PROBLOGGER

31 DAYS TO BUILD A BETTER BLOG

BY DARREN ROWSE

If you want to improve your blog but have been putting it in the 'one day' basket or just don't know how to do it - you're not alone.

You're also in the right place.

Recently when I asked on Twitter whether there were any bloggers interested in a month of concentrated teaching and practical exercises on improving blogs I was inundated with expressions of interest.

Over 13,000 bloggers signed up - the 31 Days to Build a Better Blog Challenge was born.

The reality is that all bloggers want to improve their blogs - but many never quite get around to it.

I went through this in the early days of my own blogging and came to the realization that there came a point where I just had to get serious and put time aside to work on my blog.

That's what this challenge is about.

The idea is simple. By the end of this challenge you'll have learned 31 aspects of blogging and put them into practice. It is designed not only to fill your head with knowledge ABOUT blogging but also give you some concrete things to do to actually DO something with the knowledge.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is a collection of the teaching and tasks that bloggers went through in that challenge. It is broken down into thirty-one days or tasks, each with three main sections:

1. A Task for the day on a different area of blogging

2. Teaching on that area explaining why it's important and containing tips on how to implement the task.

3. Notes - an area for you to make notes on the day as well as some extra bonus tips and reflections not included in the original version of the course.

While originally designed to be taken over 31 days feel free to proceed through this workbook at your own pace. You might take on a couple of tasks in a single day or take your time with them and do just one or two a week - it's totally up to you.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Also note that for each day that there is an 'Interact' section with a link to a Forum area where previous and current participants in this challenge are leaving comments, suggestions, feedback and examples of how they're implementing the task for that day.

To interact with them simply head to http://www.problogger.com/31days/ and look for the 'register' link in the top right hand corner - signup and interact with the rest of our community as you progress through the tasks.

BEFORE YOU START

To help us with a couple of the tasks in the challenge and to help you track the success of your blog please make sure you have some kind of statistics/metrics package installed on your blog.

I use and recommend Google Analytics (it's free and comprehensive) but there are plenty of others on the market.

Please note: if you use WordPress.com or some other hosted blog platforms you won't be able to install one. Don't worry though - WP.com has built in stats, which are good enough for what we'll need.

I hope you find this workbook helpful!

BONUS TASKS

If you find this workbook helpful and wish to continue the 31DBBB process further I'd like to invite you to join our FREE newsletter below where you'll receive:

More Tasks and Teaching - I'd love to email you further challenges like the 31 tasks covered in the workbook.

Updates on Tools and Resources - Blogging is an ever-evolving medium - this newsletter will send occasional updates on the most important developments in terms of tools and resources to help you improve your blogging.

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SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

DAY 1

WRITE AN ELEVATOR PITCH FOR YOUR BLOG

Welcome to Day #1 of the 31 Days to Build a Better Blog Challenge. As on each day of this project, I'd like to present you with two items:

Some teaching/theory

A task to go away and do

TODAY'S TEACHING

Today's task is to develop an Elevator Pitch for your Blog. Let me explain why it's important.

What is an Elevator Pitch?

> *"An elevator pitch is an overview of an idea for a product, service, or project. The name reflects the fact that an elevator pitch can be delivered in the time span of an elevator ride (for example, thirty seconds or 100–150 words)." —*Wikipedia

Many business and self-improvement courses teach students to develop an elevator pitch for their business (and even for themselves). The idea is to have a short and sharp piece that you can say about yourself when the opportunity arises, instead of bumbling your way through explaining what your business does (and miss an opportunity).

The goal is both to communicate what you do and entice the person receiving your pitch to want to know more.

Elevator Pitches for Bloggers

While the idea of an elevator pitch is usually encouraged when startup entrepreneurs are looking for investors, developing an elevator pitch for your blog is also a smart move.

One of the most important reasons to do this exercise is that to develop an elevator pitch, YOU as a blogger need to have thought through and crystallized in your mind what your blog is about. If you're fuzzy on what your blog is about, it's unlikely than anyone else will have a clear idea either.

Knowing what your blog is about helps you in developing every aspect of it, including:

➔ Writing content

➔ Promotion and finding readers

➔ Search Engine Optimization

➔ Networking with other bloggers

➔ Branding

➔ Design ... the list goes on

In fact, almost every task that we'll be doing in the next 31 days should flow on from this task.

Other Reasons for Developing an Elevator Pitch

Of course, coming up with an elevator pitch will benefit you in many ways. Once you have one it's brilliant for communicating what your blog is about to readers (both the ones you already have and potential ones), other bloggers, potential business partners, media/journalists, advertisers, and even to friends and family members who might not understand what you're doing.

Once you have your blog's elevator pitch there's no limit to the places and situations where you can use it—either part of it or in its entirety. Here are a few that come to mind:

➔ **Your Blog's Tag Line**—having a short, sharp and descriptive tag line for your blog can be a powerful technique of quickly communicating to new readers to your blog what it's all about. Readers who don't gain a sense of what your blog's about are in danger of leaving quickly—so a tag line that is displayed prominently on your blog can be a great way to hook them in.

➔ **Your "About …" page**—the "About …" page of a blog (if you have one) is one of the most-read pages of a blog by first time visitors. It's an ideal place to communicate what you're about and *sell* to potential readers why they should subscribe and come back.

➔ **Real Life Conversation**—whether at a conference, in business interactions, or just everyday conversation, the topic of your blog is likely to come up from time to time, and these interactions can be an ideal time to pull out the elevator pitch and describe what your blog is about.

➔ **Business Cards**—I receive a lot of business cards at conferences and to be honest, at the end of the day I can't remember who gave me most of them. Adding an elevator pitch to a card can help trigger who you are and what you do in the mind of those you chat with at these busy events.

➔ **Pitching to Media**—one of the things I've noticed about many journalists is that they're very busy people who are constantly being pitched ideas for stories. Having a thought-through and effective pitch can help you be noticed and give a journalist a reason to listen to what you have to say.

➔ **Pitching to Other Bloggers**—similarly, I find that if I'm being pitched to as a blogger, I take more notice if the person pitching gives me a brief insight into who they are and what they do.

➔ **Email Signature**—any people have links to their blogs in their emails, but a link can be somewhat meaningless on its own. Why not add your elevator pitch? Similarly, signatures in forums can be a good place to have a short description of what you do to motivate people to check you out further.

➔ **Social Media Profiles**—the same goes for all those social media profiles that you have. As well as using them to point people to your blog, you give them a reason to go there.

Where else would you use an elevator pitch? I'm sure there are plenty more opportunities to pull them out! Feel free to share other places where you'll be using your pitch.

TODAY'S TASK

Take some time out today to develop an elevator pitch for your blog

Note: If you already have one take a few minutes to review and refine it.

How to Write an Elevator Pitch for Your Blog

I'm sure there has been much written on the topic online but here's some starting points that I recommend:

➔ **Solve a Problem or Need**—I'm a big believer in developing blogs that fulfill real needs and solve problems that people have. The problem need not be a big one (like World Peace) but you should be

attempting to create a solution people need on some level. Communicate this in your elevator pitch.

➔ **Define Your Audience**—who is your blog for? Who are you attempting to attract? If your blog is targeting a certain demographic or type of person (and it may or may not), include this in your pitch. If your blog is for teens, don't develop a pitch for grandparents—target the reader you want.

➔ **Be Clear**—don't leave people second guessing what you mean or interpreting jargon—make your elevator pitch crystal clear.

➔ **Keep it Short**—people have limited attention spans and the capacity to absorb lots of information. Get to the point, eliminate unnecessary words and make it punchy!

➔ **Stand Out**—use humor or powerful imagery to grab the attention of those that hear your elevator pitch.

➔ **Be Intriguing**—your elevator pitch is unlikely to convert people into reading your blog all on its own—but it should entice them to learn more. You don't need to cover everything in it, but attempt to write something that stays in the minds of those who hear it long afterwards.

➔ **Be Energetic but not Hyped**—you provide more than just dry information when describing your blog, but you also convey what YOU feel about it. This is important: if you pitch to a person with language and a voice that is dry and uninspired, you're unlikely to convert anyone into a reader. Show people that you love what you're doing, that you're passionate, and that you care about your topic. But don't go too far and hype it up beyond what it is either.

➔ **Consider Using a Question**—people are wired to answer and engage with questions. Ask them, even just rhetorical ones, in your pitch and you'll hook people in.

➔ **Be Ready to Expand Upon Your Pitch**—at a recent conference I had a person approach and give me what seemed like an elevator pitch about their blog. It worked really well, they had me interested—so interested that I asked them to tell me more. The problem was that they lacked anything else to say about their blog. See an elevator pitch as a conversation opener, designed to lead into further interaction with people. You don't have to say it all in your initial pitch, but you should be ready to say more if people are interested.

These are just the thoughts that come to my mind on elevator pitches. What would you add? Not everyone will be able to incorporate all of the above points but I hope that some of it will help you to develop yours.

My Elevator Pitch

I have a couple of elevator pitches in my blog here at ProBlogger. One's short (just six words) and one's a little longer (a minute or so). I use one or the other depending upon the circumstances and opportunity to share.

My short one is very simple: *ProBlogger helps Bloggers Build Exceptional Blogs*. I've used others over the life of this blog (and continue to evolve it) but have settled on this one for the time being because it's so simple, to the point and clear.

The longer version expands upon this and shares some of the ways that the blog helps bloggers improve their blogs by talking through a few of the main topics I cover.

Write Your Elevator Pitch

Once you have an elevator pitch for your blog, write or print it out and put it near your computer so that you can be reminded of it as you blog. You might also like to start to incorporate it into your blog as a tag line or in your About page. You could even write a post about it on your blog to communicate to your readers what you're on about (the appropriateness of writing it as a post will of course vary from blog to blog).

Interact

Gain feedback on your results and see what others are doing over at the forum: Day 1—Create an Elevator Pitch for Your Blog

TODAY'S NOTES

Questions and Tips on Developing Your Elevator Pitch

➔ Start by brainstorming words related to your blog

➔ What words come to mind as you think about your blog?

➔ Ask two to three friends or family members to try and describe your blog in a sentence

➔ Where will you use the Elevator Pitch that you come up with today?

As I mentioned in the post above, my own approach with Elevator Pitches is to have two. I have a short one that I use as a tag line on my blog, business card etc, and a longer one that I'm able to share with people in person when time is less of a constraint.

Check out this screenshot of Delicious:
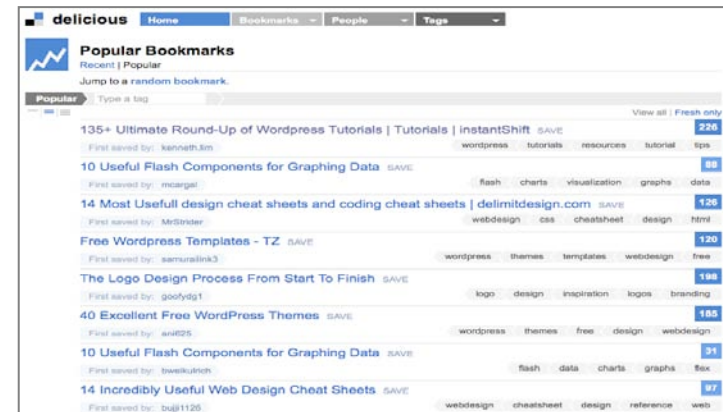
You can see there that every post in the most popular page of Delicious at this point was a list of some type.

DAY 2

WRITE A LIST POST

Today your task is to write a list post (a post with some kind of list in it).

TODAY'S TEACHING

Using lists has always been a popular and effective technique among bloggers wanting to write content that spreads from one person to the next. Just look at pages like the front page of Digg, TweetMeme and Delicious and you'll see that much of the hottest content on the web at any given time is written in this style.

8 Reasons Why List Posts are Powerful for Bloggers

List posts are popular because:

1. **Lists are scannable**—online readers are notoriously lazy and tend to scan content rather than read it word for word. A list helps communicate a number of points quickly and easily, and helps readers know if a post contains information of interest to them that they should actually read more of.

2. **Lists keep posts succinct**—there is something about a list that keeps you as a blogger from rambling. Each point has a start and end, whereas with an essay style of writing, points often bleed into one another.

3. **Lists look neat**—I don't know about you but when I surf onto a site that's full of messily formatted text I tend to keep my stay short. Lists, on the other hand, can be visually pleasing and more likely to stimulate reading.

4. **Lists can be comprehensive**—while some might argue that lists dumb down ideas and concepts, when written well they are actually just as comprehensive as any other style of writing.

5. **Lists are persuasive**—if you want to mount a case quickly, presenting numerous arguments in a list can be quite convincing. Again, it's about identifiable points that together go to forming a convincing argument.

6. **Lists can add to the ease of writing**—I like writing in lists because they break down my thoughts into bite-sized pieces, which is good for my readers and me as a writer, as I consider how to express myself.

7. **Lists go viral**—lists can start epidemics of ideas. For the above reasons and more, bloggers and social media aficionados seem to love sharing lists and, as a result, they spread quickly throughout the web (and beyond).

8. **Lists break down the complicated**—one reason I find list posts to be powerful is that they can break down complex ideas or tasks. I know on my photography blog that many of our Photoshop tutorials work best when our authors present their instructions as steps; that way, a procedure that can at first seem overwhelming becomes accessible as a list of bite-sized tasks.

Warning: limit your list posts. They can be incredibly powerful but readers can become frustrated with them if that is all you do.

TODAY'S TASK

Write a list post

Today your task is to write a list post on your blog. You may not choose to publish it today if you already have something lined up, but aim to publish it in the next day or two if you can.

3 Types of List Posts

There are a variety of ways of incorporating lists into your blog. Depending upon the topic and style of blog you're building, some of these options might be appropriate for you:

1. **The post as a list**—in this case there's nothing in the post except for the list. The title of your post introduces the topic and then the list speaks for itself. The list can be quite bare bones—short and to the point. However, readers often like them because of their bluntness and the way they tell it like it is. *Example*: 21 Ways to Write Posts that are Guarantees to Grow Your Blog.

2. **Extended lists**—this is how I generally approach list posts. I'll show you a couple of examples below but in a sense this type of post is similar to an essay or article, except the main points are broken down into a numbered list format. Generally, there's a heading for each section (highlighted in bold or with heading tags) with a paragraph or two under each one. *Example*: 10 Ways to Take Stunning Portraits.

3. **Lists within posts**—the post you're reading right now probably best illustrates this type. In this post there are two lists that present ideas in the midst of other content. In a sense the list becomes a way of breaking up your text. I find that often these posts do quite well, as other bloggers looking for a quote to share with their readers will go to your list.

Some bloggers do, at times, become a little *anti* list, suggesting it's an overused technique and a lazy way to write—but this need not always be the case. There's nothing to stop a blogger developing an in-depth list post for almost any blog.

List posts will not suit everyone's style and probably are harder to use with some blog topics than others, but they are a useful style of post to have in your tool belt for when the opportunity arises.

Highly recommended reading: If you're after a little extra reading on the topic of writing list posts, check out this excellent and practical guest post from late last year on ProBlogger, 10 Steps to Writing the Perfect List Post.

Examples of List Posts

I know some of our participants will find today's task easier than others. Some of you have successfully written a lot of list posts while others have yet to try. Some have topics where these types of posts fit better than others. I hope that in the following examples (both from my blogs and others) you'll find a little inspiration to discover a type of post that might work with your blog.

➔ 21 Tips for Amateur Wedding Photographers—a general post listing a lot of tips. The tips are brief but each could be expanded into a post of its own at some point.

➔ Popular Digital Cameras and Gear—this is actually a series of four lists of products that are popular among my readers. The lists rank popular products from highest to lowest, which my readers have really appreciated.

➔ 20 Types of Pages that Every Blogger Should Consider—note the technique of using a small picture for each point on the list in this example. I've used this a number of times and it seems to work well at drawing readers' eyes to points. I first learned the power of this technique in a post I wrote back in 2005 called 18 Lessons I've Learned about Blogging.

➔ 10 Twitter Tools that Help You Work Smarter—a list of resources and tools that have turned out to be very popular with readers. Note the amount of re-tweets this post had on Twitter—lists can go viral!

➔ 10 High Fliers on Twitter—lists of people are another classic type of post that often does well. They tend to cause debate, discussion and a few vanity link-ins from those on the list.

➔ The Logo Design Process from Start to Finish—an example of a list that really is a step-by-step process.

➔ Top 25 fictional ads in sci-fi movies—a little different but a good example.

Also: check out this long list of list posts written in a group writing project by readers of ProBlogger. This list of posts has many examples (some good and some not so good) on hundreds of topics. Hopefully some of them will give a little inspiration.

Share Your New List Posts

Join the discussion over at the forum and see what others have done for this task. Share a link to your own post. Day 2: Write a List Post.

TODAY'S NOTES

Quick Tips for Writing List Posts

➔ If you're stuck for ideas, head to a site like Digg.com or Delicious.com. Check out their popular stories and take note of all the list posts and articles.

➔ While you're on Digg and Delicious, do a search for keywords related to your blog and see what others have written that has performed well. This could give you some inspiration.

➔ My personal style of writing list posts is to start by brainstorming as many points as I can that are relevant to the topic I've chosen. I don't end up using them all, while some points merge and become one, but starting with a bit list and culling it down to just the best stuff is often a good way to start.

DAY 3

PROMOTE A BLOG POST

Hopefully you've had a chance to do yesterday's task of writing up a list post and have published it by now.

Today we're going to take that post and attempt to drive some readers to it.

TODAY'S TEACHING

Most bloggers have tried blog promotion in various ways. One mistake I see a lot of bloggers making in their attempts to find new readers is how they only ever promote their blog as a whole. Their promotion is all about driving traffic to their blog's home page URL.

While there's nothing wrong with this, I've had A LOT more success in promoting individual posts than my blog's front page. That's what we are going to do today.

Having hit "publish" on your post yesterday, don't just leave it to chance that people will read your post. Be proactive and spend a little time today giving it some nudges to help it on its way.

Let's find some ways to promote your post in other networks outside of ProBlogger.

11 Ways to Promote a Blog Post

Note: please be careful in using these techniques. Don't use them all with every post you write. Choose your best posts and promote them selectively, in ways that are helpful to other people.

1. **Pitching to Other Bloggers**—ask another blogger to consider linking to your post. There's a real art to this; read more on how to do it at 11 Ways to Increase Your Chances of Being Linked to By a Blogger.

2. **Social Messaging**—what social networks like Twitter and Facebook are you registered with? Attempt to leverage these to promote your post. The key is not to incessantly spam your followers and friends with your link, but use your network to seed the link and let your followers spread word of it for you. This won't happen every time but as your network grows, it can become more and more powerful.

3. **Social Bookmarking**—promoting selective links on sites like Digg or StumbleUpon can lead to amazing results. Further reading is available on this topic at How to Get to the Front Page of Digg and Using Social Media Sites to Grow Your Blog's Traffic.

4. **Internal Links**—rather than just promote your post on other people's sites, think about where you can link to it from within your own site. Perhaps you've written on the topic before and can add a link for further reading, or maybe adding a section in your sidebar for "Latest posts" could work. Internal linking won't drive heaps of new traffic but it can help with SEO and increase page views.

5. **Newsletters**—if you have an email newsletter list, shoot out an email about your latest post.

6. **Other Blogs' Comments Sections and Forums**—leaving helpful and insightful comments on forums or other blogs can be great at driving traffic if your comment is genuine, relevant and sensitive to the discussion. Leaving a link is sometimes appropriate provided it is highly relevant.

7. **Email Signatures**—adding links to your blog on your outgoing emails is fairly commonplace, but include links to recent posts instead of just your blog's front page URL.

8. **Follow-up Posts**—write a new post on your blog that picks up where your last one left off. This builds momentum and if you inter-link the posts, drives more page views.

9. **Advertise Your Post**—for posts that you're particularly proud of and are well-received by readers, you might even consider a mini ad campaign with a small budget using a service like AdWords or StumbleUpon advertising. There's further reading on this at Run a StumbleUpon advertising campaign on your blog.

10. **Pitch Mainstream Media**—occasionally posts will be relevant to the mainstream media. You'd want to pick a really interesting post for this; it's not advisable for every day.

11. **Article Marketing**—I wouldn't recommend submitting exactly the same article you've posted on your blog to article marketing sites (this can get you into trouble with Google where you could face penalties for duplicate content) but I know of a few bloggers who rewrite their key articles for article marketing.

