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***Top 7 Tips
to Write an
Effective Business Blog***

by Debbie Weil

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Think of a blog as the 3D version of your expertise. It's the online version of You, Inc. It's a microsite where you can showcase your thinking and writing skills.

“Good blogging is good writing.”

It's where influencers, decision makers, your customers, potential clients, the media - not to mention your boss - can get to know you better — either because they found your blog through the search engines, or they clicked through to it from a link in your newsletter, email signature or business card.

So, let's talk about how to blog well. Good blogging is good writing, after all. What should you keep in mind when you start to blog?

Here are seven rules for effective blogging:

Tip #1: Start with a topic you're passionate about

This is your theme, the thread that will run through your blog. You better be passionate about it, because you'll be chipping away at it for months!

Yep, that's the bad news. It takes time to build your blog into something worth reading. It's the accumulation of posts, or entries, over a period of months or longer that will set you apart as a real blogger.

Tip #2: Concentrate on shorter, more frequent entries in your blog

Now, the good news. You don't have to write a long essay each time you post to your blog. On the contrary, a short paragraph or two is plenty. Sometimes just a sentence will suffice.

Our goal is to show that you're knowledgeable about your topic. You're reading other blogs or news sources, online or offline, that are related.

In fact, a sentence or two with a link directing readers to a relevant article in *The Wall Street Journal* or other respected periodical is plenty. The fact that you noticed the article and have an opinion about it is what counts.

The "Dear Mom" Exercise

Don't be too stiff and professional when you write in your blog. You don't want it to sound like you've pasted in a press release. Avoid passive tense and long, tortuous sentences.

Here's an exercise: pretend you're writing an email to your Mom. Now, clean that up a bit so it's not quite so informal. For example, you probably want to avoid multiple exclamation points!!!

“A blog is a way to demonstrate that you can write and think clearly, concisely and concretely.”

Tip #3: Let your authentic “voice” emerge

Good blogs have a viewpoint and a voice. They reveal something about the way the blogger thinks – as well as what he or she thinks about.

This is where it gets a bit tricky. You want to be honest and forthright in your writing, but you don't want to cross the line into saying things that are critical or inappropriate about major players in your industry.

The best advice I have is to use common sense. Every time you post a new entry, remember that you are creating a *public* Web page, easily searchable by Google. That's a key reason, BTW, that blogs come up high in search engine results.

“The ability to write is in woefully short supply at most companies.”

Tip #4: Use correct grammar and syntax

If you’re blogging about topics related to your industry niche, the quality of your writing *does* matter.

As a refugee from the corporate workplace myself, I can tell you that the ability to write is in woefully short supply at most companies. A blog is a way to demonstrate that you can write and think clearly, concisely and concretely. *And yes, you do get extra points for proper grammar and correct spelling!*

Tip #5: Write for the Web: Purposefully organize the content of your blog

A blog provides you with an elegant and easy-to-use writing tool. It is also a mini content management system.

Use it purposefully. Think about the categories you want to cover over time. Are there keywords you should be using that clients and prospects may be searching on? Create a category for that phrase.

In addition, title each of your posts with care. Include as many specifics and keywords as possible. If you’re quoting an expert or brand name company in your blog entry, include the name in your title. Your blog entry may show up in search engine results alongside the Web site for a Fortune 500 company.

“Title your posts with care. Include as many specifics and keywords as possible.”

Writing for the Web means
writing for scanners.

Best practices are to use:

- ◆ sub-heads
- ◆ bullets
- ◆ short paragraphs
- ◆ a graphic, if appropriate

***“Chunking and packaging
your words makes them easier
and more appealing to read.”***

In short, chunking and packaging your words makes them easier and more appealing to read. It also gives you an excuse to write less. "Shorter" makes keeping your blog fresh and up to date less intimidating when you've got 100 other things to do .

