

# Five Getting-Started Blog Questions

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While most in the SEO ([define](#)) industry probably consider blogging to be a no-brainer, many large online retailers have yet to embrace the concept of broadening their online range with blogs.

From a pure SEO perspective, blogging offers many benefits. Search engines, and Google in particular, love blogs. A blog naturally tends to rank better in search results than an e-commerce site for specific topics, because blogs have a freshness factor most e-commerce sites can't achieve.

Blogs can readily be set up to be crawl-optimized by design. But don't run out and start a blog at Blogger or MySpace. You're far better off using [Moveable Type](#) or [WordPress](#) to produce your first blog at a tenured, company-held domain name or, at the very least, incorporated into your existing site.

There's little or no heavy lifting required to set up a blog. Search engine spiders respond just as easily. Because blogs are usually only two or three layers deep to crawl, search engine spiders can rifle through most blog constructs quickly and efficiently. This helps keep indexation levels repeatedly refreshed, particularly if frequent posting is a top priority.

Blogs are generally considered more "real" and inherently trustworthy compared to self-serving corporate or e-commerce sites. There's less direct financial incentive in blogging, associated bloggers, and blog content. All other elements being equal, a well-written blog is as trusted by readers as by search engines. Due to its interactive nature, a good blog can go far to enhance the visibility of brands, goods, and services.

So what's a good blog, and how does it become great? A good blog really has something to say to its audience. If the content resonates well with visitors, readers can get hooked on it. Repeat visits lead to more RSS feed subscriptions, which transcend to greater content syndication that can increase an online retailer's new-to-file acquisition rates. All this can be achieved with a concentrated effort to engage the audience. If

you're scared of your customers and fear what they might say about your brands, goods, and services, you'd better make it a really great blog.

A good blog also encourages natural link building. Bloggers tend to befriend and link to other bloggers. Even a blogger for a big company or major brand can gain trust in the blogosphere by producing a blog with something real and new to say. A blog makes you one of them. Bloggers are therefore more likely to link to your site and blog and to provide favorable coverage on their blogs. Blogs build an author's credibility as a thought leader in a space so long as posts are relevant and intelligent.

A well-written blog can enhance your company's online reputation, recruit new clientele that increases traffic to your native site, and be a significant part of your long-term link-building strategy. First, though, you may want to answer a few questions. For example, how do you get started?

Getting a new blog started can be the hardest part. Choosing a topic, getting the blog designed and set up, putting metrics in place, and creating an editorial calendar to ensure that enough content is generated take time, a modest monetary investment, and, most important, a little planning. Many online businesses find the following questions are the toughest to answer before beginning a blog:

- **What will the blog be about?** The blog's theme should be consistent with the company's product or service lines, but tangential enough so the blog isn't solely about things the company sells. A blog that only exists to link to its e-commerce site won't get far in the blogosphere. Jewelry retailer [ice.com](#) came up with a gossip-rag angle with its [Sparkle Like the Stars](#) blog. The blog has a trendy, fashionista gossip columnist writing style, talking about what jewelry celebrities are wearing and how to replicate the look. It's much more buzzworthy than a "here's what's new in stock" blog. [SeenON](#), on the other hand, avoids the gossipy side of the conversation to focus on what celebrities are wearing and where. Both blogs work well for the different online retailers.
- **Who will blog?** Company blogs can be written by employees, non-staff, or brand evangelists (i.e., passionate customers). If the blogger is outside the organization, make it clear the blog is sponsored by your company to avoid negative press about ghost-blogging. Blogs have been lambasted for trying to fool readers (e.g., [Raging Cow](#), [Wal-Mart](#)). Employees make good bloggers because they understand the brand direction, and the message can be controlled more easily. Nonemployees make good bloggers because they tend to be more trusted and less prone to having a one-track mind when it comes to writing strictly about products. Who blogs really depends on your blog's theme.

- **How much time will blogging take?** Daily posting is ideal, but a couple times a week is sufficient. The higher the posts' quality, the less frequently you have to post. If each post takes 30-60 minutes to write, that's one-five blogging hours per week. And when you're first getting started, it's a good idea to allocate an equal amount of time to commenting on other bloggers' blogs. Total blogging and commenting time is about 10 hours a week, unless there's a cumbersome post approval process. If the legal department must preview each post, rewrites and disclaimers could add some 30 hours per week to the timetable.
- **What will blogging cost?** Many blog services are free, but no-fee blog services aren't optimally designed to maximize keyword visibility and link popularity. A corporate blog should represent the company in voice, design, and brand. It should be built on a solid strategy and planned to deliver maximum benefit to the company's e-commerce Web site, while not appearing to be a corporate tool. Starting a blog can cost very little if "brandonistas" are involved, or it can cost as much as an entry-level marketing position. All the same, the technical platform is relatively cheap.
- **Will blogging really help?** If the blog is optimally created and maintained, with a transparent, sincere voice and a commitment to using it to build relationships as well as links, then, yes, it will help. How much? That depends on how much the company is willing to invest in developing relationships with customers and prospects in the blogosphere. The only time blogging can really hurt is if the bloggers are insincere and dishonest and ignore their audience, or if your company has a god-awful online reputation in the first place. If you're in a war of attrition over your company's online reputation, it's going to take a heck of a lot more than a simple blog to fix the mess you're in.

From a SEO perspective, starting a blog is just one tactic. A brand-spanking new blog should be considered just a part of your overall SEO strategy. A blog can be a big or a small part of that strategy.

Don't have a SEO strategy in place? We'll have to leave that conversation for another day!

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