Note: I repeat, don't do *all* of the above suggestions for every single post on your blog. I tend to pick 1–2 posts a week to push and let others grow organically.

TODAY'S TASK

Promote a post

Take a little time to look at yesterday's post and ask yourself where it might be appropriate to promote it. If you think the post is not really worthy of promotion, feel free to choose a more relevant post. If you don't have one, spend some time today writing a link worthy post and then try promoting that.

For most of you I'd start with point #1 above: pitching to other bloggers. Choose another blog with similar content to your post and politely submit it as a suggested link to that blog. Again, check out 11 Ways to Increase Your Chances of Being Linked to by a Blogger for tips that will help increase the likelihood of it being successful.

Feeling Timid?

I know that many new bloggers often feel quite timid and wary of promoting themselves. Don't worry, you're not alone, I have felt that myself many times; sometimes not putting my work forward where perhaps I should have. However, the times I've been willing to push myself out of my comfort zone have often paid off.

While there's been a few times in my blogging life where I've gained traffic from a lucky break, traffic in big numbers has mainly been a direct result of me doing some promotional work. Don't just leave it to chance; put yourself out there and see what comes as a result.

Interact

Once you've done it, I'd love to hear how you went about promoting your post and what the result was in the Day 3 - Promote a Post area of our forum.

TODAY'S NOTES

Final Tips on Promoting Your Post

➔ List all of the places where you have a presence online and look into the possibility of promoting a post (for example, social media, email signatures, forums, blogs etc).

➔ List people that you have connections with that might be open to helping you promote a post.

It won't be appropriate to promote your post in all of these places or to ask everyone on your list to help promote each post you write. However, having this list handy will help you each time you come to promote a post—you can scan down it and see what might be the best fit for the post.

The key is relevance. Match the post you're promoting with the right place and people, and you have a much greater chance of it being successful. Also make sure you only do this with your very best content.

DAY 4

ANALYZE A TOP BLOG IN YOUR NICHE

TODAY'S TASK

Spend some time on a successful blog in your niche

The purpose of this task is, rather than promote yourself on the blog, spend time **watching**, **listening,** and **observing** how the blog operates. The goal is to enable what you learn help shape your own blogging strategy.

There is a lot a blogger can learn by spending time on other blogs, particularly those that are doing well. You can pick up all manner of ideas, strategies and tips—things that they do well that you might like to emulate, as well as elements that they're missing that could help you to differentiate yourself.

Here's how I suggest you go about today's task:

1. Identify a successful blog in your niche

You might already know of these sorts of blogs or you might need to do a little research.

If you're not sure which one to choose, head to Technorati's Top 100 Blogs or Google Blog Search and attempt to find a blog on your topic that's performing well. If you're unable to find one that's exactly the same topic, don't stress too much; choosing a blog on a related topic will work too.

2. Take 15 minutes to do some analysis of the blog in some of the following areas:

Content

➔ What topics are they covering?

➔ What topics are they ignoring?

➔ What voice/style do they post in?

➔ How often are they posting?

➔ What level are they pitching their posts at (for example, beginners, advanced etc.)?

Reader Engagement

➔ What topics generate the most conversation?

➔ What styles of post seem to connect with readers best?

➔ What questions are readers asking in the Comments?

➔ What complaints do you see readers making in the Comments?

➔ What tools/mediums is the site using (for example, are they using Twitter, forums etc.)?

Design

➔ What's your first impression from their design?

➔ What have they done well? What have they done poorly?

➔ What options do they give readers to subscribe?

Monetization

This will give you hints as to how you might make money from your blog:

➔ What advertisers are targeting this blog?

➔ What type of affiliate programs are they promoting?

Traffic

You might like to head to a site like Alexa or Compete to do some analysis of the blog's traffic levels. Is it growing, shrinking, or reached a plateau? Alexa also provides stats on page views, time spent on the site, sites that link in, bounce rate, where the audience is from (geographically), where people go on the site etc, but I've found these to be not always accurate.

SEO

If you have some competence in SEO you might like to check out how the blog's doing in some of these areas:

➔ Who is linking to this blog? (You can use the link: www.blogurl.com command in Google to find out.)

➔ What does their source code reveal about how they've set up their site?

➔ If they have an open or unlocked stats package, what can you learn from their stats? What pages are popular? Where does their incoming traffic come from?

Really, the number of questions you could be asking is limitless but what you're attempting to do with this exercise is this: identify what is working well on the other blog, then establish what opportunities there might be to position your blog in the "gaps" that the blog is leaving.

When you do this type of analysis with a number of blogs in your niche you should begin to see some patterns emerging: aspects that consistently work on blogs in your niche and things that perhaps you could do that nobody else is doing.

Two quick words of warning

1. Maintain the Focus on Your Own Blog

A trap some bloggers fall into is spending so much time watching their "competitors" that they spend less time actually building their own blog. This analysis is useful to do every now and again, but don't let it be at the expense of other core activities on your own blog.

2. Be Unique

Another trap I see some bloggers fall into is virtually replicating every aspect of another blog. While there's a lot we can learn from others and lessons we can take from what others are doing, if you simply copy everything another

blog does you fail to differentiate yourself and potential readers have no real reason to read you instead of others.

Interact

You can also share, discuss, and explore this Daily Task over at the forum: Day 4: Analyze a Top Blog in Your Niche

TODAY'S NOTES

One More Tip for Analyzing Successful Blogs

Perhaps the best way to really analyze another blog in your niche is to be an active reader of it. Make a list of all of the blogs that you can find in your niche. As you do this, set up an RSS subscription to each of them so you can monitor what they're writing over time.

Build some time into your regular blogging schedule to read and digest the content that others are producing in your niche. As you do this you'll begin to see what others are focusing upon, what their readers are responding to, what trends are emerging in your niche, and who the authoritative voices are. You'll learn even more about other blogs by being an active commenter (but that's another day in this challenge).

DAY 5

EMAIL A BLOG READER

Today's task is all about building a community on your blog and making an impression upon readers by giving them some personal attention.

TODAY'S TASK

The task is simply to email a new reader (or more)

While the tip sounds simple—too simple perhaps—it's actually a technique that I used in the early days of this blog (ProBlogger) and it really helped build up reader engagement.

What I found is that **when you pay personal attention to a reader it significantly increases the chances of them not only returning to your blog, but also spreading the news of your blog through their network**.

So look over the most recent comments left on your blog and identify a reader that you don't recognize. Shoot them a quick email thanking them for their comment.

Make sure you include a link back to your blog so they know who you are and make the email relevant to their comment (that is, answer a question they asked or add to their comment in some way). You might also like to point them to your RSS feed in the email, possibly converting them into a loyal reader. While there are some tools out there that can email "new comment" leavers automatically for you—the more personal you can make it, the better.

Two Ways to Take this Further and Make a Bigger Impression

The above technique can really be worth investing time into each day, but here are two ways that you can extend this:

1. If the person has left a link to their own blog in their comment, leave a comment on their blog. Again, this is another technique I used in my early days of blogging and it was certainly paramount in building readership.

2. Respond to the comment ON your blog. Sending the email is great for making an impression on the individual person, but leaving a comment in your own comment section shows other readers that you'll engage in conversation. It also helps build comment numbers, which can build social proof and show your blog is active.

Rinse and Repeat

If you have a few extra minutes today, do this with a handful of new readers—the more the better. I'd also highly recommend adding this task to your daily routine; 10–15 minutes a day on this task could make an impression on thousands of people a year.

This simple tip takes just a moment to do but can create a loyal, long-term reader. Do it at least once a day (or set yourself a higher target) and you'll build your blog consistently over time.

IS THIS TIP NOT SPECTACULAR ENOUGH FOR YOU?

Last time I shared this tip with a fellow blogger, they rolled their eyes at me and said that they didn't want to find just one more reader for their blog—they wanted hundreds or thousands.

This blogger failed to realize two things:

1. **Loyal Readers Spread the Word**—I've found that in many cases a single reader quickly grows to numerous loyal readers because, when you make an impression on people, it's likely that they'll spread the word about you. They do this through their own blogs, word-of-mouth, Twitter, and other social networking sites.

2. **Loyal Readers Build Page Views**—One loyal reader can potentially view your blog hundreds (if not thousands) of times. A daily visit from that reader for a year brings an extra 365 page views to your blog. Gain an extra loyal reader every day for a full year and the numbers start to add up.

While there's nothing wrong with attracting thousands of new readers to your blog quickly, the majority will leave as quickly as they arrived.

Building loyal readers one by one on a daily basis can be a lot more fruitful in the long run.

No comments on your blog yet?

I know there are a number of very new bloggers doing this challenge that might not have people leaving comments on their blogs yet. If this is you, don't worry; I have another mini task for you to do today.

Spend 10 minutes visiting other blogs on your topic and leave relevant, helpful and genuine comments on these blogs. The more helpful your comments the better; making an impression with quality comments raises your profile and can potentially drive traffic to a blog.

Related Reading

➔ 10 Techniques to Get More Comments on Your Blog—for those who are still trying to entice readers to comment.

➔ Should You Respond to Comments via Email or in Comments? Two options for interacting with readers and both have their place.

Interact

Find out how others are doing with this task over at the forum. Day 5: Email a Reader

TODAY'S NOTES

As already mentioned, make your email as personal as possible. Show the reader that you're not just sending automated spam emails by referring to their comment, commenting on their blog (if they have one), contributing to a point made in their comment or asking a relevant question.

One other quick tip: if the person has left a particularly insightful comment or demonstrates that they know what they're talking about, ask if they'd be interested in expanding upon their comment with a guest post on your blog. I've done this a few times of late and the results have been fantastic. As well as engaging a reader, it also brings a fresh voice and perspective to the blog and builds upon the ideas presented in previous posts, creating momentum.

DAY 6

27 MUST-READ TIPS AND TUTORIALS FOR BLOGGERS

TODAY'S TASK

Learn from successful bloggers

To do this I've asked nine bloggers that I know and respect to nominate a few posts from their own blog archives that they believe would be helpful for bloggers wanting to improve their output.

You might choose to read just a couple of the following links if you lack the time today, but as someone who has just read through them all, I suspect you'll benefit most by reading as many of them as you can. There's some great advice in this lot!

Here are the posts these bloggers nominated as their best tips:

Seth Godin from Seth's Blog

➔ How to Get Traffic to Your Blog

➔ How to Send a Personal Email

➔ First, ten

Rand Fishkin from SEOmoz

➔ 21 Tactics to Increase Blog Traffic

➔ Blogging in an Oversaturated Market is Usually a Poor Decision

➔ 21 Tips to Earn Links and Tweets to Your Blog Posts

Skellie from Skelliewag

➔ A Complete Guide to Finding and Using Incredible Flickr Images

➔ How to Start or Start Over Building Your Personal Brand

➔ 25 Paths to an Insanely Popular Blog

Chris Garrett from Chrisg

➔ How to Grow Your Google Authority

➔ Diggbait, Linkbait, Flagship Content and Authority

➔ The Art of Getting Things Wrong

Yaro Starak from Entrepreneurs Journey

➔ How To Write Great Blog Content – The Pillar Article

➔ Why Don't Bloggers Understand Email Marketing?

Jeremy Schoemaker from ShoeMoney

➔ My Top 10 Worst Ideas to Make Money

➔ Why You Should Embrace Negative Press

Maki from Dosh Dosh

➔ 6 Fool-Proof Steps to Make More Money With Your Website

➔ Rethinking Blog Comments: Much More Than Just A Quick Way to Get Web Traffic

➔ You're Not Just a Writer, You're the Editor-in-Chief.

Liz Strauss from Successful Blog

➔ 10 Reasons Readers Don't Leave Comments

➔ The Secret to Massive Digg/StumbleUpon Traffic Without Spamming

➔ 7 Great Ways to Connect with Other Bloggers While You're Out Reading Blogs

Daniel Scocco from Daily Blog Tips

➔ 43 Web Design Mistakes You Should Avoid

➔ How to Find Advertisers for Your Website

Chris Brogan from ChrisBrogan.com

➔ 50 Ways to Take Your Blog to the Next Level

➔ 40 Ways to Deliver Killer Blog Content

➔ 27 Secrets to Power Your Community

Interact

Which of these posts did you find most useful? Share in the discussion here or over at the forum thread dedicated to this Daily Task. Day 6: Learn from Successful Bloggers

TODAY'S NOTES

Questions to Ponder

➔ Which of these posts and authors resonated with you the most?

➔ What did you learn?

➔ Jot down some of the key points that you can apply to your blog

DAY 7

WRITE A LINK POST

Someone asked me recently how I built a readership on my first blog. One of the answers I gave was that I was generous linking to other blogs.

I wasn't alone. Back then (we're talking seven years ago) blogging revolved around the link. One blogger would write a post and hundreds of others would link to it with posts that built upon the initial post's ideas in some way.

The result:

➔ Ideas spread across the blogosphere quickly

➔ Relationships between bloggers grew with each link

➔ Everyone's blog grew

While this still happens today on blogs to some degree, much of the sharing of links has moved to other mediums, like Twitter and social bookmarking sites. Nowadays bloggers rarely link to other blogs on their blog because they're either doing it elsewhere or they feel they'd be helping a competitor.

Reasons to link out on your blog

1. **Give something of value to your readers**—while your readers come to your blog to read what you have to say, I find that they're always appreciative of links to quality content.

2. **Build Your Credibility**—regularly highlighting what others are writing in your niche shows your readers that you're abreast of developments in your field and that you're connected to the network.

3. **Build Relationships with Other Bloggers**—there's nothing like sending another blogger traffic to make an impression and build connections. Not only that, when you link to others in a constructive way that actually builds upon their ideas and adds value to a conversation they've started, it can often lead to ongoing interactions.

4. **SEO**—some SEOs argue that linking out to related content in your niche with relevant keywords as anchor text can impact upon how search engines see your site. You'd want to avoid going over the top and linking out too much—but a few links to quality content on your topic may well show a search engine that you're worthy of authority. It's certainly not the main factor in Google's algorithm but many argue that it helps.

   The key with this task is to link to something of value that your readers will find relevant and helpful to them.

Of course, building this practice into your blogging means you need to be aware of what's happening in your particular part of the Web. To do this you'll probably want to:

➔ Subscribe to other blogs and sites in your niche

➔ Watch social bookmarking sites that cover topics in your industry

➔ Subscribe to news alerts with tools like Google Alerts etc

6 Types of Link Posts to Consider

There are many ways to link up to another blog in a way that's valuable. Let me give you a few suggestions on ways to do this that go beyond just giving your readers a link and a recommendation to "go read it":

1. **Build Upon the Points of Others**—take an article by someone and contribute some perspectives that they might have missed or not considered. A classic way to do this is to take a list post that a blogger has written and add an extra couple of points. For example, if someone writes a post, *21 Ways to Write Posts that Are Guaranteed to Grow Your Blog*, write a post, say *3 More Ways to Write Posts That Are Guaranteed to Grow Your Blog,* that links to the first post. Your post might pick up on a few of the points and then extend the article by suggesting three of your own.

2. **Take the Opposite Point of View**—another way to bounce off a blogger's post is to explore the opposing point of view. You might do this as to play the devil's advocate, or because you actually believe the opposite of what they're saying is true. Keep in mind that this is unlikely to build a relationship with the other blogger if you do it in a way that offends.

3. **Build a Resource on a Topic**—pick a topic in your niche and then spend some time reading what other bloggers in your niche have written on that topic previously. You'll probably end up with a list of posts from other blogs all on the one topic. You could present them simply as a list of links, or you could state the main points from each post or even use quotes from each one. These types of posts often do well in social media sites, particularly if you gather a large list of helpful resources on the topic.

   Example: DIY Lighting Hacks for Digital Photographers: this post was simply a collection of tutorials that others had written on a similar topic. I included a picture and short description of each one as a list. The post was passed around the Web in many social media sites. This ProBlogger post, 27 Must-read Tips and Tutorials for Bloggers would be another example of this.

4. **Speed Linking**—I used to do this regularly on ProBlogger (here's an example, but note that I've moved most of it over to my Twitter account). The idea was that on a given day I'd link to five or six posts that I came across in my daily reading for that day. The links covered a broad range of topics that I felt were relevant to my readers.

   This form of link post has great potential. A while ago I wrote a post, 25 Great Photography Tutorials and Links from Around the Web. It was simply a collection of a few great tutorials that others had written around the time I published the post, plus a few of my own links from our archives. This post made it to the front page of Digg and other social media sites simply because it contained some great tutorials.

5. **One Question Interviews**—this is when you shoot a question out to another blogger (or bloggers) to gain their perspective on a topic relevant to your readers. It takes a little coordination and some advanced planning, but I find these most effective when you email the same question to a handful of bloggers in your niche and then compile all the answers into one post side-by-side, so your readers can see different perspectives.

6. **Suggest Further Reading and Give Examples**—another common way of linking to others, as well as creating value for readers and extra depth to your posts, is to add links to what others are saying on your topic in the day-to-day writing of posts. Your post might not be a link post in and of itself as you cover a topic comprehensively from your own perspective, but this won't stop you from providing some suggested links at the end of your post on the topic at hand.

These are six suggestions for you but there are so many others that you could try. For more ideas check out a post I wrote called How to Add to Blogging Conversations … and Eliminate the Echo Chamber.

What others have said on this topic

➔   5 Reasons You Should Link Out to Others from Your Website

➔   Using Outbound Links to Improve Your Blog

TODAY'S TASK

Link, link, link! Write a link post

Today your task is to reclaim some of this practice of linking to other blogs; write a post that highlights what another blogger (or bloggers) in your niche has written.

Once you've done it come back and tell us how you did it, what you learned, where the post is, and what impact it has on readers and other bloggers.

PS: if you can find something relevant on another "31 Days" participant's blog it'd be great to share some link love to other bloggers in the community. I've seen quite a few 31DBBB participants starting to team up and support one another—why not reach out to someone today and see where it leads! There are loads of people over at the forum talking about this now. Day 7: Write a Link Post

TODAY'S NOTES

A Tip on Collecting Links for Link Posts

A key to successful link posts is having your head across what people are writing about in your niche. As mentioned on Day 4, it's important to be aware of and actively following other blogs and sites in your niche.

One thing that I do to help me record useful resources and links in my niche is to use a bookmarking site like Delicious. I've set up an account there so that when I find an interesting article that I think people will find useful, I simply bookmark it with a tag that I only use when I think the post is worth sharing with my readers. Then, when I come to do a link post I have a ready-made list of links to share.

You could do the same thing by bookmarking posts in your browser, having a text file that you dump links into, setting up a Twitter account to keep the links on etc. The key is to have some kind of system to capture the best stuff that you can share later.

DAY 8

INTERLINK YOUR OLD BLOG POSTS

Today I'm presenting you with a task that's perhaps a little less involved than some of the days so far. I wanted to give you a task that would both help improve your blog but wouldn't take too long to either learn or implement (although it's something that you could easily dedicate a lot of time to if you have time on your hands).

TODAY'S TASK

Spend 10 minutes interlinking previously written posts in your archives

Why is Interlinking Posts Powerful?

There are three main reasons why I regularly dedicate time to go over old posts on my blog and find ways to update them with links to my newer blog posts.

1. **Usefulness to Readers**—my primary motivation for interlinking posts is to make my blog more useful by providing a better experience for my blog readers. If a reader comes to my blog and finds a post that not only answers their question, but also provides further reading and suggestions on where to explore related topics, they're more likely to go away satisfied. A satisfied reader is what I'm aiming for; they're more likely to return (it makes your blog "sticky") and tell their network about their experience.

2. **SEO**—search engines look at the links within a blog to find content to index but also to work out how to index and rank content. Links from other blogs to your blog are the ultimate way to start ranking highly in Google but internal links also count.

3. **Increase Page Views**—inserting links into old posts increases the chances of a blog visitor viewing more than just one page. This has a couple of benefits, the first being that it can help you earn more from that visitor if you're running CPM (cost per impression) advertising. The second reason is that you're creating a bigger impression upon the person visiting your blog. I find that when someone views more than a single page on your blog, they're more likely to remember it, subscribe to it, comment upon it, and become a regular and loyal reader.

While these three benefits all seem fairly small when you think about the advantages a single link might bring, if you start building the interlinking of posts into your daily blogging experience the accumulative impact on your blog will be significant.

How to Add Links to Old Posts

There are a variety of methods of interlinking posts from your archives. Here are the three main ones that I use:

1. **In Post Links**—I find that this is the most natural way to add links to an old post. All it involves is making a keyword (or words) in your post into a link that points to another post on the topic of that keyword.

