

# Grow Your Traffic, Build Your Blog

# **GROW YOUR TRAFFIC, BUILD YOUR BLOG**

Tips and Tricks for the Tenacious Blogger

The Editors, [WordPress.com](https://WordPress.com)

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# INTRODUCTION: LOOKING FOR TRAFFIC IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

We all blog for different, deeply personal reasons. At the core, though, blogging means we want our voices to be heard by others. We want an audience.

In a blogosphere with millions and millions of sites vying for readers' attention, it often seems tough to crack through the din of competing distractions. The good news: you have the power to make your blog more visible and more attractive to people interested in the same things as you.

This ebook, a labor of love by the Editorial team at WordPress.com, contains a wealth of tips, advice, and general wisdom, culled from our growing archive of [posts on traffic and growth](#), on how to get your blog noticed.

No matter what type of blog you keep, or even where you keep it (WordPress.com, another platform, or a self-

hosted site), we hope it'll help you reach new audiences and make blogging the rewarding activity it can be.

Happy blogging!

– The Editors, WordPress.com



PART I

# TRAFFIC 101: UNDERSTANDING YOUR BLOG'S PERFORMANCE

In this section, we go over traffic fundamentals. We explain the basics of stats and SEO, and how to use them to grow your audience. We also discuss the ten cardinal rules of consistent, healthy traffic.

# 1

## TRAFFIC DOS AND DON'TS: A CHECKLIST

One of the main reasons bloggers stop blogging is lack of traffic: at some point, they get tired of being the proverbial tree in the forest, making sounds nobody hears.

No list of advice can guarantee your blog's success, but it's important to be aware, from the outset, of the most critical elements at play. Five dos, five don'ts: give them a try.

Dos

**Write regularly.** Producing fresh content on a regular basis is essential. As we mentioned in the previous chap-

ter, it makes your blog more appealing to [search engines](#), which means new readers are more likely to find you. Just as important, it creates a sense of loyalty among the readers you already have, who know you won't be stranding them for weeks at a time.

**Write well.** What makes a post engaging, moving, or entertaining is clearly a matter of opinion. What's not a matter of opinion? Correct spelling. Reasonable [grammar](#). Sentences and paragraphs of manageable length. [Go over](#) your post, spellcheck, and edit — above all — for clarity.

**Keep your blog easy on the eyes.** While beauty is in the eye of the beholder, unattractive blogs are surprisingly easy to spot. Some minimal care can pay great dividends, even if you don't have time to think of every possible detail. [Choose](#) a [theme](#) that suits your needs and your content. Make your homepage attractive with striking images or easy [customizations](#), and make sure your content is easy to read.

**Use your existing network.** If you're a beginning blogger, you should rely on friends and family to visit your blog and share your posts on their own social networks (use common sense to decide how often and how insistently you ask them). Keep them informed by [publicizing](#) your posts, and keep them interested by addressing, at least at first, [topics](#) you know they'll enjoy.

**Create new networks.** The blogging community is immense. The best way to find your own niche within it is through *meaningful* reciprocity. [Follow](#) and leave thoughtful [comments](#) on others' blogs, and take the time to respond to feedback left on your own site. Use [widgets](#)

to make it easy to [follow](#) and [syndicate](#) your own blog. Participate in [events](#), or attend a [blogging conference](#) to make new friends and learn new tips.

## Don'ts

**Don't forget to tag.** Unless you're already a famous entity offline, readers won't search specifically for your blog. That's why smart [tagging](#) is so important: add a healthy mix of general and specific terms related to your post, and your potential audience will find you, either through search engines or on the WordPress.com [Reader](#).

**Don't spam.** Community members and search engines alike are quite savvy in telling thoughtful content from fluff. One-word comments? A blog full of [pingbacks](#) and [reblogs](#) with very little original content? There is no surer method of pushing your audience away, even if your intentions are good.