***“Use the draft
function of your
blogging software to
park an interesting
tidbit of info or
useful URL.”***

Tip #6: Post a new entry at least once a week, and preferably two or three times a week

Circling back to Tip #2, you need to write frequently in order to keep your blog fresh. The more you post, the more content you are creating. Since each new post or entry is its own Web page, you are increasing the chances that search engines will find your blog. I can't emphasize frequency and consistency strongly enough.

One way to force yourself to write more often is to use the draft function of your blogging software to park an interesting tidbit of info or useful URL. When you run across something you'd like to write about, open up your blog and create a draft entry. Give it a provisional title. Come back later, when you've got 20 minutes to spare to write up a coherent paragraph.

Tip #7: Include your key contact information

You'd be amazed at how many bloggers forget to do this! Never forget that your blog may turn up in a reporter or customer's Google search. By building your contact information into your blog template, you make it easy for them to pick up the phone and call or send an email.

“Never forget that your blog may turn up in a reporter or customer's Google search.”

"Everybody has an online identity whether they know it or not, and a blog is the single best way to control it," Debbie Weil says. "You're going to be Googled. No one hires anyone or buys anything these days without going online first and doing research."

- as quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* (April 10, 2007)

Bonus Tip:
Have fun!!

BONUS TIP

Have fun when you blog. Whether you're blogging your way to new customers, to get media exposure or to start a conversation with existing customers and friends, you may find that blogging is truly a creative outlet.

Over time, you might find yourself teasing clarity out of a complex topic or delving into subjects you didn't know you were so interested in.

Keep chipping away with each blog entry. Who knows? Your blog might turn into a book!

To blog is to write for the Web

Let's recap the rules of the road and review how to write for the Web:

- Title your post succinctly, remembering keywords and being specific. Search engines and RSS readers will pick up on your post titles, so they're important.
- Write informally - *but not sloppily*.
- Let a conversational tone with an "opinion" and "point of view" emerge.
- Include lots of links, and be sure to give credit to the other bloggers.
- Use white space and visual markers for easy reading.
 - Bullets
 - Indents
 - Bold
 - Italics
 - Snappy sub-heads for skimmers
 - Add images (clip art, photos, charts)
 - Embed videos (yes, there's an easy way to do this)
- Use the "continue reading" feature, so your post doesn't appear too long.

Before you Publish... review for typos and repetitiveness.

At a loss for words: link, link, link

If you're struggling to find things to write about, you're not alone.

In a recent WordBiz survey, 71% of the marketers who responded said that time was a key concern in managing a corporate blog for their company or organization. Forty-five percent didn't know what to write about. Let's rule out *lack of time* as a barrier to blogging.

“To avoid blogging burnout, link to an article you’ve read, make a one sentence comment on it, and your blog entry is complete.”

Really, you'll never be stuck for something to write about. Link to industry articles or other blog posts, or add an interesting graphic or insert a relevant video from YouTube.

Create a blogging schedule *and stick to it*. Don't wait for a topic to drop from the heavens! Instead, use RSS feeds to scour regular sources that focus on your niche expertise. By publishing that information through your blog, you position yourself as an expert and avoid wasting time searching for information that doesn't benefit your business.

“Your blog doesn’t need to be ‘cool’.”

Remember Tips #2 and #6: Don't feel pressured to write an article-sized entry. Keep your blogging concise. Blogs are supposed to be a quick, easy read. Link to an article you've found, make a one or two sentence comment on it, and you're done. Posting short entries a couple of times a week shouldn't lead to blogging burnout.

Your blog doesn't need to be "cool." A steady stream of short tips with links to other sites or articles is often all it takes. With a blog, you can parcel it out in digestible bits — *with more impact*.

Blogging bits and pieces is a heck of a lot easier than writing full-length articles.

A few examples of well-written corporate blogs

Who is blogging for business?

Lots of companies, often technology-oriented ones, and lots of savvy marketers. Here are a few examples of well-written blogs from companies large and small.