2. **Updates**—sometimes posts in your archives become dated and are in need of a revision. There are a variety of ways to update an old post but the simplest is to write a new post on the same topic, then leave a link in your earlier post to the new one.

   For example: One popular post here at ProBlogger is How to Market Your Blog in 2007. While the post still contains useful information on marketing a blog, it was obviously written over two years ago. As a result I've added a link at the top of this post to a page on How to Find Readers for Your Blog, which points people to a variety of resources on that topic.

3. **Further Reading**—many blogs have a Further Reading section that appears at the bottom of each post. In most cases this is a list of related posts that are automatically generated using a plugin. While this can sometimes provide readers with relevant results, I find that adding manually chosen links for further reading can produce a more relevant experience. You can add these suggested links both at the end of the post and throughout the post itself.

Quick Tip: When linking between posts, always try to make the link words relevant keywords to the article you're linking to. This will maximize the SEO benefits of the link and help you rank higher for those words in Google.

Make Interlinking Posts a Regular Task

While I'm suggesting that you set aside some time today to interlink some of your old posts, I'd also highly recommend that you build this practice into your blogging on a regular basis. I spend 10–15 minutes a week hunting for opportunities to do this, but also find myself doing it in my daily blogging rhythm as I'm writing new posts.

As you write a new post train yourself to be thinking about what you've written previously that relates to your new post. As you identify related content start to interlink your posts (you can add links in your new post to old

content and/or add links in your old ones to your new content). If you force yourself to do this you'll find that it becomes a more natural part of your daily posting.

Go Do It!

Take 10 minutes now to start identifying old posts that relate to one another and add a few links between them.

Interact

Share your thoughts and progress with others over at the forum. Day 8: Interlink Posts

TODAY'S NOTES

3 Quick Tips on Interlinking Posts

1. Try to build this task into your daily posting schedule. It takes a little discipline to get into the rhythm of it but it can have some real benefits if you do (as outlined in this post).

2. For bloggers with large archives who can't remember every post they've ever written, one way to help you find your previous posts is to have a "related posts" plugin on your blog. These will often present you with suggestions on older posts that might be relevant to link to within your post.

3. Also, if you have a lot of content that you've never interlinked before, start with the most popular posts. If you look at your blog's metrics make a list of the posts that receive the most traffic from Google. Once you have the list, go through each post one by one, specifically searching for other posts on your blog on similar topics to your popular posts. Then I'd recommend the following:

   ➔ Add links TO your popular posts from these posts and it'll help

increase their search engine authority.

➔ Add links FROM these popular posts to other quality relevant posts on your blog and it'll help to drive traffic around your blog.

DAY 9

JOIN A FORUM AND START PARTICIPATING

TODAY'S TASK

Join a forum that relates to the topic of your blog (or, if you've already joined one, spend 10–15 minutes participating in it)

One of the questions I always ask new bloggers when it comes to finding readers for their blog is: **Where are your potential readers already gathering online?** One of the places I encourage them to go looking for those potential readers is on forums on related topics to your blog.

Forums are fantastic places for bloggers to participate in, for a number of reasons:

1. **Profile Building**—put consistent time into a large forum on your topic and you can build a significant profile in your niche. I've seen it happen in my own photography forum numerous times where bloggers have provided value and shown off their expertise so that they've actually developed fans among other forum users.

2. **Driving Traffic**—create value and become a useful resource in a forum and people will want to know more about who you are and what you do via your signature or profile page. You'll sometimes also have the opportunity to share some relevant links to things you've written.

3. **Understanding Your Niche**—the hidden benefit of joining a little known forum is that it can actually be a fertile ground for gathering ideas and understanding the needs of potential blog readers. Go to any forum and you'll begin to see the same questions being asked over and over again. These questions actually annoy some regular forum members but you as a blogger should be taking note of such questions and writing posts that answer them, because they usually signal a problem or need that people have on those topics. I know if I'm ever in need of a topic to write about on my blogs, the forums are one of the first places that I go looking for inspiration.

Spend some time today searching for forums in your niche. Once you find them, join up and start participating. The key is to spend time being as useful as possible to the forum. Your main activity should NOT be leaving links to your blog but answering questions, making connections, and generally being as useful as you can to other members of the forum.

I could say a lot more about building your blog up by participating in forums, but we've covered the topic a few times on ProBlogger previously. Check out these two posts:

➔ Build Your Blog With Forum Traffic—a post where Skellie suggests four strategies on this topic.

➔ How to Use Forums to Drive Hundreds of Thousands of Readers to Your Blog—a story from an anonymous reader who built a successful blog using this technique.

Note: if you can't find a forum on your specific topic look for them on related topics. If you can't find any at all, perhaps it's a signal that you should start one at some point. Forums can actually be great additions to blogs.

Interact

Day 9: Promote Your Blog by Finding a Forum to Participate In

 People are sharing and exploring this task together over at the forum … you could start there!

TODAY'S NOTES

Quick Tips for Forum Interactions

In my Firefox browser I have a folder of bookmarks—called Forums— featuring all the forums with which I have an account. I set aside 15– 30 minutes a day to interact in forums and when that time comes, I simply right-click on the forum folder and select "Open All in Tabs" (to open up all the forums quickly in separate tabs). I then quickly move through the forums, looking for opportunities to provide speedy answers to questions or give tips.

Some forums also allow you to subscribe via RSS to threads of conversation. If you really want to stay on top of conversations in a forum, subscribing to key threads and areas can be a great way to stay abreast of anything new.

Set Up 'Alerts' for your Blog

DAY 10

SET UP ALERTS TO MONITOR WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR NICHE

Friends, family, and readers often ask me how I spend my time on an average day of blogging.

Those asking are often surprised to hear that while writing is definitely one activity that I do a fair bit of, there are a number of other activities that take up quite a bit of my focus.

These important activities that I spend considerable time on as a blogger include watching, monitoring, reading, and listening to what others are writing or saying on their blogs or social media accounts.

Reasons to Be Aware of What Others Are Talking About in Your Niche

There are quite a few reasons why bloggers monitor what's being said on other blogs and in the news on certain topics. These include:

1. **Ideas for Posts**—one of the main challenges that bloggers face at different times is running out of topics to blog about. Keeping abreast of what others are writing about gives you an almost unlimited supply of ideas and helps you to keep your posts current on what is buzzing in your niche at any given point in time.

2. **Being Aware of Breaking News**—this is more relevant for some niches than others but sometimes knowing when a story is breaking in your industry can be very important. Being unaware of such stories can make your blog look out of touch to readers wanting to know the latest.

3. **Profile Building and Perceived Expertise**—bloggers who are obviously aware of what else is happening in their niche are often seen as experts and authorities in their industry. I know of a number of bloggers and Twitter users who've built profiles for themselves simply by having their finger on the pulse of their niche and linking to interesting and useful content on other sites.

4. **Networking**—using some of the alert tools below enables you to know who is talking about issues relevant to your niche within a short time of them doing so. This enables you to make connections and build relationships with these people.

5. **Managing Your Reputation**—knowing quickly when others are talking about you, your company, your brands, and your blog is valuable information. It enables you to not only build relationships with those who are saying positive things about you, but also manage any negative talk.

There are other reasons to be aware of what people are saying in your niche, but let's move on to *how* to do it.

TODAY'S TASK

Set up a variety of alerts or watchlists for your blog's niche

There are many services around to help you keep track of what people are writing. I'd love for you to suggest those that you use in the comments below, but here is a handful that I regularly use:

➔ **Technorati Watchlists**—Very similar to Google Alerts as it will feed you mentions of certain words on blogs.

➔ **Twitter Alerts**—there are a lot of tools to help you monitor what is being said on Twitter. Some are built into Twitter clients (for example, TweetDeck has a great one) but others include Monitter (allows live monitoring but also gives you an RSS feed for words), Twendz, Twitter's Search (you can set up an RSS feed for any keyword) and Twitter Hawk (a paid service that allows you not only to monitor but respond to tweets on keywords). Again, there are many others that you
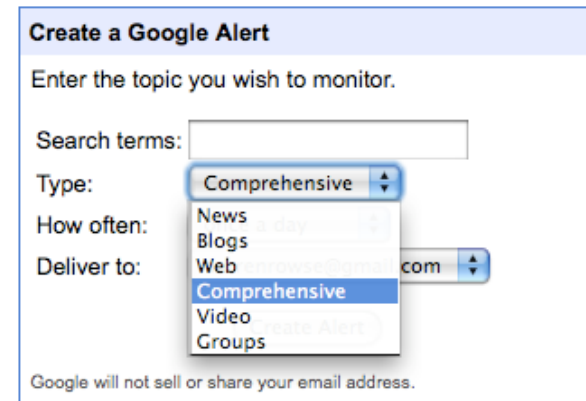
can use—feel free to suggest others below.

➔ **Google News and Blog Alerts**—Google Alerts will show you any mention of keywords in news sources (for example, newspapers), on blogs, in videos, on the Web or even in their groups. You can choose to be alerted about different categories or all of them. You have the opportunity to receive alerts via email or RSS feed at different intervals.

As mentioned above, there are many tools around to do this type of monitoring. The key is to find one or two that fit with your style and rhythm of blogging, and to regularly check them.

Types of alerts to set up:

Lastly, let me outline a few *types* of alerts to set up. These are the two that I most commonly utilize:

1. **Industry Words**—these are words relevant to your blog's niche. For example, if you blog about the wedding industry you might like to monitor terms like "wedding dress." If you blog about Britney Spears, you'll want to be watching for any use of her name. The key is to find keywords that highlight when stories are breaking in your industry but ones that don't overwhelm you with results.

2. **Vanity Alerts**—these are keywords that are specifically relevant to you. They include your personal name, blog's name, company name, brand names, and even URLs.

Warning: Monitor in Moderation

Let me finish with a word of warning. Don't become obsessed with monitoring what OTHERS are saying.

While I do believe it can significantly enhance a blog to be aware of what others are doing online in that space, it can also become a distraction (if not an obsession). The key with all blogging tasks is to do them in a balanced way. Set up some alerts today and keep an eye on them, but don't forget to actually do some writing yourself instead of just watching what others write!

Interact

See what others are saying at the [Day 10: Set up Alerts to Monitor Your Blogs Niche](#) forum thread.

TODAY'S NOTES

Setting up alerts is fairly simple

Here's what I do:

➔ List keywords that are relevant to your blog (some of the words that you used in your elevator pitch from Day #1 might work).

➔ Once you have the list, start typing them into the alert tool that you're using to see the results. If you're unsure what alert tool to use, start with Google Alerts (see link above).

➔ Sometimes it takes time to find the right keywords because some words return no results while others return more than you can realistically monitor.

➔ I generally let an alert run for a week before I decide whether to keep it running or not. That way you can see the number of alerts you'll receive and whether they're helpful or not.

DAY 11

COME UP WITH 10 POST IDEAS

EVER RUN OUT OF THINGS TO WRITE ABOUT ON YOUR BLOG?

If your answer is yes, you're not alone.

One of the biggest challenges facing bloggers with blogs that have been around for longer than a few months is to come up with fresh content on a regular basis.

Today your task in the 31 Days to Build a Better Blog challenge is to do an exercise that will identify a range of post topics that you can use when stuck for an idea in future.

The key with this process is not to put yourself under pressure to come up with completely new and out-of-the-blue ideas for every post you write.

Instead, this process taps into what you've recently written on your blog and helps you to identify ways to extend those ideas.

The beauty of this is that you actually end up building a sense of momentum on your blog, where your posts build upon and relate to what you've previously written rather than just writing a collection of posts that fail to grow in any one direction.

Here's the mind mapping method that I've used (note: I've talked about this previously so it could be familiar to some).

1. The Setup

Grab a whiteboard, piece of paper, notebook, tablet pc or anything else to write on (there are also various mind mapping tools and software options out there, but I find a pen and paper can work just fine) and draw five circles across the middle of the page. In each circle write the titles of the last five posts on your blog (if you want to do this more comprehensively go back further and do it with more posts).

2. Extend Your Previous Posts

Now take each post in turn and spend a few minutes brainstorming ways that the post could be extended. Most posts that you write will be able to in any number of ways including:

➔ Picking up a question or idea that a reader asked in the comments on that post

➔ Exploring the opposite point of view from the post

➔ Taking a news post and writing an opinion piece about it

➔ Taking a theoretical type post and writing a piece that helps people to "DO" it

➔ Expanding upon ideas glossed over in passing in the previous post

The list could go on. Really it's about finding ways to take ideas in a previous post and expanding upon them.

For each idea draw a line out from the circle, draw a square (or use a different color) and write the idea inside it.

The key at this point is to let yourself be as creative and outside-the-box as you want. Any idea is allowed at this point.

Let me take an older post of mine (Why You Should Use AdSense on Your Blog) and show you how it might work:
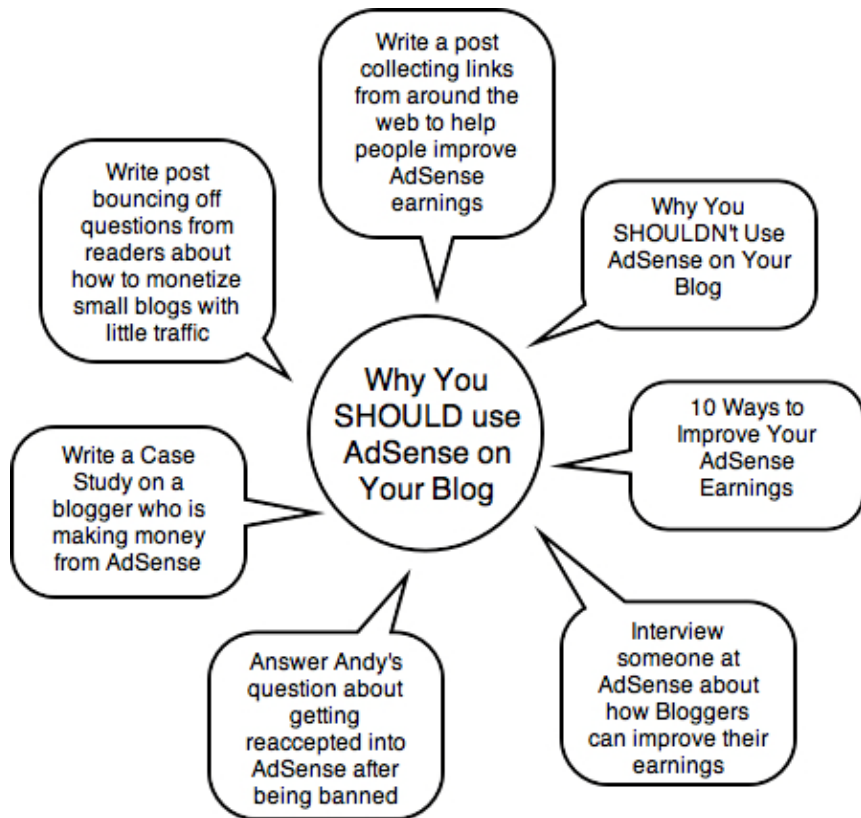
At this point I have seven potential new posts to write that extend upon my original one. Coming up with them took me two to three minutes, but if I were doing this seriously I'd give it more time and come up with 20 or so posts.

These ideas are logical next steps for readers wanting to explore this topic, some of them based upon actual questions by readers. Do this with the other four posts you've written and you'll have plenty of ideas for new posts to cover in the coming week or two.
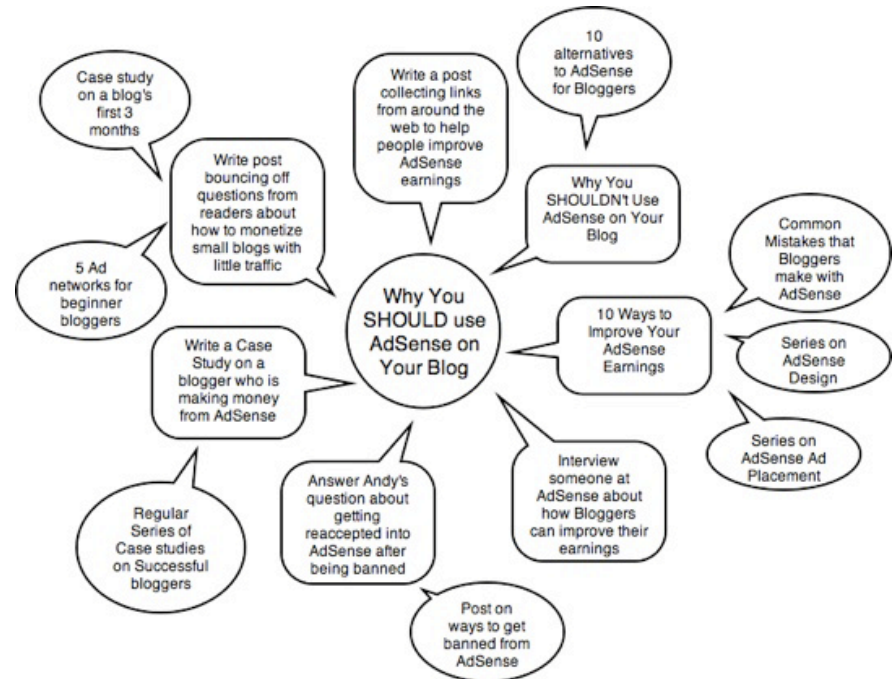
3. Extend Further

You might want to stop this exercise at this point if you feel you have enough topics to keep you going. However, while you're in a brainstorming frame of mind, why not take it a step further and think about how you might extend the

topics you've come up with. The beauty of thinking forward even further is that you could quickly come up with a further 10 or so posts and be able to map out the next few weeks of blogging.

Let's do it now with the post above, just for fun.

You can see that I found some posts easier to extend than others. This is okay as not every post is in need of a follow-up one, while others will have multiple possibilities (some will even have a longer series of posts that you could run).

You can take this exercise as far as you'd like into the future (you have the idea I'm sure so I'll leave it at that).

From the example above you can see that I've come up with 15 ideas (not bad for five minutes of brainstorming), some of them for multiple posts (as a series or ongoing weekly columns). You'll find that you'll come up with more posts than you can actually use on your blog when you do it with more than one post.

The key when you do it is to let your creativity run wild (because it can take you in some wonderful directions) but then to be ruthless in culling ideas that add nothing to your blog. Remember: everything that you post on your blog either adds to or takes away from your blog's perceived value, so not everything that you come up with should make it through to the front page of your blog.

TODAY'S TASK

Come up with a list of at least 10 future topics to write about

At this point your list should be not much more than the topic or title of your post. If you're feeling inspired you might like to choose one of them to begin shaping into an actual post, but don't feel you need to do that yet. Tomorrow we're going to look at the list of topics and help you to take them to the next step by creating an editorial calendar for your next week of blogging.

PS: Another Approach to this Exercise for New Blogs

I know that some bloggers doing the 31-day challenge have very new blogs and perhaps only have a few posts in their archives to base mind mapping on. If this is you, use the same principle but instead of making your five starting circles previous posts, make them categories that your blog might cover.

For example, if your blog is about personal finance you could make your starting circles subtopics of that overarching topic. They might be budgeting, saving, investing, credit and career. Once you've got your categories or subtopics you can then pick up the exercise at step #2, extending those subtopics into post ideas or topics within the subtopic.

Interact

Share your ideas and see how others are doing over at the forum post for Day 11: Come Up With 10 Post Ideas.

TODAY'S NOTES

The process outlined in this post is what I try to do on at least a monthly basis. I set aside time at the start of each month to brainstorm as many possible topics as possible.

I use other methods in addition to mind mapping as part of this process; I also keep a list of questions I'm receiving from readers via email or in comments, as well as watching what other people are writing about in my niche.

I also have an *ideas* text document on my computer's desktop where I'm constantly jotting down ideas for posts. This way, at a moment's notice I can usually find a topic to write about that's relevant for my audience.

DAY 12

DEVELOP AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR FOR YOUR BLOG

Yesterday your task in the 31 Days to Build a Better Blog challenge was to come up with a list of at least 10 post ideas for your blog. The thinking was to spend time before you needed the posts to come up with ideas. Doing this releases you from the pressure of having to brainstorm ideas every day; you can just focusing on writing instead.

TODAY'S TASK

Take the list you created yesterday and plan your posting schedule (or editorial calendar) for next week

I attempt to do this on a weekly basis for each of my blogs (usually Sunday night or Monday morning).