**Don't be afraid of the *Publish* button.** The only post guaranteed to attract zero traffic is an unpublished one. Don't worry too much about posts that ended up different from your initial vision. At worst, you can edit and update them later. At best, their shortcomings, if any, can be part of the conversation you start with your readers. Either way, what could you possibly lose?

**Don't stop reading.** Writing that exists in a vacuum will be less appealing to readers who don't already know you. Whether it's a new bestseller, other blogs and sites around the web, or the great content we feature daily on [Freshly Pressed](#), staying part of existing conversations keeps your content relevant, and will engage a wider audience than an entirely impenetrable musing.

**Don't lose sight of why you blog.** Even if you're doing everything right, it might still take a while before your blog gains traction. It's a good idea to remind yourself why you decided to start a blog to begin with. Whether it's to express your opinions, record memories, or any other reason, *you're* the most important member of your audience, and should enjoy the experience. Fun tends to be contagious: a writer who enjoys blogging regardless of traffic is, paradoxically, more likely to attract it.

# 2

## USING YOUR STATS TO INCREASE TRAFFIC

Understanding traffic means understanding your blog's stats. Whether you're a math maven or numbers-shy, the road to a better-performing blog passes through your charts.

Your statistics can give you more than just an ego boost (or an excuse to down a pint of Ben and Jerry's and vow to give up blogging forever, as the case may be).

Most of us look at our stats more than we probably should; it's natural to want to see whether anyone's pay-

ing attention, and undeniably gratifying to watch the graphs go up, up, and away. But if you're trying to build a readership and are not using the world of data lurking in your stats to inform your blog and boost your traffic, you're missing out.

Your stats page is way more than a bunch of charts with the power to boost or kill your confidence — it's a bunch of charts that give you the ability to see into the minds of your readers and shape your blog accordingly.

There's a huge quantity of data captured on your stats page. In this chapter, we're going to focus on overall views and visitors, top posts and pages, and tags.

## Views and Visitors

This is the big ol' graph with the light and dark blue bars right at the top of your My Stats page. It looks like this:



This chart tracks both views and unique visitors; the light blue bars represent views, and the darker blue represents unique visitors. A view is counted every time anyone loads a page on your blog (for example, your “About” page or an individual post’s page), while a unique visitor is counted whenever a user visits your blog for the first

time that day, week, or month. If your mom visited your blog twice today and clicked on three pages, she'd show up as three views and one unique visitor for the day.

At the top of the chart, you can choose what time period it covers — [days](#), [weeks](#), or [months](#). Day view is great for seeing the impact of specific posts, but week and month view give you the data that helps you grow.

Looking at your stats in week or month view, you can see what happened when you started posting more frequently, introduced that new feature, or changed your theme.

You can see whether there are times of the month or year that are bigger for you; maybe you write a food blog and see holiday season spikes as the internet descends on your killer cranberry sauce recipe, or your pop culture blog gets a boost from tired workers killing the last few hours of a Friday afternoon.

Use this information to inform (or create) your [editorial calendar](#). You can either map out a calendar in advance (“I’ll prep eight Passover recipe posts and roll them out as the holiday approaches.”) or just time your posts to coincide with your visitors — there’s no need to rush to hit publish on a post you wrote on Saturday if your traffic spikes on Tuesdays. These stats might also give you insights into your content, especially if you write about multiple topics. Perhaps there’s one topic that resonates with more people, or different topics are more popular at different times. Which brings us to...



## Top Posts, Pages, and Tags

“Top Posts & Pages” collects data on [your top posts and pages](#):

Top Posts & Pages		—
Today	Yesterday	Summaries →
Title		Views
Home page / Archives		285
Creating an Index on WordPress.com		209
Daily Prompt: Choose Your Adventure		85
Choosing the Perfect Blog Name: Two WordPressers Sha...		79
Quick Tip: Own Your Reader		74
Weekly Photo Challenge: Unique		42
Weekly Writing Challenge: Mind the Gap		34
Daily Prompt: Call Me, Maybe		23
Affect and Effect		22
Post Every Day		20
Other posts		314
Total views of posts on your blog		1,187