Note that each blog entry is written by one person and in a distinctive voice. Individuals blog; companies don't blog. Corporations typically communicate in marketing-speak, whether it's through glossy collateral or their corporate home page. Which do you think is more persuasive? Corporate-speak or the conversational style of a blog?

Put it this way: who wants to be *marketed at* or *sold to*? Wouldn't you rather have an intelligent conversation with a real human being (via a blog) and decide later whether to buy?

When you check out these blogs, look at the length of the entries, who writes them (some are multiple-author), the topics, what they link to and the writing style.

Dell's Direct2Dell blog

<http://direct2dell.com>

Dell launched a blog as a way to combat criticism of poor customer service and to communicate directly and openly with thousands of customers. It's written by a group of employees. The guiding philosophy of the blog is to "Think straight, talk straight."



Conference Calls Unlimited's Zane Safrit

<http://zane.typepad.com>

CEO of a teleconferencing and podcasting company, Zane is a prolific blogger. He dropped expensive - and fruitless - online advertising via Google Ads in favor of reaching out to his customers via a blog. I love his tagline: Thoughts from leading a small company in a rapidly changing industry.



BlogWrite for CEOs

<http://BlogWriteForCEOs.com>

This is my blog about corporate and CEO blogging. Scroll down the right-hand column to check out the resource links for corporate blogging, as well as links to Top CEO and Exec Bloggers. I've purposefully collected these so I can refer to them myself.

Wells Fargo Blogs: Join the Conversation

<http://blog.wellsfargo.com>

Wells Fargo is the first Fortune 50 financial services company to launch several public blogs. They're written by teams of authors. [Guided by History](#) began as an event-specific blog to commemorate the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake & Fire. [The Student Loandown](#) is directed at students (and parents) worried about financing college education.

Berkshire Blog by Karen Christensen

<http://www.berkshirepublishing.com/blog>

Karen Christensen is one of the few CEO bloggers who is a woman. The publishing company executive chronicles the highlights of her trips and writes in an engaging style about doing business in China.



Meryl's Notes

<http://www.meryl.net/blog/>

Meryl K. Evans is a writer and editor whose blog is a great example of how a solopreneur can showcase her talents and know-how. Click the *Archive by date* link and you'll see that she's got entries going back to the year 2000.

Micro Persuasion by Steve Rubel

<http://www.micropersuasion.com/>



Rubel's hugely popular blog discusses the impact of blogs on public relations. He evangelizes the use of new technologies including blogging, RSS, video and podcasting. He updates his blog frequently - often several times a day. Use this one to learn about the coolest new widgets.

Sun Microsystems CEO Jonathan Schwartz

<http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan>



The first Fortune 500 CEO blogger, Schwartz writes about Sun's mantra (the network is the computer), competing with IBM and other tech industry issues. He's super smart and it shows. He writes in an inviting conversational style though his entries are often essay-length. Note the drop-down in the header of his blog. It's translated into 10 languages!

Seth Godin's Blog

<http://sethgodin.typepad.com/>

It's no surprise that the author of *Permission Marketing*, *Purple Cow*, and his newest book, *Small is the New Big*, has a blog. He riffs on everything from what he sees in the grocery store to billboards in Times Square. A great read.



Basic blogging etiquette

Keep it fresh (and short)

As compelling as your blog may be, if you don't keep it fresh, your audience is going to lose interest. Update your blog several times a week at minimum.

This way your audience will know it hasn't been abandoned. Don't try to write an opus. A short entry is fine.

Link, link, link

No matter what site, article or other blog you refer to, you should embed a link to your source. Not only is it polite, it's what makes the blogosphere tick - the cross-linking and cross-fertilization of hundreds and thousands of blogs.

Of course, it's also what draws the search engines to your blog. Be sure to refer to the specific, permanent link - or *permalink* - if you're referencing another blogger's post.

Stick to a niche topic

While it's tempting to sound off on the topic du jour, don't. An effective business blog focuses on a subject that's useful to your audience.