How to Develop a Weekly Editorial Calendar [or at least, how I do it?

1. Calculate how many posts you want to post in the coming week on your blog.

2. Set up a spreadsheet or Word document table that has a slot for each post, as well as the date and time the post needs to go live on the blog.

3. Take the list of ideas that you've previously brainstormed and place them into the empty slots in the table. As I do this I often have new ideas for posts that might make good follow-ups to those I'm planning. I slot these into the schedule too.

4. For each post that you slot in write a sentence or two about what it's about (so you're able to remember later in the week). I often also take a moment or two at this point to brainstorm some main points for the post. If any examples, illustrations, pictures or related posts that I've previously written come to mind I make note of these too.

Let me say at this point that what I come up with after going through this process is not always the way that I roll out posts in reality. My blogging style is a little more fluid than this and I tend to add new posts into the mix, reorder posts, and extend single posts into series.

However, going through this exercise is fantastic because it means I have a week's worth of post ideas at my fingertips. It also means that for each post I have ideas that I can use when writing the post; this gives me a real head start and means that I can usually get right down to business and start writing on the days I need to do the writing of posts.

Another Editorial Calendar Idea to Consider

Another way that some bloggers approach editorial calendars is to come up with a 'weekly rhythm' of posting for their blog. Put simply – this is where they assign a different *type* of post for each day of the week and stick to that rhythm over the long term.

For example, Mondays might be *list post* day, Tuesdays might be *link post* day, Wednesdays might be *opinion/rant* day, Thursdays might be *review* day, and so on. The blogger then knows the style of post for each day and just has to slot in topics that fit each style.

The above methods are only two suggestions of many; there are many variations on the idea of blog editorial calendars that you might like to explore. Here are a few posts that pick up the idea from the archives here at ProBlogger:

➔   Editorial Calendars and Professional Blogging

➔   Having a Constant Stream of Blogging Ideas

➔   How to Develop a Niche Blog Content Plan

➔   7 Ways to Keep Fresh Content Flowing On Your Blog

How did you find this process? Have you got next week's Editorial Calendar set up? Share in the comments, or join the discussion over at the forum: Day 12: Develop an Editorial Calendar.

TODAY'S NOTES

Developing an editorial calendar is particularly useful at helping a blog remain balanced in a variety of ways.

1. **Topic:** sometimes when I do this exercise I realize that my blog has become a little one-dimensional, always focusing upon one aspect of my blog's niche. Developing an editorial calendar helps me to be intentional about covering a variety of topics relevant to my readers.

2. **Style of writing**: one thing that many blogs do well is write different types of posts. They throw in a review, a rant, a "how to" tutorial, a list post, an interview, a humorous piece. By mixing it up, an editorial calendar can help you vary the style of voice you write in too.

DAY 13

TAKE A TRIP TO THE MALL AND IMPROVE YOUR BLOG

Today we're going shopping!

Okay, I can hear what you're probably thinking: *"What? This ProBlogger dude has lost his mind— what does shopping have to do with blogging?"*

Stick with me for a second and let me explain. The reason I want to encourage you to go shopping is twofold:

1. **It will get you away from your blog for a bit—**I was chatting with another blogger recently and we both admitted that we had been in our PJs all day blogging (it was 4.00 p.m. for me) and needed to go out more. Sad but true.

2. **It will give you a chance to do some observation exercises that could help your blogging—**this is the main reason for today's task

and is based upon an experience that I had today at a local shopping centre (or mall, as many of you non-Aussies would call it).

TODAY'S TASK

Get out and about for inspiration!

Step away from the computer (come on, you can do it).

Grab a notebook and pen. (Do you remember them? They're what you used to use before your primary form of communication involved typing.)

Head to your local shopping centre/mall/shopping strip. (Easier for some than others, I realize. Apologies to those in rural areas; this may or may not work in your local general store.)

Once at the *mall*, take 30 minutes or so to go wandering with no agenda (don't do your groceries) except to observe in some of the following ways:

- ➔ Who is there? Who are they with?
- ➔ What are they doing?
- ➔ What are they buying?
- ➔ What products are particularly in demand at the moment?
- ➔ How do they make their buying decisions?
- ➔ What are the retailers doing to attract people's attention and stand out?
- ➔ What messages are they using in their marketing?
- ➔ What colors or design techniques are in at the moment?
- ➔ What else is "hot" or in fashion?
- ➔ What sales techniques are sales staff using?
- ➔ What are retail outlets doing well? What are they doing poorly?

As you watch, make some notes. Don't attempt to find any *lessons learnt* or try to tie it back to your blog yet.

Once you've spent half an hour or so in observation mode find a spot to sit down with a coffee (a food court, perhaps) and go over what you've noticed. See if there are any lessons you might be able to apply to your blogging.

This process might seem a little random and pointless but I've done it on numerous occasions over the last few years, and each time I've come away with at least one new idea to apply in my blogging.

Some of the ideas have come directly from what I've seen retailers do in their marketing; for example, today I saw a store using an attention-grabbing technique that I want to apply to my blog to draw readers' eyes. Other ideas are more lessons about people and how they operate, and once or twice I've seen illustrations to use for posts or even ideas for new blog post topics. I've even spotted a trend that gave me an idea for a new blog.

If nothing else, it will get you out of the house for a bit!

I'd love to hear about your experiences doing this exercise in the comments below.

Update: Here's what I learned on MY shopping expedition when I first posted this exercise in the last 31-Day Challenge. I hope it gives some ideas on how this might work out.

Interact

They're talking about this over at the forum, Day 13: Visit a Mall (Really … a Mall). You should join them!

TODAY'S NOTES

Okay, today's task was a little from left field but I hope you found it helpful. It's actually a task that can be adapted to almost any place—not just a mall.

Of course, malls are great in some ways because they're where marketers are employing all kinds of strategies that can be useful to learn from. If there's no local mall in your town or you're unable to get there, try another place that people gather. What can you learn from:

➔ A walk through your town or shopping strip?

➔ 30 minutes of watching TV (try a channel like the shopping channel)?

➔ Your local library?

➔ A local tourist destination?

There are lessons locked away in many aspects of life. For an example, look at what I learned from watching an umbrella salesman on a rainy day a couple of years back: http://www.problogger.net/archives/2006/05/16/lessons-from-an-umbrella-salesman/.

DAY 14

UPDATE A KEY PAGE ON YOUR BLOG

TODAY'S TASK

Update some of the key pages and posts on your blog

What are the most important pages on your blog?

This is an interesting question to ponder ... in fact, why not do that before reading on.

What pages or posts on your blog do you see as most valuable? I sat down and asked myself this question earlier in the week and identified 10 or so pages on my blogs that for one reason or another were more important than others.

The reason I did the exercise was because that day I'd had the realization that while every page on my blog is important, some pages on most blogs are more powerful than others at helping you to achieve your goals as a blogger. However, it also struck me while thinking about it that some of these important pages need updates from time to time.

So, today your task is to spend time identifying key posts and pages on your blog and to give them an update.

Let me explore a few of these pages and suggest some ways that they might need an update. We'll start with the most obvious page first:

Your Front Page

This is a fairly obvious one. Most blogs receive more traffic at the front page of their blog than any other. Here at ProBlogger my front page has a little less than 20% of all traffic on the site.

It's the page I usually promote on business cards, in my email signature, on profile pages of social media sites, and the page that others mentioning my blog on their sites refer people to. It's also a page that people landing on old posts on my blog often head to next to see what the site is about.

1. **Update it**: There are a variety of ways that one can update the front page of their blog. These range from complete makeovers through to tweaks. The makeover/overhaul end of the spectrum is a little beyond the scope of this challenge so let me suggest a few smaller ideas:

2. **First Impressions**—what first impression does a new reader coming to your front page gain? Do they know what your blog is about immediately? Does your blog's title tags, header, tag line strongly communicate what your blog is about? Are their eyes drawn to any one important element or is it cluttered?

3. **Sidebar**—most blogs have a sidebar on every page but it probably is looked at more on your front page than any other. Over time sidebars tend to become cluttered with lots of buttons and links; perhaps it's time for a spring-clean, with the objective of only leaving useful and important information there.

4. **Headers/Logo**—one way that you can give your front page (and other pages on your blog) a refresh without doing a full redesign is to develop a new logo or header for your blog. This shouldn't be rushed into but perhaps today is a day to begin thinking about a new look for your blog.

5. **Think about Objectives and Call to Action**—one question to ask when looking at your blog's front page is: what are your objectives? What do you want people to do when they arrive on your blog for the first time (remember, your front page is a logical place for new people to visit)? Do you want people to subscribe to an RSS feed or newsletter, click on an ad, tell a friend, be driven to your best content, buy a product, and hear your story? What do you want them to do? Once you've identified your objective you can then position a call to action in a prime location on your blog's front page.

The front page of your blog is very important but there are other vital pages too. Let me suggest a few:

"About" Page

The "About" page of a blog may receive less traffic than others - but it is one of the most important ones that you can spend time developing. The reason is because it can be a very influential page.

Have a think about who might read an "About" page. It doesn't take a genius to work out that those reading your blog's "About" page are going to be people in investigation mode. My suspicion is that those clicking on "About" links are going to be:

➔   First-time readers wanting to know whether this is a site for them

➔   Potential partners/advertisers/collaborators/journalists/PR people/other bloggers wanting to know if they should invest time in building a relationship with you.

It stands to reason that it's a page you'll probably want to spend some time keeping up to date and thinking about how you call people to action, and so on.

Probably the biggest two mistakes that you can make when it comes to an "About" page are:

Not to have one

To leave it as the default "About" page

Contact Page

During the last week I had an email from Becki who is doing the challenge. She wrote:

"I read all 700+ comments to the Day 2 post and searched for people who have blogs in a similar niche to me. I was hoping to have a link on their site and to cooperate in some way, but am amazed that most have no method to directly contact the author."

Becki actively wanted to reach out to other bloggers in her niche with the hope of working with them in mutually beneficial ways, building their blogs. But due to many bloggers lacking a way of being contacted they missed out on a potentially fruitful relationship.

Do you have a means of being contacted on your blog? If so, is it up to date?

High Traffic Pages

Most blogs that have been around for a while have at least a handful of posts in their archives that generate a higher number of page views than others. This can be the result of search engine traffic, another site linking to you, a social media site making a page popular, and so on.

These are important pages on your blog as they are gateways where potential new loyal readers are entering.

The problem that many blogs have is that those entering your blog through these gateways often turn right back around and leave again.

Spend some time today identifying the most visited posts on your blog using a blog stats program. Google Analytics is one that I use and recommend, but

even a blog platform like WordPress's native stats package should reveal what pages are visited most.

Once you've identified some key pages make sure they are up to date and as helpful to readers as possible, but also think about how you can make that post "stickier." You could do this by adding:

➔ Some suggested further reading links at the end that point to other key posts on your blog

➔ An invitation to subscribe to your blog at the end (or even at the start of the post).

Other Key Pages

Many blogs have other key pages on them that often go for months and months (if not years and years) without an update. These include "Advertise with us" pages, "Recommended reading" pages, and "Subscribe" pages. Almost any page linked to from your navigation menu is worth addressing, as these will be links people looking around your blog for the first time are most likely to visit.

Enough talk—go update some pages! Once you have, share with us how this exercise went in the comments below.

Update: You can also share your results and exchange feedback with others in the challenge over at the forum. Day 14: Update a Key Post or Page on Your Blog.

TODAY'S NOTES

One suggestion with this exercise is to try to get into the head of a new person visiting your blog. We're going to do a first-time reader audit on Day 17 of this challenge but in the meantime try to find a person who has not visited your blog before, but might have an interest in the topic you're covering. Don't show them your blog yet (wait till Day 17) but spend a few minutes with them today asking them about the type of information they'd want to know about your topic and blog.

For example, I was recently chatting to a photography beginner, a family member who had just bought a digital camera. I asked them:

➔ What kind of questions do you have about your camera?

➔ What's the most confusing aspect about using your camera?

➔ If you were to go to a site about photography, what type of information would you be after?

➔ What would make a photography site more credible to you?

What I found in asking these types of questions is that they wanted information on an aspect of using a camera that I'd never written about before. I immediately wrote a new post on that topic and then added a link to it from one of my key pages, because it turned out that many others had similar questions.

Trying to get inside the head of a first-time reader can help you identify the type of information that might convince them to keep coming back to your blog, as well as motivate you to update those key pages that they visit while making that decision.

DAY 15

FIND A BLOG BUDDY

TODAY'S TASK

Find a Blog Buddy

While I'm an introvert and am energized by spending time alone, I've found that it's when I work with other bloggers that my blogs grow fastest. Let me start with an illustration that some of you will be familiar with to help show the power of working together.

A Lesson from Geese

Scientists have found that geese flying in formation in a flock can travel around 78% further in a session than geese flying solo. Working together on the task of flying is beneficial in a number of ways:

➔ **Aerodynamic Formation—t**he V formation of geese maximizes the energy expended by those flying as part of it. The bird at the front of the flock breaks the air for those flying behind it and creates a slipstream for them to be dragged along in. The birds behind also help those in front as the upward motion of their wings also creates an upward draft, propelling them forward. This push–pull relationship ensures all birds in the formation benefit from the work of others.

➔ **Rotating Leadership—**even with the pushing effect of those behind it, the front bird uses the most energy and becomes tired more quickly than the others. The geese know this and instinctively rotate leadership of the flock, allowing tired birds who have expended a lot of energy for the sake of the flock to rest and be dragged a long for a while until it is their next turn up front.

➔ **Dropping out of the Flock—**as a result of sickness or injury a bird will occasionally begin to fall away from the flock, unable to keep up. Instead of allowing this bird to fly on alone, at least two others will always drop out of the flock with it. This ensures that the injured bird will be defended and cared for until it's ready to resume flying, and that it will fly on with the benefit of flying in formation.

➔ **Power of the Honk—**from the ground the V formation of the geese is a beautiful thing to watch; serenely gliding across the sky these birds look quite majestic and peaceful. However, go up into the flock and you'll find it's quite a noisy affair with the geese constantly honking at one another. There are numerous theories about this honking (it could

be partly about letting each other know where they are so there are no mid-air collisions) but many believe it's actually about creating an environment of success and mutual encouragement. It reminds me of when I used to play football at school. Before the game would begin all the boys would gather in the locker room to whip themselves into a frenzy—shouting meaningless stuff about what they'd do to the opposition, slapping each other on the back (and backsides), and basically creating an environment where we thought we could conquer the world.

As a result of these dynamics the geese can fly amazing distances without stopping for rest, so much further than if they tried to do it alone.

Advantages of Working Together as Bloggers

In the same way, I've noticed that bloggers who work together often last longer and have more success in the building of their blogs. There are many benefits of finding another blogger (or a small group of bloggers) and committing to work together for the common good of your blogs.

Here are 10 benefits (taken from a great article in which each point is expanded upon in our archives, The Power of Collaboration in Today's Blogging World by Eric and Sean):

1. You gain feedback on posts, prior to pressing publish.
2. You have a person to vent to, who understands your situation.
3. You can work on projects together.
4. You can share link love.
5. You can share each other's posts through social media and with other bloggers.
6. You can share communities.
7. You can help each other stay motivated through encouragement.
8. You can guest post for each other.
9. You can share each other's talents.

10. You'll have twice the blogging power at your disposal.

How to Find a Blogging Buddy

So how does one find a blogging buddy? Let me suggest two things:

First, go and read this article written on the topic: How to Find a Blog Buddy (there's no point me rehashing those 7 points here).

If you have yet to join the 31 Days to Build a Better Blog Forums, head over there and start networking. There are 1300 or so bloggers already signed up and interacting and we've set up a special area specifically for Collaboration.

My dream with the 31 Days to Build a Better Blog challenge is that participants not only come away from the 31 days having learned and done a few exercises, but that they come away feeling connected to other bloggers who have shared the experience and who are looking to work together.

Together we know and can achieve a lot more than any single one of us alone.

Parting Advice in Building Blog Buddy Relationships:

As you head off to start connecting with other bloggers let me leave you with a few words of advice:

1. **Make it Mutually Beneficial**—these types of relationships are best when both parties come out of the interaction better off. It's a give-and-take situation so make sure both parties contribute and benefit in tangible ways.

2. **Attempt to Find a Blogger in a Similar Niche**—this may be impossible for some, as there are a few people blogging with quite a narrow and specialized focus; however, where you can, try to build relationships with people in similar niches to you. This will open up great opportunities for you on many levels. If you're unable to find someone in your niche, all is not lost. You can still learn a lot from another blogger when you have different topics.

3. **Find Other Bloggers on Your Level**—when I've suggested this in the past I noticed a lot of bloggers approaching just the successful A-list bloggers. While there's nothing wrong with building a relationship with a more popular blogger, it's beneficial to find another blog at a similar stage to you. This means you'll be both going through similar challenges at the same time and can worth through them together.

4. **Make Each Other's Blog Better**—my parting advice is to commit to make each other's blogs better. While most of us are committed to making our own blogs better (and should be) it can be quite powerful when we take that attitude with another person's blog too.

"Synergy is the highest activity of life; it creates new untapped alternatives; it values and exploits the mental, emotional, and psychological differences between people." —Stephen Covey

See the forum discussion of this task and teaching here.

TODAY'S NOTES

One of the best things you can do today is head to the Collaboration area of our forum. This area is *hot* with people looking to work with other bloggers. Some are specifically looking for blog buddies while others just want to connect and work with others in similar niches to them.

The other thing that I'd say is that sometimes this type of task takes time. While I've given you a challenge to find a blog buddy today, don't expect to find one immediately. The best blog buddies often come out of ongoing relationships, which take time.

Build into your daily blogging the task of reaching out to other bloggers in your niche. Look for opportunities to work together to mutual benefit, and over time you might just end up with the kind of blog buddy that I've described in this challenge, without either of you actually asking the other to be a blog buddy at all.

DAY 16

SOLVE A PROBLEM:
7 WAYS TO IDENTIFY READERS' PROBLEMS

Solve a Problem for Your Readers

TODAY'S TASK

Write a post that solves a problem that your readers (or potential readers) have

This is a task that most successful bloggers build into **every single day of their blogging**. Here's their motivation:

1. If you're solving problems:

2. You'll make an impression on people

3. People are more likely to return to your blog

4. People are inclined to tell others about your blog

How to Identify Problems to Solve:

For some bloggers identifying a problem that their readers will have is easy—they have a lot of readers and so have their *finger on the pulse* of their needs. However, it's a little trickier for newer bloggers with smaller and less vocal readers.

7 METHODS FOR IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS TO SOLVE ON YOUR BLOG

1. Solve Your Own Problems

My favorite way to identify needs and problems of others is to take note of my own. In my experience, when I have a problem, it's likely that others will also. So, instead of just solving your problems for yourself and moving on, why not capture the solution and add it to your blog so that others can benefit from it.

A Twitter follower recently asked me how she should start her blog. She was a little apprehensive and not sure how to start out. My answer was to write about a problem that she'd experienced and how she had solved it. There's no

better way to start up a blog; right from day one it signals to readers that you're interested in solving problems.
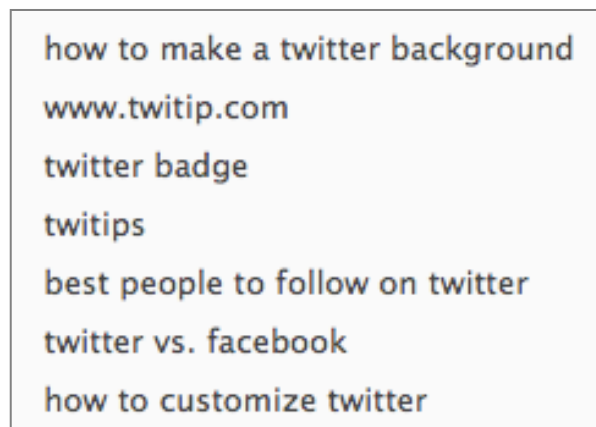
A great exercise to do to identify your own previous problems (at least those that don't come to mind straight away) is to sit down with a notepad and pen or a laptop and simply brainstorm everything you've learnt, overcome, discovered or solved when it comes to the topic that you cover on your list. Also list questions that you remember asking others about or problems that you might have researched privately.

Having done this you should end up with a good list of potential posts to write on your blog.