While “Top Tags” does the same for — you guessed it — tags:

## Tags & Categories —

### Most popular topics you've written about

Topic	Views
📁 Things observed	13
📁 Travel	8
📁 Florida	5
🔗 theme parks, 🔗 roller coasters	2
🔗 Space, 🔗 science, 🔗 jumpfromspace	2
📁 Lee River	2
📁 Spain, 🔗 tile, 🔗 carving, 🔗 Spain, 🔗 Granada, 🔗 Alhambra, 🔗	2
📁 Uncategorized, 🔗 beach, 📁 California, 🔗 travel, 🔗 California	1
📁 New Zealand	1

If you [tag your posts effectively](#), this panel will show you which topics get the most traffic. Snapshot generated from your top posts over the past week.

You can quickly see what readers were most drawn to yesterday and today, and click on “Summaries” to access historical data and see what’s been popular in the past week, past month, or over the lifetime of your blog. Make sure you’re [tagging your posts effectively](#) to get the most out of these stats.

See if there are particular topics where your blog shines, or if you can spot trends among popular posts. Then, you can give you readers more of what they enjoy: try a follow-up to your most popular post, or introduce [a new series](#) based on reader interest. If a series or topic is falling flat, you can consider retiring it and experimenting with something new based on what people are responding to.

You might also use menus and widgets to direct people to your best stuff. Link to your greatest hits right from your “About” page, or add a [widget listing your most popular](#)

[posts](#) — drive new visitors to posts that will suck them in, and they'll be more likely to stick around.

It's also smart to see what pages are racking up the views so you can keep them up-to-date. Since pages are static, we can easily forget about them and let their content grow stale. Your "About" page is a prime candidate — when was the last time you looked at that thing? (If yours hasn't been refreshed since you started your blog, check out About [101](#) and [201](#) for help breathing in some new life.)

### Search Engine Terms

These days, as you can see at the bottom of the Search Engine Terms panel below, the majority of search terms that brought readers to your blog belong in the 'Unknown search terms' category. This isn't a bug: [Google has been encrypting more and more searches](#), and intends to encrypt them all.

SEARCH ENGINE TERMS		—
<b>Today</b>	<a href="#">Yesterday</a>	<a href="#">Summaries →</a>
Search	Views	
new theme	9	
wordpress	9	
new themes	9	
wordpress.com	6	
wordpress login	4	
wordpress.com login	3	
wordpress comic strip theme	3	
worldpress.com blog	3	
<a href="http://en.blog.wordpress.com/2013/08/19/customizing-coraline/">http://en.blog.wordpress.com/2013/08/19/customizing-coraline/</a>	2	
<a href="#">Other search terms</a>	83	
<a href="#">Unknown search terms</a>	549	
<b>Total search terms</b>	<b>680</b>	

While the loss of data can be significant for some, the reasoning behind it — making it harder to abuse search data — is a positive one. Online and off, safety should always trump convenience. Moreover, unless your blog receives a significant chunk of its readers via search engines, the difference, if any, should be minor.

The data you receive about traffic originating in your social networks and in the WordPress.com community stay the same. Which is all the more reason to focus on those stats you can affect directly through better tagging and [better use of social media](#).

Bottom line: blog stats aren't just for math geeks and data nerds. They tell a story, and understanding it will help you grow your blog from where it currently stands.

# 3

## ALL ABOUT SEO

Many bloggers wonder about SEO, and no wonder — you work hard on your site and want to get the word out. SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. SEO recommendations are intended to help your site rank higher and more accurately in search engines, like Google. Say you write a blog about sailboats. When someone Googles “sailboats,” how many pages of results do they have to scroll through before they see a link to your blog? The goal behind having good SEO is to increase your website’s SERP (Search Engine Results Page) ranking.

Ideally, you want your link to be on the first page of results. The best ways to accomplish this are:

- Consistently publish useful, original posts about sailboats; and
- Promote your blog in intelligent ways to people

who are looking for information about your topic.