Oh, and have fun!

It's hard not to, once you get into the swing of blogging. Imagine... a business communications vehicle where you can *tell it like it is*, avoid endless rounds of editing and approvals, develop a distinctive writing voice and style... and still generate leads, attract media attention and brand your company or organization as a thought leader.

Business Blogging Resources

Recommended Blogging Software

Hosted

Hosted means you can launch a blog in several hours or less. Both TypePad and WordPress have dozens of pre-designed templates you can choose from. You can create a snazzy, professional-looking blog with no design expertise.

www.TypePad.com (minimal monthly or annual fee)

www.WordPress.Com (free)

www.Blogger.com (free)

Install on your own server (requires tech expertise)

www.MovableType.org (license)

www.WordPress.org (free)

Blog Search Engines

www.Technorati.com

www.BlogPulse.com

<http://blogsearch.google.com>

Good Blogs about the Intersection of Marketing, PR and Business

www.mpdailyfix.com (Marketing Prof: Daily Fix)

www.BlogWriteforCEOs.com (see right-hand column for links to CEO and Fortune 500 blogs as well as other corporate blogging resources)

www.Blogspotting.net (written by two Business Week reporters)

RSS Newsreaders

www.Bloglines.com (web-based; highly recommended)

www.Newsgator.com (download; integrates with Outlook)

<http://ranchero.com/netnewswire/> (for Mac OS X)

<http://my.yahoo.com> (web-based; easy to use)

<http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/central.html>
(Firefox browser is RSS compatible; highly recommended)

About Debbie Weil

Most companies are terrified of bloggers. There are over 70 million of them, according to Technorati, and you can't control them. But there's a way you can defend your brand in the blogosphere whether you're a Fortune 500 company or an individual entrepreneur: *Start your own blog.*

Through keynotes, workshops and consulting, Debbie trains busy managers, executives and solopreneurs on how to launch and maintain an effective blog. A blog makes you (or your brand, product, service) findable online. A blog can make you come up first in Google search results. A blog is a powerful and cost-effective PR, marketing and communications strategy.

Her practical presentations (no techie jargon) demystify the blogosphere and show you how to get started immediately. She specializes in content strategy – who and how to write your blog, what your topic should be, how to prompt a conversation with your readers. She has parsed the implications of Web 2.0 and social media (blogs, podcasts, wikis, video and RSS) for thousands of executives throughout the US and in the UK and Europe.



Engage her for:

- **Consulting** ([executive blog coaching](#) and [corporate strategy](#))
- **Keynotes** ([Belgium](#), France, the UK, the US... soon China!)
- **Teleconferences** ([example](#))
- **Webinars** ([example](#) and [example](#))
- **Workshops** ([example](#) and [example](#) and [example](#))

For more information, visit www.debbieweil.com/speaking.



Debbie is the author of [*The Corporate Blogging Book: Absolutely Everything You Need to Know to Get It Right*](#) (Penguin Portfolio 2006). There is a UK edition. It will be published in Mandarin Chinese and Italian (!) in 2007.

You can download Chapter 1 at www.TheCorporateBloggingBook.com. Buy it [on Amazon](#) or find it at Barnes & Noble, Borders and other booksellers.

She writes a widely-read blog on the topic of CEO and corporate blogging, www.BlogWriteForCEOs.com, and publishes an award-winning e-newsletter, www.WordBizReport.com

Debbie has been quoted on the why, what and how of business and corporate blogging in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Times*, *Entrepreneur Magazine* and numerous other newspapers and trade magazines. She has appeared on television on the UK's *Sky News* and on the *Nightly Business Report*.

Debbie previously worked at *Network Solutions, Inc.*, the original dot com company. She was a reporter and editor for two decades with major newspapers including *The Atlanta Constitution* and *Cox Newspapers Washington Bureau*. She is a graduate of Harvard with an honors degree in English, has a Masters in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin and earned an MBA from Georgetown University.

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