2. Look for Questions in Search Referrals

Once your blog has been going for a while there are ways to tap into your readership and discover the problems they have. One particularly useful way when readers don't tell you their needs and problems is to look at how and why they access your blog (and what they do when they arrive). Look at the terms people type into search engines to arrive on your site. Sometimes the most common keywords can illuminate a topic where people have problems.

For example, on my Twitter Tips blog I have the WP stats plugin installed. While not as advanced as some stats packages, it does show me the most commonly used keywords that people have used on search engines to arrive at my site. Here's a screenshot of part of the list of keywords:

> how to make a twitter background
>
> www.twitip.com
>
> twitter badge
>
> twitips
>
> best people to follow on twitter
>
> twitter vs. facebook
>
> how to customize twitter

These are just seven of many hundreds of terms that people have typed into Google, and already there are a few potential issues that users are seeking to address, such as:

➔   How to make a background image for Twitter

➔   Finding out about Twitter badges

➔   Looking for suggestions on who to follow on Twitter

➔   Deciding between Twitter and Facebook

➔   Seeking information on how to customize Twitter

From those seven search terms I've identified five problems that people have on Twitter!

The same information can be gleaned from most web statistics packages, such as Google Analytics.

Another great tool for identifying such terms and honing in on questions that people are asking when they arrive on your site is 103bees. To use it you need to be able to add a little JavaScript code to your blog's footer or header; once you've done that it'll show you what keywords people are typing into search engines and highlight the questions people are asking.

So here on ProBlogger people have arrived on this site in the last few minutes asking:

how to be lucky

how to get people to read your blog

how to find passion

5 places in space where it is important to know ho...

how to get traffic to my blog

what is a blog?

how to be more positive

Again, there are some real-life needs that people have.

Keep in mind that with both of the above techniques you're relying on your site ranking well for certain keywords that you've already used and addressed in previous articles. So the reason I have people arriving on my blog searching for "how to be lucky" is because I've already written about that exact topic (so I probably don't need to write another post on that topic). However, you'll find in the mix that people ask questions about areas that you've yet to write specifically about.

3. Analyze Internal Searches

Another related way to find information on what your current readers' needs are is to watch what they search for when they're on your blog. This is helpful because it shows you questions that they're asking that you've often not already written about.

There are a few tools available that show you internal search keywords:

Lijit—Lijit is a search box that you put on your sidebar or in your navigation area instead of your normal search box. In many ways it performs the same functions as far as your readers are concerned in that it allows them to search your blog. However, it also presents publishers with a large array of useful information on what those searches are for. For example, Lijit shows me that people on ProBlogger have searched for:

Top Searches (max 25 shown)

1. blogs for beginners 401 times
2. wordpress 87 times
3. cpm monthly income blogspot 61 times
4. starting out 52 times
5. twitter 51 times
6. do affiliate program for fitness 47 times
7. creating an article list 38 times
8. adsense 36 times
9. blog marketing 36 times
10. traffic 35 times

It also produces a list of searches that people have performed on your blog that have NO RESULTS:

Last Searches That Returned No Results (max 25 shown)

putting bullets in emailable form 0 results
rss scrypt 0 results
xine 0 results
youtube videohow to insert video on site 0 results
bq 0 results
twttad 0 results
www.facebook.com/profile.php&id=1099345088 0 results
fluid mechanic 0 results
cengel 0 results
town of georgina 0 results
'u843wdfg 0 results
jacmgggg 0 results
jacm 0 results
wordpress thematic skins 0 results

While that list includes some rather odd results it also produces some very useful information at times, providing a snapshot into what information readers are looking for.

4. Ask Readers for Questions

Another method that can be worthwhile is to directly ask readers for questions, or about the needs and challenges they face.

This of course assumes that you have some readers (so it might be unsuitable for those just starting out) and that they'll feel comfortable to give you a response.

There are a variety of ways of doing this:

➔ Write a post asking for questions;

➔ Email a handful of the most recent comment leavers asking if they have anything they need help with;

➔ Set up a contact form that acts as a questionnaire;

➔ Run a survey for readers;

➔ Set up a sidebar or run a poll that gives people a set of options to show you their most pressing needs (this allows some anonymity)

I've done each of these and all can be well worth your time implementing.

5. Look for Problems on Other Sites

This one can be particularly good for those just starting out with no current readers to ask. It simply involves finding a forum, blog, or social networking site that's relevant to your niche and surfing through threads of conversation looking for the type of questions that people ask.

You'll probably want to concentrate doing this on larger sites that receive a considerable amount of comments to make such a task worthwhile. Once you spend some time on most decent-sized forums, you'll see a range of questions that are asked over and over again.

6. Use Social Media to Gather Questions

I'm gaining more and more inspiration for posts from Twitter and other social networking sites.

Twitter is a great place for collecting questions from people with real needs and problems. I mainly do this in two ways:

1. **Asking for Questions**—every now and again I simply tweet that I'm looking for a few questions to base posts on.

2. **Watch lists**—I have a few keywords that I particularly look to track and monitor usage on Twitter, which I do through my Twitter Client TweetDeck. I've written more about setting up watch lists earlier in the challenge, but many of the times keywords are used I see questions being asked. I try to answer these questions on Twitter but also often use them as inspiration for longer blog posts.

7. Ask Friends and Family

Lastly, don't forget your real-life friends, family, and work colleagues. Many of the day-to-day conversations you have reveal the types of struggles and challenges that people face. While you'll want to keep private conversations private they could be a great source of inspiration for posts.

I actually find that family gatherings with extended family are great for me to tap into what people think about the topics that I write about. For example, at one gathering a family member asked me if he was holding his digital camera right. He was almost a little embarrassed to ask as it was so basic, but as I was answering I realized that other beginners using cameras would have the same question, hence How to Hold a Digital Camera came into being.

Interact

Join the discussion and share ideas over at the forum, Day 16: Solve a Problem [Writing Challenge]

TODAY'S NOTES

One of the best ways to solve problems of a more advanced level that readers might have is to draw others into helping you. For example, on my photography blog I'm often asked questions where I lack the expertise to solve. I'm not a professional photographer and even if I were, I wouldn't have expertise in all aspects of photography.

So when I'm asked one of these tricky questions I go searching for AN EXPERT in that area. I ask them one of three things:

1. Would they write a guest post for me on that topic?

2. Would they like to be interviewed on that topic?

3. Would they mind answering one question on that topic?

I generally start with option #1 and work my way down the list if they don't have time. If they're unable to help I'll then find another who can.

An alternative idea for involving others is to ask the same question to multiple experts. Ask five people how they'd solve a certain problem and then share all five answers in a post. This way you gain five perspectives on the question rather than one.

DAY 17

WATCH A FIRST-TIME READER USE YOUR BLOG

New readers to your blog are making decisions within seconds of arriving that will determine how (and if) they'll use your blog.

In the same way that first impressions can be vital in real-life interactions, they are just as important online.

TODAY'S TASK

Do some analysis of what first impressions people have with a First Time Reader Audit on your blog

What You'll Need

A friend, family member, work colleague, or even a blogger that you've not had much to do with before. The key is that the person has not seen your blog before. The person will need 10 or so minutes with you so bribe them with a coffee or otherwise to procure their time.

A computer in front of your first-timer and ideally you'll be in the same room with the person, but it can also be done virtually.

The Process

Load your blog up and let your friend surf it. Have them spend 4–5 minutes just wandering around your blog (and don't talk to them while they do this either).

Watch carefully how they use your blog

- ➔ How do they navigate?
- ➔ Where do they click?
- ➔ What do they pause to read?
- ➔ What do they skip over?
- ➔ What areas of the blog do they seem most drawn to?

Once they've surfed your blog ask them some questions about the experience

- ➔ What were their first impressions?
- ➔ What did they first think your blog was about when they arrived at it?
- ➔ Did they find it easy to read/navigate/understand?
- ➔ What did they *feel* when they first arrived at your blog?
- ➔ What suggestions do they have on how you could improve your blog?
- ➔ What questions do they have after surfing your blog?

➔   What words would they use to describe the design?

➔   What are the main elements they remember about your blog 10 minutes later?

➔   What suggestions do they have from a user perspective?

It's amazing to see what you'll learn by watching a person use your blog.

Once you've done your First Time Reader Audit, come back to this post and let us know what you learned.

PS: The last time I went through this process I actually had four people participate. I chose people of with different levels of web savvy, from a person who doesn't use the Web much at all, through to a more experienced blogger. I found having feedback from across a small group of people to be very valuable.

Interact

There are lots of people who joined the challenge that are working together on this task over at the forum, so check it out! Day 17: First Time Reader Audit.

TODAY'S NOTES

For those of you who are able to put JavaScript code into your blog, a great little tool that you should try is CrazyEgg.com.

CrazyEgg enables you to watch where people click when they're on your blog, creating a heatmap of the most clicked-on areas of your blog.

It won't give you all of the information that you would gain from watching a first-time reader use your blog in person, but it will show you what links are clicked on; from this you can gain insight into what interests your readers and what catches their eye.

This is very useful both from a design perspective and a content writing perspective as you'll see what types of information your reader wants more of, what types of "calls to action" in your posts work better than others, and so on.

Note: Google Analytics also has a feature to show you this, although the presentation of where people click isn't half as pretty or useful as the CrazyEgg heatmaps, in my humble opinion.

DAY 18

CREATE A SNEEZE PAGE FOR YOUR BLOG

TODAY'S TASK

Create a Sneeze Page for your blog

What is a Sneeze Page?

The term *sneeze page* is one that I came up with for the 2007 version of this blog challenge, and is a concept I've been using as a key strategy in my blogs for quite a few years.

The idea is simple: to create a page that propels people in different directions deep within your blog by highlighting a variety of posts that you've previously written.

Why a Sneeze Page?

The challenge that many bloggers face is that over time the archives of their blogs fill up with hundreds and then thousands of posts. The problem is that by default a blog generally only highlights the most recent posts that you've written on the front page, while the majority of your posts go largely unnoticed once they drop off the front page.

A sneeze page is all about showing off those archives.

Benefits of Sneeze Pages

There are a variety of reasons that a sneeze page can be powerful:

1. **It Shows Off Your Archives**—when I spend hours (if not days) crafting a blog post, I want people to read it! Sneeze pages lengthen the time that people interact with your older posts.

2. **It's Great for SEO**—search engines look at the links that other people make to your posts in order to rank them, as well as the internal links on your blog as well. Linking to old posts can help grow their search engine ranking.

3. **It Can Help Create a Sticky Blog**—I've yet to see stats on this but it's my suspicion that a person arriving on your blog for the first time is more likely to return if they discover more great posts there. Have a person read 10 great posts that you've written previously instead of just the one and you'll exponentially increase the likelihood that they'll subscribe and become a regular reader.

Types of Sneeze Pages (with Examples)

There are many ways of creating a sneeze page (or post) for your blog. Let's explore some:

Themed Sneeze Pages—these are posts or pages on your blog or site that revolve around a single theme. For example, here on ProBlogger I've created sneeze pages around some of the main themes for this blog such as:

- ➔ How to Make Money Blogging
- ➔ How to Find Readers for Your Blog
- ➔ How to Write Great Blog Content
- ➔ Search Engine Optimization for Bloggers
- ➔ Using Social Media Sites to Grow Your Blogs Traffic

These sneeze pages (and others) are linked to prominently around my blog, including the "Best of ProBlogger" section on my front page.

Similarly, on Digital Photography School (DPS) I've created pages for key topics (like Composition Tips, Digital Photography Techniques, Portrait Photography Tips, How to Photograph, and Digital Photography Tips for Beginners) and linked to them from navigation areas. I find these pages generate a lot of page views, including the pages they link to.

One more example that steps away from the posts that are purely lists of links is 21 Settings, Techniques, and Rules All New Camera Owners Should Know. This post is still a list of links but it's written more as a post with pictures and descriptions of the points made in each of the posts linked to. While the examples above are all pages in WordPress rather than actual posts, this last example just appeared as a normal post on my blog.

1. **Time-related Sneeze Pages**—these pages are based around a defined period of time. They're usually a "best of" post that highlights your key posts from that period, and serve to either remind readers of previous posts that they might want to revisit or to highlight posts that they might have missed.

   The period of time that you choose can really be anything from a year (here's my best of 2006 at ProBlogger post) through to a month, week, or even a weekend (that is, a post that summarizes the posts from a weekend that those readers who only read your blog during work hours might have missed). Blogs that have a particularly high frequency of posting use these quite regularly; for example, Lifehacker would often do one at the end of each week to highlight key posts for that week out of the many that they'd published.

2. **Retro Sneeze Pages**—another variation of the time-related sneeze page is to do one that unashamedly shows off a number of posts from your blog from a particular point in its history. The most common way to do this is to have a post highlighting blog posts from a year ago. Here's an example from Lifehacker, another blog that did (and still occasionally does) this.

3. **Series Sneeze Pages**—this is the technique of writing a series of blog posts exploring a topic over a period of time with lots of interlinked posts.

   One key with writing a series of posts is to make sure that readers have a trail of links between posts so that they're encouraged to read the full series.

   A great way to help readers discover a full series is to develop a sneeze page. All of the posts in the series should link back to it, and it should link to them.

   Series sneeze pages can become key pages on your blog. For example, here on ProBlogger one of my most popular pages is Blogging for Beginners, which started out simply as a list of posts from a series I was writing specifically for beginners.

Promote Your Sneeze Page

Sneeze pages can be an effective way of driving people deep within your blog, but they'll only do that for as long as you're able to drive people to the sneeze page itself.

As a result, a sneeze page should be promoted and positioned prominently on your blog so that people will continue to see it. Do this by linking to your sneeze page from navigation menus, sidebars, or other *hot* zones on your blog.

Create a Sneeze Page and Share It with Us

Okay, it's time to go create a sneeze page for your blog. Once you've done it please do come back and share a link to it in the comments below, as I'm sure there are a lot of creative ways to use these types of pages, and that we could all learn by sharing them.

Check out what others are doing with today's task in our thread for Day 18 in our forum.

TODAY'S NOTES

Is this your first Sneeze Page?

If you're creating your first ever sneeze page don't be overwhelmed with the idea. The way I started was simply to do a "best of" page that looked back on the last month of my blogging.

You can see an example of this from my Twitter blog at http://www.twitip.com/10-hot-twitter-tips/.

It's important to note that my blog had only been going for three months at this stage. While I lacked a lot of blog content, I could still create a sneeze page simply by looking at the stats of my blog and identifying the most popular posts so far.

Another Approach

Another tip to start off with is to consider what your most common questions are from readers and then identify a cluster of posts that might help answer them.

For example, on my photography blog I'm often asked about wedding photography. I've written on the topic a number of times on that blog so I decided to pull together a list of links on the topic.

In this way I've kept the sneeze page topical but around a theme I'm constantly asked about. I now have a standard email that I send to anyone requesting wedding photography information that points them to this post.

DAY 19

WRITE AN OPINION POST ON YOUR BLOG

TODAY'S TASK

Write a blog post that expresses an opinion

There are many factors that set great bloggers apart from the rest. One that continually crops up while interacting with successful bloggers over the last few years is that they often have strong opinions that they're bold enough to express.

While other bloggers in their niche report news, it's those who express opinions about the news and current events in their industry whose blogs tend to receive more links from others, generating more comments and who are perceived as thought leaders in a niche.

So it's time for you to write a blog post that expresses an opinion. This might seem easier for some niche or topics than others, but I think it probably applies to most of us.

➔ **If your blog is about politics**—share your personal thoughts on what a politician is saying.

➔ **If your blog is about cameras**—instead of just reporting that a new camera has come out, tell your readers what you think of its features and who you think it will be useful for.

➔ **If your blog is about Britney Spears**—showing her latest haircut and outfit is fine, but tell us what you think about it.

➔ **If your blog is about food**—share a recipe, then tell your readers what you love about it and what occasion it suits.

Steer clear of being highly emotional about your topic; to express your opinion all you need to do is add your own thoughts and feelings about the topic you're covering.

Why Opinions Matter

1. You'll probably find that some posts are unsuitable to share opinions on (depending on the type of blog), but when you regularly give your opinion on your blog you'll find that it can have a significant impact:

2. It often encourages others to share their opinions, in comments or on other blogs. Often opinion posts draw out interaction and productive conversations.

3. You help your readers to translate news and understand how information applies to them. This makes your content more useful.

4. You show your readers that you go beyond just reporting news; you're actually engaging with it and interested in the topic you're writing about. This is infectious and will draw your readers in too.

5. **Expressing opinions on your blog is like adding seasoning to food.** Without it your blog could end up being quite bland, blending into the

crowd. However, by adding your opinions you'll find that it helps to give your blog a unique flavor.

6. **Your task today** is to write a blog post that expresses an opinion about related content to your blog topic. Once you've written it come back and share a link to it, telling us about the experience.

Check out the thread for this task in our forum here.

TODAY'S NOTES

Nervous?

A number of people emailed me after I published this task saying that they were a little worried about being divisive and putting off readers by expressing their own opinions on their blog.

I can understand this feeling, especially when you're a new blogger. It can take a while for some bloggers to grow used to the idea of sharing what they think and feel, knowing that others are reading it.

My main advice to those feeling a little nervous about sharing their opinion is:

➔ **Start Small**—it's unnecessary to share your opinions on a big and controversial topic right up front. For your first opinion post choose a topic that's less confronting, perhaps a review of a book you've read, rather than who you voted for in the last election.

➔ **Don't be Afraid of Controversy**—over time you hopefully will become more comfortable with expressing stronger opinions. Keep in mind that there's nothing wrong with a diversity of opinions and that a little controversy can actually bring life to your blog. It can often snap people out of passively looking over your posts and actual start engaging. Just make sure that your posts are topical, relevant, and helpful to readers—avoid controversy for controversy's sake.

➔ **Write with Grace**—strongly held opinions can be written in a way that is inclusive of other people's views and respectful of those who disagree. There's no need to write a *rant* in highly emotive or confronting language.

➔ **Work on a Community of Knowledge**—when I write opinion-type posts I generally end it with an invitation for others to share their views. I try to build a sense on my blogs where it's okay to disagree and where "together we know more than any individual." Foster a sense of community and inclusiveness, and try to create an environment where people feel safe to share what they think yet where diversity of opinion is valued.

YOU as the blogger set the tone for your blog, so model inclusiveness and respecting and valuing others, and you'll find that most of your readers will follow your lead.

DAY 20

LEAVE COMMENTS ON OTHER BLOGS

TODAY'S TASK

"Leave comments on other blogs"

If there's one piece of advice on building traffic to a blog that's given to new bloggers more than any other, it's to leave comments on other blogs.

Today your task is to do just that: spend 10–15 minutes reading and interacting on other blogs featuring your topic (or surrounding topics).

The Benefits of Commenting on Other Blogs

➔   Finding out what other bloggers in your niche are doing

➔   Reading some great content that could spark ideas for your own blog

➔   Reaching out to other bloggers in your niche, as comments are often the start of fruitful relationships

➔   Creating a small doorway back to your own blog for the readers of that blog

➔   Building your own profile in your niche because it's a chance to show your expertise, knowledge, and understanding of the topic

Warning!

It should go without saying, but just having moderated the comments on my own blogs I suspect it needs to be said again: DON'T BE A COMMENT SPAMMER!

More than that; AVOID **LOOKING** LIKE A COMMENT SPAMMER!

I add that second warning because I come across a lot of bloggers who try to leave comments on other blogs in a way that they think is genuine, but that looks like spam. Their comments more often than not find them on blacklists of comment spam filters.

The rule of thumb that I advise when leaving comments on other people's blogs is simple: add value.

A comment that simply says "great post" with a link signature back to your own blog adds little if any value to the blog. And it looks spammy. The only visitors coming back to your blog are people wanting to know who the spammer is!

Tips for Commenting

➔   Keep comments on topic

➔   Let your comment show that you've read the post

➔   Say what you like or don't like about the post

➔   Add an example or another point that the blogger might have missed

➔   Ask a relevant and insightful question

➔ If you put a link back to your own blog in the comment, try to make it a relevant one that adds to the post and will be useful to those who follow it.

Comments Are Mini Resumes—every comment you leave is representative of you and so is like a mini resume for you and your blog. You can read more about this idea in the last point of Lorelle's post on comments.

Comments Can Hurt Your Brand—on the flip side, every comment you write can potentially hurt your reputation and brand as a blogger. Here are 10 Ways That Comments Can Actually Do More Harm Than Good to the Brand of Your Blog.

Further Reading: I wrote a comment back in 2007 which I think is still relevant today: 11 Tips for Getting Your Comments Noticed on a Popular Blog.

