
think bigger
than the
humble blog...**

Act like a publisher

Your content marketing activity is about driving awareness, action and advocacy – but there is another ‘A’ which entwines these, as well as the rest of your content output together.

Authority.

As the old saying goes, to be the best you’ve got to beat the best. Why should industry publications be the automatic go-to for the latest in news, comment, opinion and information? Your brand is embedded at the very heart of the industry, so position yourself as the authoritative expert. Become that fountain of industry knowledge!

This is where stepping up from your blog becomes critical – you need to evoke the core principles of a publisher.

The first step is your content platform’s name. The likes of ‘Insights’, ‘Our Views’ or the overly creative ‘Blog’ are used across almost every vertical in every sector, making it a non-descript proposition.

You need a name that’s unique to you to allow your platform to stand out from the rest and gives you that publication feel as soon as someone reads or sees any of your content. It builds authority from the very start.

Think about how and where it sits too. Whether you host all the content on a dedicated microsite or on your main website, make sure it’s easy to find and navigate.

When it comes to content creation, an editorially led approach is key. Be sure to banish those company news updates to a separate news page.

This is about creating high-quality content across all formats which informs, engages and inspires an audience, and builds authority not only for your platform, but also for your brand.

An editorial approach to inform and engage

Here's an example: A new piece of regulation is about to be released, which will impact all businesses within your sector. A publisher would take the following approaches:



A news article announcing the latest regulatory standards to be introduced in your sector



An educational guide on what exactly the regulation is and the impact it will have



A thought-leadership piece around what the regulation means for the industry, coming from a voice within the industry



An informative how-to guide on the best ways to prepare for the introduction of the regulation



An audio or video Q&A roundtable with industry influencers and stakeholders discussing the regulation

Each one of these offers an audience something slightly different, but the end result is the same. An audience would come away feeling informed on the regulatory update from digesting any of them. In turn, this helps your brand and your publication showcase its expertise, create a voice of authority and build trust in what you have to say.

Using publication tactics for generating content

Harnessing the power of third-party brands, academics, initiatives and influencers as part of your editorial publishing model is key too. Not only does featuring other experts on your platform covering topics associated to, but outside of, your expertise enhance its credibility, but it can also help your brand bridge into other networks through encouraging social sharing amongst contributors.

Hosting webinars, seminars and industry events using your platform's name is the sort of activity a publisher would do and, on grander scales, creating sector awards can all help generate further brand awareness – all through acting like a publisher.

Of course, the amplification of all your activity is critical. Using both organic and paid social media activity can help you target new and existing audiences with what you've got to say, while newsletters add an extra layer to your amplification strategy.

This even comes down to the look and feel on your platform. We've touched already on the ever-evolving aesthetics and ergonomics of blog platforms, but to capture your audience's attention your platform needs to look a million dollars just like those industry publications out there.

A masthead, filterable functionality, social share and subscribe buttons are all simple enough features, but they exude the impression of a truly respectable publication, not just a blog you've tucked away on the footer of your site.



Third-party brands,
academics, initiatives
and influencers



webinars, seminars and
industry events



Social media
amplification



Platform design

Creating content drives engagement, generates leads and builds authority

Any content activity you undertake as a brand is aimed at supporting your overall marketing and business objectives. The blog has revolutionised how brands communicate with existing and prospective customers, but now is the time for it to undertake its next evolution.

To become a trusted, authoritative voice within your industry through the content you generate, thinking and acting like something much bigger than a blog is the way forward.

From interview features and industry news, to thought leadership and contributing authors, evoking the ethos and ideologies of a publisher can give your audience confidence in your knowledge and expertise – all through your content marketing activity.

About Brand8 PR

Brand8 PR is a content marketing agency delivering powerful ideas that enable businesses and brands to achieve their commercial objectives. We do this by combining the disciplines of brand strategy, public relations, content marketing, social media and SEO, executing robust tactics across traditional, digital and social media channels.

Our approach sees us consider how best to utilise content as a primary communications channel to manage reputation and influence outcomes, rather than the production of content to simply appease a search engine.



Rob Smith
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- 5 . <https://www.semrush.com/blog/content-marketing-statistics/>
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