

10 Ways Your Blog Post Can Lay an Egg

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As a

social media marketing professor, I am embarrassed to say that some of my blog posts were complete duds. After garnering one comment, a “like” from my wife and a couple of shares on one post, I realized I am not practicing what I preach. Have you been there? The following is nothing new. But it’s a compilation of what leading bloggers and researchers suggest we do to make our posts comment-worthy, share-worthy and link-worthy.

> Making Posts Comment-Worthy

Without a trail of comments, blog posts are essentially articles. Lost are opportunities to spark engagement and showcase our content’s popularity as measured by likes, shares, comments and views. And without this social proof from commentary, what confidence do readers have that your post is worth reading?

A sizeable body of evidence also suggests that trails of commentary indeed contribute to search engine results. So what mistakes are made in trying to attract commentary? Media communication and PR literature seem fairly consistent on this subject.

Mistake #1: Shying Away from Controversy

A former wrestling extraordinaire and colleague of mine at Rockwell Collins, Dave Deal, often schooled us marketers on the art of guerilla warfare. As a regional sales director, Dave’s inputs on marketing strategies were followed by his infamous rally cry to “go pick a fight!”

Although intended to steer a competitive strategy, shouldn’t the same apply to blog posts? Without hitting a nerve or fueling a debate, why should readers park a comment on your post? Many bloggers likely fear that controversial posts can spoil a professional image or derail a discussion. But some academic research suggests that by stirring controversy, you can reap a lengthy comment trail devoid of your own biases.

Mistake #2: Failing to Solicit Input

A second way to make your posts comment-worthy is to leave your post open ended. In effect, this argument for commentary building suggests that readers have a clear understanding of their role. But consider how you would respond to the proverbial

“what do you think?” or “please share your thoughts.” My own reaction is “where do I start?”

Instead, watch what happens when you ask “what have I missed?” Here is where you will find experts coming out of the woodwork. I found this works when I ask students what I did wrong after sharing a story of a professional screw-up. I often have to interrupt with “okay, I get it!”

Mistake #3: Going Silent

One sure way to stop a comment trail is to avoid replies and thereby imply your readers’ comments don’t really matter. In their study of newsgroup participation, Joyce & Kraut (2006) found that those who got a reply to their comments were 12% more likely to post again. The authors attribute this to the commenter’s desire for positive reinforcement.

Mistake #4: Not Reciprocating

There is a great deal of practitioner support for the case that successful solicitation of comments is largely influenced by the activity you spend on your potential readers’ blog posts. Consider how we feel when our contributions to others’ blogs are not reciprocated. Although much of these claims on comment reciprocation are anecdotal, theories of reciprocity have shown that social media engagement improves as bloggers demonstrate their empathy in the form of comment replies and sharing generosity.

> Making Posts Share-Worthy

Did you ever have a post with long comment trails and likes but few shares? By ignoring strategies to amplify sharing, you miss an even greater opportunity to bump search engine results and build followers. And likes without shares can amount to a mere thank you that offers only temporary boosts in social activity and newsfeed bumps. The mere fact that shares are often augmented with a reader’s own spin suggests a more vested community interest and message relevance. This, in turn, could translate to new followers. So how do we blow this opportunity?

Mistake #5: Lack of Emotion

It’s hard to find any practitioner or academic research that does not highlight the importance of emotion in encouraging readers to share content. Whether through tearful joy or excitement, emotional content represents over 97% of the viral content (> 50K views) shared on YouTube. And the remaining 3% applies primarily to informational videos supporting innovative product launches (e.g., Lexus and Apple).

Mistake #6: Too Much to Visualize

And few would debate the accelerated trends towards visual content. In fact, Cisco claims that video traffic will account for 82% of all consumer Internet traffic by 2021. But beyond just the simplicity and clarity afforded by imagery and videos, don’t most of us want to share something that looks digestible (e.g., photos, bullets, short paragraphs, simple titles, plain English, etc.)? Anyone waiting for a steady stream of white papers? My 6 year old at the time asked me who was going to read our journal publications. There are no pictures.

Mistake #7: Underestimated Reader Bragging Rights

Having 4 sisters, I could attest to their desire to be “the first to tell.” After all, don’t they lose their social capital if I already heard the news? So many would argue that posts on breaking news encourage readers to share your content. But have we gone overboard with town criers? An argument could be made that instead of breaking

news, we should focus more on interpreting or providing our unique perspective on emerging trends. I found the latter to be more promising than the hackneyed news jacking we get when everyone is live video streaming. Another way to encourage bragging rights is to highlight one of your fan's comments (e.g., shared personal experience).

Mistake #8: Saturate Audiences with Education

Guilty as charged. As much as I feel compelled to inform and explain, my students will fall asleep if I don't inspire or entertain them. Renowned philosopher, Herbert McLuhan, perhaps said it best: "Anyone who tries to make a distinction between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either."

In our own studies of social media influence, Dr. John Gironda and I found that entertainment value and inspirational motivation impacted social capital as much as helpfulness and foresight. This would imply that readers are just as motivated to share something that boosts the spirits of their followers as they are in sharing news.

> Making Posts Link-Worthy

But these tactics for building commentary and encouraging shares may not invite links. Unless you somehow authenticate those linking to your site, why would they want to interrupt their own content with disruptive hyperlinks?

Link-worthiness is about enticing audiences of high social influence to transfer their social capital to you in response to your rewarding them or validating their claims. And search engines like links especially from sites with high traffic. So what keeps influencers from linking to your site?

Mistake #9: No Meaningful Influencer Outreach

How many of you received links when you validated the claims of an influencer with even the simplest of research (e.g., a survey)? When influencers consume their day with podcasts, blogging and TED Talks, many are left with little time to empirically back their expertise or perspectives. If you can cite and tag their claims in your research findings, many may link to your supportive findings and even invite you to elaborate on their own blogs or podcasts.

Mistake #10: No Meaningful Influencer Rewards

And if you can't help them, then why not reward them? My highest performing pieces acknowledged thought leaders as featured contributors or industry pioneers. But rather than name dropping with pretentious and invalidated top expert lists, the leading influencers were tagged more as leading examples of the discussed concept.

At this point, I believe that many of you may argue that blogging in the traditional sense will die out in favor of live video streaming. But the goal for talk-worthiness will likely remain. Unless our content attracts commentary, encourages sharing and invites links from reputable sites, can we really expect our readers to join the dialog?

So what am I missing that you found to be effective in boosting comments, share and links?