Your task today is to find blogs on a similar or related topic to yours and to spend 10–15 minutes interacting on them in a genuine and useful way. Let us know how you go below, with a comment of course!

TODAY'S NOTES

Another Quick Tip

Blogs are only one place that allow comments. We've already talked about forums earlier in this challenge, but another type of site that often allows these sorts of interactions is mainstream media web sites, particularly newspapers.

Not all newspaper web sites allow them (and some are moderated quite heavily) but I've noticed more and more newspapers adding a blog area to their sites, or even adding the ability to comment on news articles.

Some prohibit you from leaving a link to your blog in the comments area, but if you use your URL as your name you can still gain some benefits from

doing so. The same rules apply though: avoid being spammy and add genuinely interesting and useful comments to be most effective.

DAY 21

BREATHE LIFE INTO AN OLD POST

Let me be a little presumptuous and blunt: not every post in the archives of your blog is up to scratch.

I know this because it's true of my own blogs.

No matter how hard we work on our blogging there are always elements in the posts that we've previously written that can be improved upon. There are also posts in most of our archives that have simply underperformed for some reason or another.

TODAY'S TASK

Update an older post on your blog

This is a little different to our previous task to update a key page on your blog (day 14) because in that task we were looking at important pages to your blog. In this one we're looking for posts that you've written that for one reason or another fail to be up to scratch.

This might be because:

➔ You rushed the initial writing of the post and it was poorly written

➔ Your post lacked depth in some way

➔ The information is now dated

➔ You've changed your opinion on what you wrote

➔ A key element in the post (like the title, formatting, or opening lines) was poorly done

➔ You were wrong in your post and it contains factual errors

➔ You know more now about the topic than you did when you first wrote it

Whatever the reason, **today your task is to update at least one older post**.

The update might be anything from a couple of tweaks through to a complete overhaul. If the update is significant write a new post on your blog linking back to the old one to let readers know that it's updated. You might also want to think about promoting it on Twitter, to other key bloggers in your niche, and so on.

7 Ways to Update a Post and Give It New Life

Below are seven ways that you can update a post. These come from a series I wrote a few months back on crafting blog posts, and while it's written from the perspective of crafting a new post I think that most of it can easily be applied to updating old posts too.

1. Crafting Your Post Title—if there's one element that lets down posts more than others it's the post title. A title can mean the difference between a post being read or not. I've reworked the titles on a few old posts and seen them have new leashes of life simply because the title changed.

2. Opening Lines—your post title's goal is to entice people to read your opening line, but it needs to be a great opening line otherwise people will stop reading.

3. Call to Action—what do you want people to do when they've finished reading your post? In many cases bloggers simply let posts end in a whimper without giving readers a call to do anything. Posts with a call to action give readers a next step.

4. Add Depth—many blog posts that I read would be much more successful if the blogger had spent just a few extra minutes giving examples, adding an illustration, suggesting further reading, sharing an opinion, and so on. This post gives 13 ways to add depth to a post.

5. Quality Control—many posts (my own included) could be improved with a little extra proofreading. Also, pay attention to links that may have become dead or facts that you present that are dated or inaccurate for current readers.

6. Polishing Posts—how your post looks has a massive impact upon how they're treated by readers. A great looking post can mean the difference between a post being read and going viral and a post that sits unnoticed in your archives.

7. Conversation—for many bloggers once a post is published it goes off the radar for the blogger, despite readers interacting with it and commenting upon it for days, weeks, months, and even years after.

Further Reading

Updating Old Posts on Your Blog—an exploration of the *why* and *how* to update old posts. This explores the question of when to update an old post and when to write a new post that updates an older one.

Interact

Check out the discussion on this topic here in our forum.

TODAY'S NOTES

A handful of people disliked this task: they felt that updating posts somehow compromised the nature of their blog and they wanted to preserve their old posts as a way of showing the journey that they'd been on as a blogger.

I totally respect that approach to blogging. While I think adding an update to an old post and clearly labeling it as an update differs to this way of thinking, if you'd prefer to avoid updating, how about writing a new post that extends or updates the ideas in a previous post?

To do this simply choose a post in your archives which has content that you'd like to update or extend, then write a new post linking back to that post but with the update. That way the old post remains intact and your ideas area extended. You can link to your new post from the old one so readers can see the progression (if your philosophy of blogging allows that, of course).

DAY 22

PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO A READER

TODAY'S TASK

Make a reader famous

Choose one (or more) of your current readers and do anything out of the blue that acknowledges them, shows them that you value them, and highlights them to your other readers.

Why this is Important

While many blog tips focus upon techniques to help make bloggers and their blogs more well-known, one of the paradoxical keys to blogging success is this: many bloggers who build great blogs actually go out of their way to make their readers more famous.

When you create space on your blog to highlight readers in some way the impact can be quite profound, particularly when you do it regularly. Two groups of people tend to be impacted:

Those You Make Famous Benefit—the first and most obvious people to benefit from your efforts are those who you highlight. Having a blogger go out of their way to talk about an individual on their blog certainly can make an impression. It gives them a sense of being valuable and belonging to a community, and participating in the blog can help them achieve their own goals if you send other readers to their site or blog to learn more about them.

Other Readers Are Impacted—one of the lessons I learned early in blogging is that when you publicly value one reader, others often feel valued also. It shows you have an interest in your readers, and that you value all of them even when you just highlight a few.

How to Make Readers Famous

There are many ways to highlight your readers on your blog. Let me share a few that I've done over the years.

➔ **Promote a Comment to a Post**—sometimes readers make insightful and wise observations and tips in the comments of your blog. While they'll be read by a handful of people in the comment thread, why not pull it out and use it as the basis for one of your posts—highlighting the wisdom conveyed and the person who made the comment.

➔ **Write a Post about Their Blog**—visit the blogs of those leaving comments on your blog and pick one that resonates with you to post about. Write an unpaid review of the blog, highlighting the best posts and what you like about it.

➔ **Send Your Readers to Comment on Another's Blog**—write a post that links to another's great blog post and suggest to your readers to head over and comment on it on that person's blog. Shutting down the comments in your own post and saying that you've left a comment already on their blog can help make this more effective.

➔ **Give Readers an Opportunity to Promote Themselves**—run a

project or write a post that gives readers an opportunity to promote themselves in some way. For example, on DPS I've given readers a chance to show off their photography. One time I asked, "Do you have a photoblog?" where I asked readers to share a link to their photoblog. Hundreds of readers left links to their blogs and many emailed me later to thank me for sending them traffic. Another similar example was when I asked readers to share their best-ever shot).

➔ **Reader of the Week**—I've seen a few blogs do this over the years; they simply choose one reader each week to highlight in a post.

➔ **Projects, Memes, and Competitions**—long-term readers of ProBlogger will be familiar with the group writing projects that I run here every six months or so. I invite readers to write posts on their blogs and then share the link with each other. These projects always generate a lot of traffic to other blogs. Similarly you can run competitions, blog carnivals, memes, and so on, which give readers an opportunity to highlight their own online presence, blog, twitter account, whatever. Another example of this is my social media love-in that I ran last year, inviting readers to tell us what social media accounts they had. Hundreds of people participated and those that did received a lot of followers on Twitter and new contacts on other networks.

➔ **Run a Reader Poll and Display the Results in a Post**—have a post one weekend where you pose a question to your readers. Then do a follow-up post the next week where you add some of your own thoughts on the question and highlight some of the best comments left by readers. Alternatively, you could survey your Twitter followers on a topic relevant to your blog and then highlight their responses as a blog post.

➔ **Invite Guest Posts**—often guest posting is talked about solely as a way to gain free content for your blog. While this is nice, one of the things I love about it most is that it puts the microphone in the hand of another, so that a person normally constrained by the comments section has a little more influence on the direction of your community for a moment in time. This can have a real impact on the person doing

the post, as well as your readership as they see a person like them featured on your blog.

No Readers to Make Famous Yet?

Of course, this exercise is easier for blogs that have been around for a while and have developed a readership. Those just starting out will find it harder—there are only so many times you can make your mother, wife, or best friend famous on your blog without looking a little desperate!

If you're a new blogger or your site is yet to attract reader comments, try making another blogger famous today by writing a post that links up to them, highlighting them to your readers.

Make a Person Famous

The blogosphere was built on principles of promoting others, conversation, celebrating diversity, open source knowledge, and so on. One of the first attractions to me of blogging was the way that bloggers celebrated their readers and other bloggers. Attempt to recapture some of that ethos by making others famous today on your blog.

Share How You Do it

In the spirit of this post, I invite you to share how you make your readers famous in the comments below. Share a link to the place where you're doing it so we can learn from you! Also stop by the forum thread for today to share your progress.

5 More Ways to Make a Reader Famous

1. **Conduct a Short Interview with an Interesting Reader**—this works particularly well if your reader is a professional or expert in your niche. I've done this a number of times with great photographers on my photography blog.

2. **"Introduce Yourself" Post**—simply write a post inviting readers to introduce themselves. Many forums have these types of threads so why not have a post dedicated to it on your blog?

3. **Widgets and Plugins**—there are a variety of tools around that let readers highlight that they've been on your blog. One of the most common ones is MyBlogLog, which shows a little avatar of any readers who visit your blog (for those registered as MyBlogLog users).

4. **Gravatars**—let readers personalize their comments by setting up your comments area to show their avatar if they're registered on Gravatar.com. You can see this in action in my Photography blog's section.

5. **Give Readers a Chance to Show Their Expertise**—one way I've done this is to periodically ask my Twitter followers a question and then highlight their answers on my blog. Here's an example in this video that I created.

DAY 23

CALL YOUR READERS TO ACTION

TODAY'S TASK

Write a post that contains some kind of a call to action

While this type of post might not be one that you'll use all of the time, it's a handy style of post to have in your tool belt of blogging techniques. As in the life of most blogs there are times where you want your readers to go beyond reading and take some kind of action.

This might include many types of actions, such as:

➔ Implementing an idea that you've written about

➔ Subscribing to your RSS feed or an email newsletter

➔ Buying an affiliate product

➔ Writing a comment

➔ Voting in a poll

➔ Making a donation to a charity

➔ Voting for you on a social bookmarking site

➔ Buying a product that you've developed

➔ Visiting another site

➔ Hiring you for some service that you offer

➔ Reading another piece you've written on your blog

➔ Visiting your business site.

The list could go on … and on…

Some of the actions that you'll want to call people to do will benefit your blog while others will be about applying the ideas you're writing about (and of course some will benefit both you and your reader).

The Problem of Passive Readers

While the above list might seem like fairly simple things to encourage readers to do, the reality is that most blog readers are passive. Looking at my own blogs I'd estimate that less than 1% actually make comments, and that the vast majority of those who come to my blogs leave without *doing* anything.

This Could Be One of Your Readers.....

Talking to other bloggers I have the feeling that I'm only one of many with passive readers. How about you … would you like to have a more active and interactive readership?

How Do We Snap Readers Out of Passivity?

Learning how to call your readers to action won't happen over night. There are some techniques that I can point you to that will help, but the best way to learn how to do it is to practice your calls to action and see what works best for you.

Hence, today's task is to write a call to action post.

Before you attempt today's task I would highly recommend that you read my recent post, 12 Tips to SNAP Readers out of Passivity.

It contains some useful tips and techniques that will help you in today's task. Once you've read it, all you need to do before writing your post is to choose the action that you want your readers to take.

If you've not done this type of thing before, choose a task that's simple and achievable (for example, persuading readers to comment or subscribe to your feed). Another option might be to write about a book that you have read and would recommend, and call people to action to buy it at Amazon with an affiliate link.

Really, the action that you'll want to call people to will depend upon the goals of your blog.

Once you've written your post I'd love to hear how you went with it.

➔ Do you have passive readers?

➔ What techniques did you use to call people to action?

➔ Did it work?

➔ How would you do it differently next time?

➔ What have you done previously that has got your readers *doing* something?

Interact

You can share the above at the forum post for this task: Call Your Readers to ACTION (Day 23).

TODAY'S NOTES

4 More Tips to Call Readers to Action

1. **Relevancy is Key**—ask readers to DO perform an action that is relevant to your blog's topic. This might sound a little obvious but I've seen a lot of bloggers throw posts into the mix that call people to do tasks that are unrelated to their normal blogging. The more relevant the call the more chance that people will respond.

2. **Build a Culture of Action**—one of the aspects I've noticed about building interactive blogs is that it often takes time. When I first start a blog, it's usual that's there's only a few comments (if any), hardly anyone votes in polls, nobody responds to affiliate invitations, you catch my drift. However, in time it's possible to build up reader activity on your blog.

   My recommendation is to start with simple *calls* that encourage your readers to start interacting with you and DOING something—comments, answering questions, participating in polls, and so on. In time, once readers' start taking ownership you can try other stronger calls to action.

3. **Break Through with Humor**—this will only apply to some blogs but I've seen a number of bloggers have readers participating by asking them to do something a little light-hearted and humorous. For example, some of the bloggers in our forum area ran a mini competition inviting readers to submit a caption for a funny photo and had some good results.

4. **Set Homework**—one of the reasons that this challenge has been working so well with my own readers on ProBlogger (that'd be you) is

that I've worked hard to make every day in the series practical with its own task. I've tried to include ways for people to take the teaching in the posts and apply them in practice straight away. Readers seem to be appreciating this, as they not only learn the theory but are able to bed it down in an experience with the homework task.

DAY 24

HOW TO USE A MAGAZINE TO IMPROVE YOUR BLOG

Are you looking for some fresh design, marketing, story, or even headline ideas for your blog? Today your task might just help with this.

This is an offline activity. All you need to complete it is a pack of sticky notes, a notebook, a pen, a magazine (or a newspaper), and an hour of time.

TODAY'S TASK

Take some time out to analyze or review a magazine with the view of learning about how you might improve your own blog

Which magazine do you need? Really, almost any will do; however, if there's a magazine covering the same topic as your blog then it's probably worth choosing it.

Hint: many public libraries have back copies of magazines so you can do this for free and with lots of magazines at once.

I do this process on a regular basis and find that it helps me in a number of ways:

➔ **Marketing Ideas**—the way the magazine markets and pitches itself to readers can teach a lot, particularly what they do on the front cover as it's all about convincing people to buy the magazine.

➔ **Design Ideas**—some magazines do layout better than others and the Web is definitely a different medium than print, but you can still learn a lot about design from reading a good magazine. Better magazines will give you an indication of what types of design, colors, and layout are in vogue at the moment.

➔ **Post Ideas**—whether I choose a magazine on my blog's topic or not, I almost always come away with a story for a new post. Sometimes the inspiration comes from a completely unrelated topic, but the article's headline or title could be applied to my niche.

➔ **Learning About My Niche**—if you choose a magazine on your topic it'll keep you across the latest news and developments.

➔ **Writing Tips**—a good article on almost any topic can teach you a lot about effective communication.

➔ **Monetization Lessons**—mainstream media have been monetizing content for a long time; while the Web is a little different some principles still apply.

➔ **Reader Engagement**—while a very different medium, magazines are increasingly trying to become more interactive with readers by running competitions, setting up online areas, and using reader contributions. I often gain sparks of inspiration from watching how magazines reach out to readers.

Why Analyze "Old Media"

I can hear a few blogging evangelists asking what the point of this exercise is. Blogging is *new* media so why would we look to *old* media like magazines to learn tips?

While I agree that blogging is a very different medium to magazine publishing, throwing out everything that's been learned by mainstream media seems arrogant to me.

Sure, we should be innovating and working with the strengths of the blogging medium, but there are also lessons to be learned by looking at what others are doing in different mediums. A lot has been learned over decades of print publishing that we as bloggers could take on board and build upon.

The Process That I Use

I generally conduct this magazine review exercise this way:

1. Set aside at least an hour and head to a place where you'll be left undisturbed (I tend to go to a cafe).

2. Bring along the magazine (or more), notebook, pen, and a pack of sticky notes.

3. Starting with the front cover, quickly skim through the magazine placing a sticky note on any page that catches your attention. Don't pause to read anything yet, just take a quick flick through it to see what leaps out at you.

4. Once you've had a quick skim through the magazine, make a note of what grabbed you on this first pass through. Was it a headline, picture, color, opening line of an article, or otherwise? Attention grabbers are

so important in creating an engaging blog so it's worth noting what caught your attention.

Now take a second, slower read of the magazine. Start at the front cover and work your way through. As you read ask yourself some of the following questions:

➔ Who is the target audience of this publication?

➔ What techniques are used on the front page to draw people into the magazine?

➔ What makes you pause to read an article? Why do you skip over other articles?

➔ What type of headlines are they using? How effective are they?

➔ How are pictures used?

➔ What colors are in at the moment?

➔ How are articles formatted (use of subheadings, bold, lists etc.)?

➔ How does the magazine sell itself (looking forward to future issues, subscription pages etc.)?

➔ What can you learn from ad placement and design in the magazine?

➔ What level is this magazine pitched at (beginners, advanced etc.)?

➔ What does the magazine do well? What does it not do well? How would you improve it?

➔ What are the limitations of the magazine medium? How could you use this to capitalize on selling your blog?

As you read through the magazine make note of story ideas, design techniques, headline structures, and other techniques that you might want to try on your blog.

I'm not saying you should copy everything you see happening in the magazine, but rather that you use it as an opportunity to learn and think about your own blog. Some of what you see will naturally lend itself to your blog; other parts won't.

The value of this is in stepping away from your own blog for a little while and gaining some fresh ideas and perspectives.

I'm keen to hear how you go with this exercise. Feel free to share your experiences in comments below.

One More Tip

If you choose a magazine on a similar topic to your blog, it can sometimes be worth keeping an eye out for opportunities in order to directly improve your blog.

Pitch yourself as a contributor to the magazine—I've done this a number of times with mixed success, but if the magazine strongly relates to your blog why not contact the editor to suggest that you do a piece together? For example, you might offer to write an article or even a regular column. I've seen a number of bloggers do this with some success. Alternatively, you might want to pitch yourself or your blog as a potential subject for an interview or article in their magazine.

Interact

Discuss this article in our Forum here.

TODAY'S NOTES

Find Potential Guest Writers

One extra way that a magazine can help you improve your blog is to identify people who might contribute content.

Magazines that use contributions from readers will often publish the web site of those that submit articles or tips. I've followed up these links many times and have often approached these writers for guest contributions to my blogs.

Some of them take me up on it, and it's a great way to bring a fresh voice into your blog: read more about how I do this.

DAY 25

ASK A QUESTION: 10 REASONS WHY QUESTIONS WORK AND 12 TIPS ON HOW TO ASK THEM

TODAY'S TASK

Ask your readers a question

10 Reasons to Ask Your Readers Questions

Asking readers questions is a fantastic way to grow your blog—here are 10 reasons why:

1. It gives readers a sense of **community** and **participation**—there's nothing like coming to a blog where readers are interacting; it gives the blog a sense of being alive.

2. It increases Blog **Stickiness**—people are more likely to return to a blog that they've contributed to.

3. Question posts are fairly effortless to write (although they can take some moderating).

4. Question posts are fantastic for helping you to gauge where your readers are at on certain topics.

5. Reader answers can fuel future post ideas for your blog.

6. They open up opportunities for follow-up posts as you summarize the answers, pick up conversations, and even answer the question yourself.

7. Well-worded questions can often rank high in search engines. Pick a question that people will ask when they search the Web for answers and optimize your page for that question, and you could rank quite well.

8. They can be great for generating incoming links to your blog as other bloggers pick up the conversation on their own blogs.

9. When a reader comments it gives you a means of entering into conversation with that person, either by responding with a comment or via email. In the early days of a blog it can especially be good to do this, as those few readers you have can help to spread word of your blog into their network.

10. Reader answers can sometimes be used as actual posts. I've promoted the comments people have made on my blog to actual blog posts (adding a few extra comments of my own and giving credit to the comment leaver, of course).

Some bloggers resist writing question posts because they're scared that nobody will answer the question. This can certainly be a little disheartening, but if you construct the post well and include your own answer to the question then at least there's value of sorts, even if the conversation fails to take off.

Remember that only around 1% of blog readers tend to leave comments, so a lack of response to your blog doesn't mean that no one is reading. Keep trying!

12 Tips for Asking Your Readers Questions on Your Blog

When it comes to asking your readers questions there are no real rules as to the type of questions and how you should go about it. However, here are 12 tips that I've found helpful:

1. Keep the question relevant to your blog's topic.

2. Ask a question that builds on a previous post; for example, on DPS I wrote a post about the pros and cons of shooting in RAW versus JPEG. The post was quite popular so I followed it up with a post asking readers what they shot in.

