

# Does your Firm Really Need a Blog?

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## Why does your business need a blog?

*To be honest, maybe you don't need a blog.*

There are several marketing benefits from having a blog on your company's website. They are:

- Establishing brand identity and authority in your field
- Building relationships with prospects and customers
- Developing sales leads
- Improving the ranking of your website on search engines
- Improving your website conversion rate

As you can see, these break down into two broad categories of public relations and indirect marketing.

Let's look at each of these items.

## Brand identity and authority

By consistently publishing information which is useful to your target audience, you establish your blog as a resource that people will want to visit. Over time, this will make your brand more recognizable. Along with that recognition, your blog will become an authoritative voice within the business sector where you sell your products and services.

There are some caveats here you should not neglect. First, don't use a blog as a direct marketing tool. No one wants to visit an advertisement masquerading as a blog post. Readers will sniff out that sort of cheesy ploy in microseconds and you will lose credibility. It undermines your authority as a resource, which is the exact opposite of what you want.

In order to lure users and make them repeat readers, your blog posts need to be useful to your target audience in a substantial way. What goes into your posts should be factual, candid and reliable information about your business sector or business niche. Robert Bly in the third edition of his classic *Copywriter's Handbook* related the following example which emphasizes this:

*At GM, vice chairman Bob Lutz, who is in charge of product development, began a blog about GM cars. 'Once readers realized it really was him and not an advertising ploy, they quickly warmed to the idea that he was talking candidly about GM and its competition' ... Seventy percent of auto buyers now go to the website for information, reports MIT professor of management Glen Urban."*

By serving up reliable and candid information, Lutz established his GM website as an authoritative voice for potential buyers of his product.

## Building Relationships and Developing Leads



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Before the internet invaded everyone's home, customers interacted with a business either through a sales representative or through a field representative who installed and fixed products or provided a service. The internet changed that.

Now consumers visit company websites as a first point of contact, send emails to company staff, post to the business pages on sites like Reddit or Facebook, or comment on business blogs. Smart marketers know this and set up to respond to reader comments promptly. This is pure gold in terms of reaching out and building customer relationships.

Quickly replying to someone's comment on a blog post makes your firm look responsive and responsible. It says you really care about your customers and it builds a positive relationship with not just the person who commented, but also with everyone who read the entire comment-and-reply exchange.

Not only are you building relationships, you are also developing leads. By creating an authoritative blog presence and using it to develop relationships, people shopping for your products will notice and remember you. If you do a better job with your blog than your competition, you will attract more leads when your blog readers are ready to buy.

Again there are some caveats here. The first is regularity in posting. You won't build a readership for your blog if you don't post regularly. Just posting when you can manage it doesn't pass muster. An irregular blog sends a message of inconsistency and inability to meet a schedule. It makes you look like an amateur.

You are better off *not* having a blog if you can't field the resources to publish on a schedule. Posting once a week has become a standard. Typical posts are 500 to 800 words. If you have a topic that takes more than that, then break it up into parts and post a part every week.

There is also a caveat about responding to reader comments. Always have someone available to respond to those comments. This is nothing less than good customer relations. It's the internet equivalent of a sales rep returning phone calls. If you skip this, then you are losing out on building relationships and generating future leads.

## Search Engine Optimization



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There's that horrible SEO thing again. It shouldn't be intimidating nor should it keep you up at night. A good factual blog with a regular posting schedule will do more for your search engine rankings than buckets of keywords and tag optimization. When it comes down to SEO gimmicks versus good content on your blog, content is still king.

Just by establishing a regular posting schedule for your blog and sticking to it, you will grow your rankings naturally for the domain where you host your blog. Sure, knowing how to use your meta, tags and keywords is advisable, but good content posted on a regular schedule is vastly more important.

Get the content and the schedule established first and then worry about the nuances of SEO kung-fu after you have the basics squared away. Never forget that quality content and a frequent posting schedule are the best ways improve your search engine rankings. Blog volume matters more than all of the SEO tricks in the world: a business with a regular blog will have [434 percent more indexed pages](#) than a business without one.

## Website Conversions

There's a lot of marketing talk out there about using website features to generate conversions. A conversion is just jargon for getting a user response. Asking a user for their name and email address in exchange for downloading an ebook counts as a conversion. Opting-in to receive an email newsletter is another example. Basically, a conversion is when you've used something on your business website to get a user to interact with you in some way. Your conversion "rate" is one of the ways to measure the effectiveness of your website as a marketing tool. The most desirable of all conversions is the sale of your product.

The idea here is that pre-sale conversions build relationships with users through active engagement. Every time a user signs up for your blog's RSS feed or writes a comment in reaction to one of your posts, those too are conversions. Your blog content engaged those users to take an action on your website. A well-maintained blog with quality content will always result in these conversions.

A lot of internet marketroids will tell you that conversions are desirable and will ultimately result in sales; however, you also want to avoid too many gimmicks to generate those conversions. If you pursue conversions too rigorously, you will annoy the visitors to your website and drive them away.

You don't want to have too many chat pop-ups or forced registration scripts. Those sorts of gimmicks distract your visitors from reading your content, and as any professional writer can tell you, distractions lose readers. They are the internet equivalent of the in-your-face hard sell. Overuse of those features will make you look like a sleazy used-car lot. It's not a good image and it will hurt your branding efforts.

The best way to generate conversions with a blog is through quality content served up on a predictable schedule. Good content will generate comments and RSS sign-ups. Some fraction of these conversions will lead to sales so the more conversions you can generate, the more sales you will ultimately receive.

## Should you have a blog?



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As a marketing manager or business executive, the marketing types will tell you that you need a blog as part of your sales strategy. That 434 percent increase in search engine indexing for your website is a very persuasive reason to blog regularly.

Regardless, there are circumstances where you shouldn't blog.

If you are a sole proprietor or small company that doesn't have the resources to maintain a weekly blog, consider not having one. Instead, create a page on your website with articles that would be useful for your current and future customers. Yes, you will lose the opportunity to improve your search engine rankings, and yes, you will also miss out on building relationships through interactive comments; but if you don't have time to generate blog posts regularly, you probably also lack the ability to respond to user comments in real time.

A blog can be a great way to help market your company and its products; however, a badly-done blog can actually do harm to your online image. It's better to do a blog right than slapping together a shoddy effort. After all, a blog falls into the category of indirect marketing tools. It's a brand builder, not a sales closer. Good blogs take effort and time. If you don't have the resource to do a blog well, use your limited resources where they can do you some good, like creating some white papers or case studies for your website.

On the other hand, if you have the resources to run a regular blog, you should always do so, especially if you can do a better job at blogging than your competition. A blog that becomes a quality information hub for your industry is a small investment with a potentially huge return.