3. Ask questions that are answerable. This might sound dumb but sometimes questions are so hard to answer that people shy away from them.

4. Ask questions that readers will want to know the answer to—such as a hot topic that you think readers will want to have insight into what others think or do.

5. Suggest to your readers some possible answers. I find that when I give some options to choose between, it can help a discussion start off.

6. Generate debate by asking an either/or question—where there are only two answers to choose from; they're easy to answer and a great way to help train your readers to comment (the RAW/JPEG question post above is an example of this).

7. Try using a poll tool to give your readers a way to vote on a number of options.

8. Stimulate a conversation by asking a controversial question, but be aware that readers could get fired up.

9. Be willing to share your own answer, but if you're confident people will respond you might want to consider holding off on your own answer and do it in a follow-up post. This means two posts instead of one but you won't be skewing your readers' answers.

10. Do you have a frequently asked question that you're unable to answer? Ask your readers for their opinion—you might learn something. I often use "community workshop" type questions where I simply pose a question and ask readers for advice on the topic. The comments section then becomes the resource (see examples below).

11. Ask more personal (yet on topic) questions. That is, instead of just asking what people *think* about a theoretical question, ask them what they *do* or about their own lives. For example, a while back I asked readers to tell me what their favorite lens was at DPS. It was answered

by over 200 people which, at the time, was my most commented upon post.

12. Follow up your question posts with summaries of answers. If you receive a lot of responses it can be well worth your time to collate the answers in a new post. This shows your readers that you value their answers but also creates an interesting post. Looking at the example from the previous point, I wrote a summary of popular DSLR lenses. The response from these two posts was fantastic as many readers not only had a say on a topic but also enjoyed reading what others were doing.

Having all that in mind, your homework for today is to go back to your blog and ask a question of your readers.

Once you've done that, come back to this post and share the link with us so we can check it out and see how you've approached it.

Some Examples of Question Posts

I use reader questions regularly on my photography site. In fact they're among the most popular posts on the blog, both in terms of page views and generating comments. I've supplied a few below, which I hope that by sharing them you'll gain some ideas for different types of questions to ask:

➔ Which Digital Camera Manufacturer is Best? A question that caused some real debate as there is no one answer. I followed it up with a summary post: Best Digital Camera Manufacturers.

➔ Win a Prize by Telling Us About Your Digital Camera. In this instance I offered a prize for people to answer the question (in the DPS forum).

➔ What Digital Camera Do You Use? Another question aimed at asking readers to share their own experiences of gear that they use. This gave me valuable data on the type of reader I had but also provided me with great information for a follow-up post.

➔ What Shooting Mode Do You Shoot in the Most? Asking this question provides an opportunity to link to previously written posts on the topic at the bottom of the post. I also followed it up with some posts on the same topic, as the question itself really opened up an area that some of my readers hadn't explored much before.

➔ How Would You Photograph a Funeral? This is a community workshop-type post where I pose a reader's question and let other readers give their advice and tips. I find these question posts particularly effective as they not only answer a reader's question but the community's answers form a fantastic resource. Other examples of this include "How to Photograph Grandma" and "How do I Photograph Kids?"

➔ Share Your Best Shot Ever. This post simply asked readers to share a link to their best photograph. It gave readers a chance to show off their work a little and was very popular.

TODAY'S NOTES

The most common response to this topic is from those just starting out with their blog, who feel they lack the readership to gain enough responses.

I feel your pain on this one. You may want to limit your question posts while you're starting out; however, I still think they're worth running occasionally—you just need to work a little harder to start off the conversation.

Here's what I'd do:

➔ Write your question post. Make it on topic and easy to answer. A poll might be a good starting place as it's easy for people to complete and it's anonymous.

➔ Be the first person to answer your own question. This will start the ball rolling.

➔ Email a few friends, pull in some favors, and ask others to help out by answering the question or voting in the poll.

You may find that it's only your friends who respond, but by having a few people interacting, you could draw out other readers.

This might seem a little fake (and I guess it is on some levels) but sometimes starting a conversation takes one person to start the ball rolling.

DAY 26

IMPROVE ANOTHER BLOG

When was the last time you made another person's blog better?

TODAY'S TASK

Is to do just that: improve a blog that is not yours

Most bloggers naturally spend the vast majority of their time improving their own blogs. There can be a lot of positive results however, when you spend time improving other people's blogs in one way or another.

I think it's fairly obvious why it can be worth helping another blogger achieve their goals so I won't go into it too much, except to say that you can make a MAJOR impression on another blogger by helping them achieve their goals for their blog. When you do this, any number of benefits can come your way.

The question is: how do you improve a person's blog?

I'd love to hear your suggestions on this in the comments below but let me mention just a few:

➔ Write a high quality guest post that will be useful to another blog's readers

➔ Leave helpful and insightful comments

➔ Link to the blog and share your readers with them

➔ Promote the blog in social media and start a social bookmarking campaign for them

➔ Recommend to your readers to subscribe to their blog

➔ Email the blogger with some suggested topics you'd love to see them cover

➔ Introduce them to a potential advertiser

➔ Share with them an affiliate program that has worked for you

➔ Write an email telling the blogger how you found one of their posts helpful.

Really, there is no limit to the ways that you can help another blogger improve their blog. The key is to ask yourself what their needs might be and attempt to fulfill those needs in some way.

The key with this exercise is to perform a significant action for the other blog. Don't just leave a comment on 50 blogs today; spend some significant time focusing your energy on one other blog in your niche.

If it's unnoticed by the other blogger, don't despair. Hopefully, in doing something for others you'll learn something for yourself also, as well as gain a little good karma in the process!

Let us know what good deed you do for another blogger today in the comments below.

TODAY'S NOTES

The most simple way to do today's task is to leave a highly useful comment on another person's blog—but I'd encourage you to go further today if you can.

One of the most effective strategies to explore is guest posting on another blog. This has the benefit of exposing your ideas to a new audience, and for the blogger that you're writing for it's free content, a fresh voice, and a day off from them having to write a new piece on their blog.

Of course, a guest posting spot on another blog can be tricky to obtain, but it's worth the effort to at least try.

To save wasting your time write a guest post for another blog on a similar topic to yours, so if the other blog declines to publish it you can always use it on your own blog.

Here's some further reading on gaining guest blogger spots and what to do when you do:

How to get Guest Blogging Jobs

How to be a Good Guest Blogger

How to Guest Post to Promote Your Blog

Lastly, if at first you don't succeed try and try again. In time someone will take you up on your offer and when they do, you have an example that you can show another blogger. Each time it becomes a little easier.

DAY 27

HUNT FOR DEAD LINKS

TODAY'S TASK

Go on a dead link hunt

Blogging is built on the *link*. One blog links to another blog, who links to another who makes comment on another. This is a wonderful thing, but what happens when one of the blogs that you're linking to is retired, deleted, moves, or changes its link structure?

The link becomes dead (this is also known as link rot) and can cost your blog on two fronts:

1. **Readability**—clicking on a dead link can mean your readers can end up on error pages or being redirected to other irrelevant content. This can lead to reader frustration and give the impression that your blog is old and out of touch.

2. **SEO**—I'm unsure of the technicalities or what the latest research shows, but from what I can tell, a dead link is unfavorably looked upon by search engines which means you run the risk of penalties.

So how do you detect dead links on your blog?

The most obvious solution is to surf every page on your blog and manually check all the links. This might be achievable on a new blog, but on older blogs with hundreds or thousands of posts it's impossible.

There are many link-checking tools available but to be honest, I'm yet to find one that I'm really happy with. I do hear that Xenu's Link Sleuth is well regarded. I've also used the free version of Dead-Links.com (which only checks to a shallow depth) but I'd be keen to hear from readers on their suggestions of other options.

Here are a few dead link checking tools that are recommended in the WordPress Codex:

➔ Siteowner's Link Checker

➔ Link Valet

➔ W3C Free Link Checker

➔ AnyBrowser's Link Checker

➔ HTMLHelp Valet Link Checker

➔ NetMechanic's Link Check

What to Do When You Find a Dead Link

There are a few options for handling dead links:

1. **Fix or Update the Link**—if the link is simply wrong or pointing to the wrong place, update it so it works.

2. **Delete the Link**—if the link is are dead and there's no correct or updated one then you can delete the link. I usually add a note to say

that I've done this. Sometimes I also update it with new links so that the post is still relevant.

3. **Delete the Post—**occasionally I've done this if the whole post's main point is to link to another post. A dead link makes this type of post obsolete so I consider deleting them rather than updating.

Whether you use a tool or just tackle the task manually a few posts at a time, finding and fixing dead links can be well worth the effort.

What do you do?

How do you find dead links? What do you do when you find them? Have any cool tools to share? Feel free to discuss it in the forum post for this task.

TODAY'S NOTES

Dead link fixing isn't the most glamorous task so while we're at it, how about dealing with some other dry tasks that many blogs could benefit from?

➔ Spelling—set aside some time to go over old posts looking for misspelled words.

➔ Grammar—most bloggers have plenty of grammatical errors that could do with some fixing.

➔ Formatting—if you've ever done a site redesign there can be all manner of formatting issues that need to be fixed in old posts. It can be well worth your time going back over your early posts to see how they look now in the new design.

None of the above is riveting work for you as a blogger, but finding these kinds of errors can make a big impact upon readers!

DAY 28

WRITE A REVIEW POST

TODAY'S TASK

Write a review post

I know that many bloggers already write reviews on their blogs but you can never have enough practice on this type of post.

The Web is increasingly being used by people for research to help make purchasing decisions.

I'm without any stats on this, but looking at the types of words and phrases that are typed into Google to find my blogs, there's some strong anecdotal evidence that people are actively using the Web to seek advice. Reviews on your blog help position you well to meet this need that people have.

The other great aspect about review posts is that they show you have opinions on your topic. This makes an impression on readers and increases the likelihood that they'll see you as an authority on the topic that you're writing about.

Reviews Irrelevant for Your Blog?

You might be thinking to yourself right now that your blog is unsuited to review posts. For example, you may not write about products nor think of any books that might relate to your topic.

Fear not—all you need to do is think a little creatively to still be able to do today's challenge. Here are a few ideas for reviews:

➔   Books

➔   Movies or TV shows relevant to your audience

➔   Another web site in your niche

➔   A restaurant if you're a food blogger

➔   An article from a magazine or web site

➔   A hotel, tourist destination, or airline if you're a travel blogger

➔   An outfit that a celebrity is wearing if you're a fashion blogger

➔   A speech given by a politician if you're a political blogger

➔   A gadget if you're a tech blogger

➔   A tool or piece of equipment relevant to your niche

➔   An exhibition or gallery if you're an art blogger

➔   A toy if you're a parent blogger

➔   An instrument if you're a music blogger

Really, the list could go on and on—there's so much scope with this type of post.

Tips on Writing Effective Reviews on Your Blog

1. **Give an Opinion**—people read reviews to help them make a decision. As a result they want opinions, so don't be afraid to give them. If you review an item that's below par, don't be afraid to say so. This builds credibility with your audience and shows that you're willing to give real advice.

2. **Give a Rating**—tied to the point above, I find that when you give some kind of concrete rating in a review that readers generally respond well.

3. **Be Balanced**—you can give an opinion and still be balanced with it. Reviews that give both positives and negatives are more rounded and helpful to readers.

4. **Think about Keywords**—as you're writing your review think about the words and phrases that people will be searching for in search engines to find this information. It'll vary from topic to topic but I find words like *price*, *problems*, *review*, and so on are often searched for. Also, make sure you use the name of the item you're reviewing at least a few times, especially in the title. Make sure you write for people as your primary audience rather than search engines (otherwise you risk your review being dominated by keywords) but do use your common sense to optimize your post well for SEO.

5. **Make Comparisons**—I find readers respond well to comparing products in a class. If you've already written a review on the item you're comparing to, make sure you link between them.

6. **Use an Affiliate Link**—if there's an affiliate program associated with what you're reviewing—use it. Bloggers will differ on this one but in terms of pure conversion rates on affiliate links, a well-written and balanced review can be very good at driving sales.

7. **Say Who it's Good for**—*"is this right for me?"* is a question that many of your readers will be asking. As a result, share who you think a product or service is right for. Tied to this - if appropriate talk about how you'd use a product - what reasons would someone need or use it. Also any tips to help those who do buy the product to use it can really lift a review. The more you can tie your review to the real life of your readers the better.

8. **Be Personal**—often it's the more personal reviews that tell a story that seem to connect best with readers on my photography site. Making a connection with your readers by sharing your story and even showing real life pictures or video (as opposed to official product pictures) can really make a difference.

9. **Visuals Count**—on that note, anything that can help your readers visualize the product you're reviewing will help. Use pictures, videos, screen captures, or diagrams wherever you can to add depth to your review post.

10. **Give Details on How to Obtain the Item**—if your review is about a product that can be purchased, give as much information on how they can buy it and how much it'll cost.

If you have any further tips on writing reviews I'd love to hear them below.

Once you've written your review post for today please share a link to it below and tell us how you found the exercise. You can also feel free to share in the forum post dedicated to this task.

TODAY'S NOTES

On a related (but different) note: if you're writing reviews of a book or product that's listed on a site like Amazon, consider writing a review for that site too.

I'm aware of a number of bloggers who are prolific reviewers on Amazon, and who have actually built up a good name and profile for themselves through leaving insightful and helpful reviews on that site.

While you're forbidden to leave live links back to your blog IN your review, leaving reviews allows you to have a profile page. You can then leave a link and information about yourself. Some reviewers also include their URL in their profile name.

Again, it's all about creating value for those that read your review and letting your usefulness help sell you.

DAY 29

DEVELOP A PLAN TO BOOST YOUR BLOG'S PROFILE AND READERSHIP ONLINE

TODAY'S TASK

Develop a plan focused on boosting your profile

This task is one that should help you think more strategically about where you spend time building your online profile.

One of the ways that many successful blogs create a readership and profile is by spending significant time and energy building up a presence on other web sites. Whether this be forums, social bookmarking sites (like Digg or StumbleUpon), social messaging sites (like Twitter), blogs, or any other type

of site—time invested in other web sites can be a great way to build your own brand.

However … spending time on other sites can also be a complete waste of time.

A trap that I see many bloggers falling into (and have fallen into myself) is sinking significant time into building a presence on sites without having really thought through two things:

1. Whether it's the right site to build a presence on

2. What's the strategy and purpose for being on the site?

Perhaps I'm describing myself more than you here, but many of us as bloggers tend to DRIFT around the Web from site to site without any real direction or purpose.

20 minutes onTwitter, 5 minutes on MySpace, 20 minutes reading other blogs on Google Reader, 30 minutes checking out photos of friends on Facebook, 20 minutes checking out the latest threads on our favorite forums, back to Twitter for 20 minutes, 15 minutes following links we found on Digg …

It's easy to reach the end of the day and wonder what it was that we really achieved. We aimlessly drift around the Web and have very little to show for the time we spend.

Can you relate?

It's a pity so many of us struggle with this problem because spending time on other web sites has the potential to really build our blogs. However, for so many people it can end up being largely a waste of time.

Today your task is one that some of us (yes, I'm referring to myself here) will find difficult. Depending on your personality type it could feel a little rigid; however, I ask that you humor me and see where the exercise takes you.

1. How Much Time Do You Have?

Work out how much time you have each day (or week) for spending on other web sites to build the profile of your blog. Remember that you need to also

put aside significant time to spend on your own blog, writing and interacting with readers.

2. Describe Your Desired Reader

Spend 10–15 minutes describing the type of person you want to read your blog. For some of you this will include very specific things like demographics (age, gender, location), but for others it will be less specific. Your potential readers might be defined as "beginner photographers" or a description based more upon people's needs or behaviors, like "people interested in learning the latest patchworking techniques."

3. Ask Yourself This Question

"**Where are my potential readers gathering online?**" This is a key question to ask yourself regularly. If your goal is to build your blog you need to know what types of people you want to attract and to be on the look out for other sites where these types of people gather.

Of course, this question is a little tricky to answer and it can take a lot of time to identify these sites. Let me give you some examples of how I've answered this question:

➜ **Flickr**—a site dedicated to photo sharing was an obvious place for me to have a presence when starting my photography site.

➜ **Lifehacker**—this blog is all about helping its technically-interested audience with hacks or tips. A logical place for me as all of my blogs share tips.

➜ **Twitter**—until recently Twitter has been mainly used by social media buffs; it's a logical place for me to have a presence for ProBlogger, especially TwiTip.

➜ **Forums**—when launching ProBlogger I spent a lot of time on webmaster-related forums like DigitalPoint and Webmaster World. And when starting out with my photography blog I was involved with a lot of photography forums.

➜ **Blogs**—I still hang out on a lot of blogs related to my niches, but particularly in the early days of my photography blog I was a daily commenter and occasional guest poster on quite a few.

➜ **StumbleUpon**—image-based posts tend to do really well on StumbleUpon; as a result it was a logical place for me to build a presence for my photography blog.

These were some of the places that related to my own blogs. For your niche or topic it could look quite different. Perhaps there are other social media sites or different types of sites that attract your kinds of readers. For example, Facebook features certain popular topics with strong followings, while LinkedIn might be a more appropriate place to interact.

Keep in mind to look for sites beyond your niche or topic. For example, Lifehacker is not a photography blog but it has a readership that overlaps with the type of people I want to read my photography blog. The webmaster forums were not specifically forums about blogging, but they had a user group consisting of a percentage of people who operate blogs.

So, look at related topics and whether there might be some kind of overlap between the readers that they have and who you're looking to attract.

As I mentioned above, learning where your potential readers gather online is a long-term search, but try to come up with at least a couple for the purpose of this activity.

4. What Opportunities Are There to Build a Presence?

Once you've identified at least a couple of places that your potential readers are already gathering, spend some time looking at what opportunities you might have on these sites to build your own blog's profile.

The opportunities will again vary quite a bit from site to site. Some of them we've touched on earlier, including:

1. **Guest Posts**—if it's a blog do they accept guest posts? Some blogs actively seek contributors (look for "Write for us" pages) while others may not advertise it but do use reader contributions.

2. If you're accepted as a guest poster pay particular attention to what types of posts work well on the site you're writing for. Look at comment numbers and try to find out what types of articles might have done well previously on social media sites. Quite often the blogger will be willing to help you and give you examples of what has previously worked on their blog.

3. **Submit Tips or News**—similarly, some blogs rely heavily on readers for story ideas and will give credit for the source. For example, in the early days of my photography blog I was regularly emailing Engadget and Gizmodo when new cameras were released. I'd send them not only the news of new cameras but images that they could use. They didn't always use my stories or link back, but when they did it was a boost to my traffic, profile, and SEO.

Quite a few blogs have links in their navigation areas inviting these types of tips and ideas for stories, so go ahead and use them.

4. **Leaving Super Useful Comments**—if there's no way to share tips or write guest posts, the comments section of another blog is a place where you can really build a profile.

Make some effort with these comments. I was speaking with one blogger recently whose strategy was to leave at least one post-length comment on another blog each day. By post-length he meant that he aimed to write at least one in-depth comment of 500 words or more every day on another blog in his niche. The comment would extend the ideas in the posts they were commenting upon, share examples that gave the posts more depth, added resources, and so on, instead of just links back to their own blog. The strategy was to add comments that were attention-grabbing for their usefulness.

The result was that the blogger I spoke to was regularly asked by others to guest blog on their blog, and that readers would visit their blog even though they rarely linked to it in their comments.

This same strategy can be used in forums. Start a new thread that's a tutorial or highly useful resource; people will want to know more about you if you do (more on this strategy of using forums to promote your blog here).

5. **Making Connections and Building Your Network**—if the site you've identified is more of a social networking or social bookmarking site, then one strategy to work on is making connections with others on the site. Set up an account and start seeking friends. Pay particular interest to making friends with other active users and people with shared interests.

It can also be well worth identifying key players or influential members on the site. Watch how they operate and look for opportunities to build relationships with them.

The idea is to be a genuine participant on the site: to add value, and become a key member of the community. As you do this, opportunities will arise that will allow you to promote yourself and your blog a little more.

6. **Profile pages**—does the site have an opportunity to set up a profile page or is there any other opportunity to promote yourself in some way? On most social media sites and forums there is the ability to say a little about yourself, share a link back to your blog, customize your presence with an avatar and/or background image, and nominate some keywords as tags.

Try to keep your brand consistent across the different sites that you're building a presence on where you can. Also think about using a landing page as the page that you link to, rather than just the front page of your blog (you can read more on how I do this with a Twitter Landing Page).

7. **Signatures**—if it's a forum (or some other community site) you might have an opportunity to add a signature. My only tip with this is that sometimes less is more. Long, flashing, or bright signatures can look quite spammy, so instead go for tasteful and descriptive.

Many opportunities to promote your work exist on other sites. For example, on Facebook you can promote your blog using a variety of applications that allow you to pull in your latest posts or list your blogs. See what other bloggers are doing and test to see if their strategies work for you too.

8. **Advertising**—this won't be for everyone but many sites will have opportunities to engage their readers with advertising. While this might sound very expensive, there are quite a few sites that enable you to start affordable ad campaigns with a small budget.

   For example, social media sites like MySpace (disclosure: they are currently an advertiser on ProBlogger), StumbleUpon, and Facebook all have advertising options allowing you to target specific demographics and even people with certain interests. They all allow you to set up campaigns with small budgets too.

   Other types of sites might not have quite the same sort of ad opportunities but could be open to other types of advertising. If it's another blog of a similar size to yours you might even approach the bloggers to do an ad swap: you put an ad on their blog and they put an ad on yours.

   Further Reading: Run a StumbleUpon Campaign on your Blog (from the last Build a Blog challenge).

Volunteer to Help—if it's a forum site you're aiming to spend time on there are often opportunities to help out by becoming a moderator. Most sites will want to see your work before taking you on as a moderator, but if you contribute genuinely over time there may be opportunity in this area. Moderation status gives you a certain level of authority and profile on a forum, although take care to avoid abusing the privilege.

5. Plan a Strategy

Okay, so you've identified some sites where your potential readers are gathering and you've assessed some of the opportunities that exist to build your profile on these sites; the task now is to think a little strategically about what you're going to do on these sites.

It's unnecessary to have a highly developed plan or strategy, but jot down some of the following:

➔   How much time will you spend there? (Prioritize which sites you want to spend more time on than others.)

➔   What times of the week is it best to be active on this site? (Sites have their own rhythms and some will be more active on certain days or times than others.)

➔   What types of actions am I going to take on this site (Which of the opportunities that you've identified in step #4 will you pursue?)

➔   Set yourself some goals. Again, they can be informal and include things like having a guest post published, becoming a moderator, posting X number of comments a week, becoming familiar with the owner of the site etc.

You can extend this step by actually planning out what an average day or week will look like for you as you go about your blogging. I know of a few bloggers who've gone as far as setting up a spreadsheet with each day and the hours on that day outlined. They then block out times for each day for certain activities. They fill up their most productive times of the day with the most important activities (like writing content on their own blog) and then set aside time each day or week for spending time on other sites.

This type of schedule might only suit certain bloggers—I personally use it when I've felt particularly aimless with my time. Yet, even doing it for a week or two can help you to develop more healthy habits online.

6. Analyze Your Current Activity

The last step in this task is to analyze what you're currently doing with your time online.

➔   What sites do you spend time on already?

➔   Do these sites actually help to build your profile or could you more effectively use your time elsewhere?

➔   Are you being effective with the time you spend on these sites?

I did some analysis 12 or so months ago. At the time I was sinking a lot of time into two main social media sites: Twitter and Plurk. While I enjoyed both I realized that Twitter was a more effective place for me to be interacting. While I'd become a top ten user on Plurk, it was a less effective

use of time for me, so I decided to stop interacting there and focus my energies upon Twitter.

Note: I'm not arguing that everything you do online has to be productive and helping to build your profile. Some of you use Twitter socially rather than to build your blogs and that's legitimate; however, it's worth asking yourself the question and doing a little analysis of your online habits.

Lastly—Keep Balance

My last words of advice are to avoid becoming obsessed with building your profile on other people's sites. I've seen a number of bloggers spend so much time building their presence on sites like Twitter that they fail to actually build up and develop their own blogs. Identify key sites to spend time on, but put your own blog at the top of the list and set aside as much (if not more) time for working specifically upon it.

6 POSTS FOR SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

➔ Home Bases and Outposts: How I Use Social Media in My Blogging—a post that outlines how I use social media sites as satellites around my blogs rather than the main activity. It's about keeping perspective on why you're using these other sites—to build your own home base.

➔ 10 Ways to Find Readers for Your Blog by Leveraging Other Online Presence—really, what we're talking about here is building a presence on other people's sites that you can leverage to build your own profile. This post shares ten tips (some of which we've touched on above) for doing this.

➔ Using Social Media Sites to Grow Your Blog's Traffic—a series of posts on social media marketing for bloggers.

➔ Grow Your Blog's Readership by Targeting Readers—a similar process to the one I've outlined above.

➔ Feeling Overwhelmed by Social Media? Here Are 5 Tips for You— sometimes it feels like there's so much opportunity in the social media space; here are some tips on being focused and making what you do count.

➔ 4 Social Media Marketing Tips for Bloggers [video]

Feel free to discuss here in the comments, or over at the forum post for this task.

TODAY'S NOTES

There's a lot of information in this post; I apologize if it's overwhelming. If you're feeling that way give yourself permission to take your time, going through each of the six main points one at a time.

You might find that stretching today's task out over a few days helps you to really gain the most from it, because most of the six points are really worthy of a day's effort rather than rushing through them.

Also keep in mind that the process described in today's task you can do periodically again and again over time. For example, identifying where your potential readers are gathering should reveal new answers each time you perform this task over the coming years and months.

So while you should put some time aside today to achieve this, you'll also want to build this process into your regular blogging plan.

DAY 30

17 STATISTICS TO MONITOR ON YOUR BLOG

TODAY'S TASK

Spend time looking at your blog's statistics/metrics package to see what you can learn from it

I encouraged participants to make sure they had a metrics package installed on their blog before they started so I hope you have at least a month's worth of stats to look at. If you've yet to install a stats package you should put one on your blog ASAP, as it'll help you track how it's performing.

Take some time out today to do a little analysis of your blog's statistics. There's a wealth of information in them that can be incredibly useful.

1. **Important Note**: this exercise tends to become more useful over time. If this is the first time you do it then hopefully it'll be illuminating, but the longer you've been collecting metrics on your blog the more useful it can become as you track trends and see patterns over time. As a result, this type of exercise should be built into your regular blogging routine (I try to do an in-depth review each month).

2. Some of you will be used to doing this type of analysis so you won't need a lot of help, but if you're new to this here are a few metrics to pay particular attention to:

3. **Overall Visitors**—probably the metric the majority of bloggers look at the most. Are visitor numbers on the increase or decrease? What might be the reasons for these changes (for example, frequency of posting, topics, links from other sites etc.)?

4. **Most Popular Posts**—what posts are being read more than other posts? Knowing this is important for a couple of reasons. For starters, it gives you a hint of what topics you could write more on, but secondly, it gives you some key pages on your site to optimize—that is, think about how you can drive people from these posts deeper into your blog.

5. **Referral Stats**—what sites are sending you the most traffic? If it's another blog or site, perhaps you could develop a relationship with them to elaborate on this. If it's search engines, how can you adapt the posts to see it rise even more using on-page SEO techniques?

6. **Questions Being Asked**—what questions are readers typing into search engines to find your blog? These could make great future posts (learn more about how to do this here).

7. **Keywords that Send Traffic—**knowing the keywords that people search for to find your site is very useful. It helps you to know how to optimize your blog for SEO better and gives hints on what content to write more of.

8. **Seasonal Traffic—**are there any seasonal trends that you should be aware of and could use to capture more traffic? What caused the bumps in traffic and how can you prepare yourself better next time those conditions happen again? (Read more on seasonal traffic and how to capture it.)

9. **Daily/Weekly Trends—**another trend to watch is what traffic does over different periods of time. What are the most popular times of day? What days of the week are most popular? Knowing this gives you ammunition in planning when to release new posts.

10. **Bounce Rates—**metrics packages like Google Analytics provide you with a *bounce rate* stat, which measures how many people arrive at your site and then leave again without viewing any extra pages. I find this a key metric to watch and attempt to change. Set yourself some goals to lower this rate and raise the page views per visitor by making your blog sticky.

11. **Page Views Per Visit—**similarly to bounce rate, this is a good one to watch over time as it shows you whether those coming to your blog are going deep into your blog's content or simply looking at the page they arrive on. My goal on my blogs is to see this number increase over time. For tips on how to increase page views also check out 4 Quick and Simple Ways to Increase Page Views on Your Blog.

12. **Time on Site—**another stat that can give you a sense of whether readers are engaging with your content is to look at how long they stay on your blog. The longer they're staying the more likely it is that they're reading, commenting, and interacting (or that they forgot to close their browser).

13. **New versus Returning Visitors—**this one gives you a sense of whether you're succeeding in converting people to loyal visitors.

14. **RSS Stats—**if you're using a tool like FeedBurner to manage your RSS feeds, you'll have access to more useful information. FeedBurner provides you with the number of subscribers and also what posts people are reading the most of; again, this shows you what content people are engaging with, giving you some good information on what type of content is working best.

15. **Outbound Clicks—**some metrics packages will give you this type of information and if you have access to it, knowing what links on your blog people are clicking to leave it can be helpful. Knowing what links they click on can give you useful information on what motivates your readers to click a link and what type of information they want more of.

16. **Where People Click on Your Page—**some stats packages track this, like Google Analytics or specific packages like CrazyEgg will create heatmaps or visual pictures of what people click on when they visit your blog. I find CrazyEgg's heatmaps better than Google Analytics but you do need to set it up on specific pages of your blog to be able to see them. This is worthwhile information when thinking about the design and layout of your blog but also can help you test how to layout posts to see where people click.

17. **Exit Pages—**a similar metric enables you to know what page on your blog people are leaving from. A couple of years ago I checked my stats and noticed that the percentage of people leaving a particular page on my blog was triple that of other pages. When I investigated I found that the page had some very bad formatting issues that made the page almost unreadable; I was able to fix the problem and keep more readers engaged as a result.

18. **Monetization Stats—**many of you are looking to make money from your blogs, so it's important to pay attention to any stats you have at your disposal on how your blog is performing money-wise. The metrics you have at your disposal will vary from income stream to income stream but if possible, try to work out where on your blog the income is coming from specifically. For example, if you use Google Analytics and AdSense, you'll be able to see what specific pages are earning more than others. Otherwise, use the channel or tracking

options your ad network or affiliate program gives you to help you work out which posts are performing.

19. **Other Stats**—there are plenty of other stats that can be revealing when you dig into them. Knowing the geographic regions of your readers can be advantageous as you think about content or dealing with advertisers; being aware of the screen resolution and browsers people are using to view your site is good from a design perspective. Also worth doing from time to time is looking at stats for how many posts you've done (post frequency can help you monitor how you're performing personally), how many comments you've had, and on which posts.

What Would You Add?

There are many types of metrics that statistics packages will provide you with. Feel free to share the metrics that you check most often and how you use them to improve your blog in the comments below. Also let us know what tools you're using to check your blog's metrics.

Warning: Avoid becoming a stats addict. Most new bloggers go through a period where they're checking their stats every hour. This is normal but can add up to a lot of wasted time.

I personally try to do a quick check of stats throughout the day two or three times (just looking at traffic numbers mainly to see if there's any spike in traffic that I need to know about) and then each month put aside an hour or two to go deeper and look at some of the above statistics.

Further Reading: Using Google Analytics to Compare Traffic from Different Periods of Time. In this post I use the *compare* feature on Google Analytics to track how my blog is going over time by comparing it to other periods.

TODAY'S NOTES

Depressed?

I know that some people doing today's task will be feeling a little depressed about what they see when they delve into their blog's stats. After what seems like ages of building a blog it can be quite disillusioning when you're confronted with the reality that only a handful of people are visiting.

If this is you I'd like to take a moment today to share a few words of encouragement.

1. Firstly, you're not alone. Almost every blogger (big and small) that I've met tells me of this feeling in the early (and sometimes latter) days of their blog.

2. Secondly, keep in mind that blogs take considerable time to build. A couple of years back when I analyzed the top 100 blogs in the Technorati Top Blogs list, I found that on average they'd been going for more than three years. That was two years ago!

   The key with most successful blogs is that they break through the lean patches in their early days. While I'll stop short at promising you massive traffic, if you hang in there for three years you should see improvement over time.

3. Thirdly, aim for exponential growth. Instead of focusing upon raw numbers of how many readers you have and don't have, set yourself a different kind of goal. What I Iearned in the early days of my own blogging was that it was more powerful to think about growing my blog by a certain percentage each month, rather than by a number of readers.

Increase your blog's traffic consistently over time and you'll hit exponential growth. Read more about it in this video where I talk about my experience of growing my blog.

DAY 31

PLAN THE NEXT STEPS FOR YOUR BLOG

Today is Day 31 in the 31-day challenge!

Congratulations to those who've made it through to this point. I hope you've found it to be a helpful experience.

To those just starting partway through or who are yet to start (you can sign up at any time), hang in there!

TODAY'S TASK

Plan Your Next Steps

For your last task I'd like to encourage you to take a step back from the last month of activity and learning in order to **plan your next steps**.

I've said this numerous times over the last month, but while most bloggers tend to drift aimlessly along in their blogging I find that those who are successful often set aside time to think strategically about their blogs every now and again. This doesn't mean you need a highly developed strategy; it just means thinking about what you want to achieve and how you want to do it.

Develop a Plan for Your Next Month

If you're a blogger who is struggling with discipline or routine (you know who you are) I would highly recommend setting aside a little time to develop some kind of a plan for the next month.
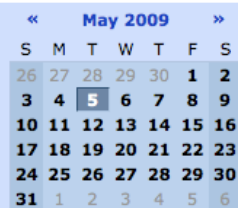
Grab a calendar (whether it be a physical one or computer-based one) and map out specific tasks that you want to achieve over the next month. Let me show you what this might look like with a calendar that I've whipped up below in Google Calendars:

Google Calendar BETA

Search My Calendars   Show Search Options

Create Event
Quick Add

◀ ▶ Today **May 2009** Refresh   🖶 Print Day Week **Month** 4 Days Agenda

« **May 2009** »
S M T W T F S
26 27 28 29 30 1 2
3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10 11 12 13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20 21 22 23
24 25 26 27 28 29 30
31 1 2 3 4 5 6

▼ My calendars
Admin Tasks
Editorial Tasks
Promotion Tasks
Settings   Create

▼ Other calendars
Add a friend's calendar
Settings   Add ▼

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26	27	28	29	30	May 1 — Brainstorm Topics; Link Post	2 — Reader Question Post
3 — Plan Weeks Posts	4 — Update Old Post; List Post	5 — Opinion Post; Comment on Blogs	6 — Review Post; Comment on Forums	7 — 'How To' Post; Write a Guest Post	8 — Reader Focus Day; Link Post	9 — Reader Question Post
10 — Plan Weeks Posts	11 — Dead Link Hunt; List Post	12 — Opinion Post; Comment on Blogs	13 — Review Post; Comment on Forums	14 — 'How To' Post; Reach out to a Blogger	15 — Reader Focus Day; Link Post	16 — Reader Question Post
17 — Plan Weeks Posts	18 — SEO Audit; List Post	19 — Opinion Post; Comment on Blogs	20 — Review Post; Comment on Forums	21 — 'How To' Post; Write a Guest Post	22 — Reader Focus Day; Link Post	23 — Reader Question Post
24 — Plan Weeks Posts	25 — Reach out to an Advertiser; List Post	26 — Opinion Post; Comment on Blogs	27 — Review Post; Comment on Forums	28 — 'How To' Post; Reach out to a Blogger	29 — Reader Focus Day; Link Post	30 — Reader Question Post
31 — Analyze Stats for May; Plan Weeks Posts	Jun 1	2	3	4	5	6

The calendar above is based on some of the activities we've covered over the last month. You can see that this plan includes:

➔ Six posts a week (Sundays are a day off from posting)

➔ Each post day having its own type of post

➔ Time on Sundays for determining the specifics of each post (topics, titles etc.)

➔ An administration task each Monday

➔ Promotional activities on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays

➔ A day for readers (Fridays) for emailing, answering questions etc.)

➔ Stats analysis on the last day of the month

➔ Brainstorming on the first day of the month

The daily tasks, of course, will vary from blog to blog and I would recommend you avoid just simply adopting this plan.

Your situation might be different, for example, you might have a different frequency of posting or include different activities—the key is to lay out a plan of the main things you feel are important to your blogging.

Of course, the above calendar looks very neat; you'll find that there will be daily tasks also (comment moderation, email, social media presence, and so on) and that other opportunities and challenges arise from day to day that will take you off course. With a main task or two identified for each day though, it means you know you'll achieve a good balance of activity over a month.

With this setup there's no need to have to work out what to do each day when you start blogging; you just have to do the task outlined for the day.

Over the last 31 days we've covered a lot of ground. By no means have I touched on every aspect of blogging, but my hope is that there are at least a few practical things that you can build into your regular blogging routine.

One last thing that I'd recommend you do is look back over the last 31 days of tasks (you can see them all listed in the daily task area of the forum) and identify which ones you might want to perform regularly on your blog. The selection of topics and tasks I chose was simply because I do these regularly myself (most of them on at least a monthly basis). It's unnecessary to replicate them all for yourself, but please don't simply end the challenge today and shelve what you've learned; pick two or three things you've found helpful and plan to do them more and extend them further.

Tell Someone Your Plan

A quick tip once you've worked out what you're doing next with your blog— tell someone.

Plans often remain just plans and don't become reality, but one way to help them happen is to share them with others. Share it with your blog buddy, tell us about it in comments below or over in our forum, or find another friend or family member to share it with.

TODAY'S NOTES

A final piece of advice in putting together your plan

I am very aware that many bloggers taking this challenge are at the beginning of their blogging journey and are very much blogging *on the side* while they work another job, look after their children etc.

The calendar that I've produced for this task may, as a result, be quite overwhelming with daily tasks on every single day of the month.

When putting together your plan for the next month, don't bite off more than you can chew. If you're just starting out with your blog, one of the dangers you need to be aware of is blogger burnout. Many bloggers put so much effort into the first month or two of their blog that they're simply unable to sustain it over the long haul.

Seven posts per week is probably unrealistic for many blogs. If yours is one of them don't beat yourself up about it. Three to four high quality posts per week are better than seven average ones.

Promoting your blog three times a week through commenting on other blogs, having a presence in forums, and networking with other bloggers may be difficult time-wise for you—that's fine. Scale it back to a level you can sustain and in time you might find yourself more able to take it up a notch.

The key is to work out how much time you can allocate to blogging and then prioritize the tasks you need to do to make it happen.

WHAT NOW?

Thanks for taking part in the 31 Days to Build a Better Blog challenge. I hope that you've found the process to be a helpful one that has given you some ideas on how to take your blog to the next level.

It Doesn't End Here

The feedback that I've had from this challenge has been very encouraging. Over 13,000 bloggers have engaged with the teaching and tasks so far - many reporting real growth in their blogs.

As a result I'd love to keep what we've started going.

FORUM

The 31DBBB forum will remain open for you to interact with other ProBlogger readers. Much of the forum activity to this point has revolved around daily tasks - but we're expanding the forums to have a more general focus upon all aspects of blogging. We'd love you to keep coming back to learn and contribute.

GET MORE FROM PROBLOGGER

Everything I know about blogging is in two places:

1. ProBlogger.net - many of you have visited already but if you've not done so stop by and subscribe to ProBlogger the blog. With over 5000 posts in our archives on many aspects of blogging there's plenty to explore. Subscribe to our news feed.

2. ProBlogger the Book - a condensed and up to date version of ProBlogger the blog - this hard copy book is written specifically with the new blogger (and the blogger who is yet to start) in mind. Get more details at ProBloggerBook.com.

Lastly - I'd love to connect with you elsewhere online. You can find me on Twitter at @problogger (http://twitter.com/problogger) and Facebook keep in touch!

BONUS TASKS

If you find this workbook helpful and wish to continue the 31DBBB process further I'd like to invite you to join our FREE newsletter below where you'll receive:

More Tasks and Teaching - I'd love to email you further challenges like the 31 tasks covered in the workbook.

Updates on Tools and Resources - Blogging is an ever-evolving medium - this newsletter will send occasional updates on the most important developments in terms of tools and resources to help you improve your blogging.

Subscribe now