The more traffic your blog receives for sailboat-related searches, the higher it will climb in Google's results. No mystery to that, right? But if you look around the internet, you'll find dubious advice about how to increase your blog's SERP ranking. Some of the suggestions you'll find are just extra busywork, but some can actually end up hurting you with Google.

### Common myths about SEO

**Myth:** I need a plugin for SEO.

**Fact:** WordPress.com has [great SEO right out of the box](#) — you don't have to do anything extra. In fact, WordPress takes care of 80-90 percent of the mechanics of SEO for you, [according to Matt Cutts, head of Google's webspam team](#). All of our themes are optimized for search engines, which means they are designed to make it easy for the [Googlebot](#) (and other search engines) to crawl through them and discover all the content.

**Myth:** I need to regularly submit Sitemaps to Google so it knows I'm blogging regularly.

**Fact:** **Every WordPress.com blog has an [XML Sitemap](#).** To view your Sitemap, type `yourblog-name.wordpress.com/sitemap.xml` in your browser's address bar. What you see there is code, so it's not meant to be easily readable by mere mortals. For the Googlebot, however, it's a "what's hot" guide to the latest and greatest on your site. WordPress.com also **automatically sends notifications to Google every time you publish** or update a post or a page. This is similar to how your sub-

scribers get email updates. Every time you post, you're telling Google, "Hey! Check this out."

**Myth:** The more tags and categories I use for a post, the better it is for Google.

**Fact:** Using a bunch of tags and categories that have little to do with your posts won't increase your site's visibility. Actually, Google doesn't rely on tags or categories — it can tell what your post is about from its content. Plus, any post on WordPress.com with *too many* categories and tags — more than a total of fifteen — will be excluded from the [Reader Topics pages](#). It's best to **use only a few, carefully selected categories and tags** for each post — those that are most relevant to what the post is about. Likewise, **avoid overly broad tags**: "catamaran" is a better tag than "boat."

**Myth:** Creating several identical sites about sailboats and making frequent use of sailboat-related terminology in my posts will help me get a lot of sailboat-related traffic.

**Fact:** Google frowns on duplicate content, and if you have multiple identical sites, your search ranking will suffer for it. Also, while it's a good idea to use accurate keywords in your posts and post titles, going overboard with so-called "keyword stuffing" will hurt your SERP rank. **Strive for clear, natural-sounding writing** that reads like it was intended for human ears, not search engine crawlers.

**Myth:** One effective way to improve my blog's SERP rank is to purchase or exchange links (sometimes known as "backlinks") with as many bloggers as possible, so that there's a lot of traffic going to my blog.

**Fact:** If you blog about sailboats, the more sailboat-focused sites and articles that **organically link to your blog as a fantastic source** of sailboat info, the better. On the other hand, Google won't be impressed if it sees a ton of links to your sailboat blog from blogs about, say, marketing, basketry, lipstick, electronics, or SEO tactics. Think of it this way: Google wants people to use its search engine as much as you want them to visit your website, so its goal is to return the most useful results for any given query. While SEO fads might bump your site artificially for a bit, in the long run, they won't work.

**Myth:** SEO requires a strategy and possibly an expert.

**Fact: SEO is mostly common sense.** While large organizations might need to hire a specialist to help them reach some very specific SEO goals, bloggers and small business owners can do everything required for good SEO on their own. Google is very transparent about its process — it has [a guide for SEO best practices here](#), and it shares any new changes in its methods [on its blog](#).

So, what *can* you do to increase your SERP rank? There are some simple steps you can take to make sure your content is properly indexed.

Smart ways to increase your SERP rank

- **Make sure to use short, easy-to-read post slugs** that accurately describe what your posts are about. On WordPress.com, the post slug is the last part of your post title, which you can edit to be anything you like. For example, the slug “/buying-sailboats” is better than “/how-to-



buy-a-beautiful-inexpensive-sailboat-on-Craigslist” or “/354.”

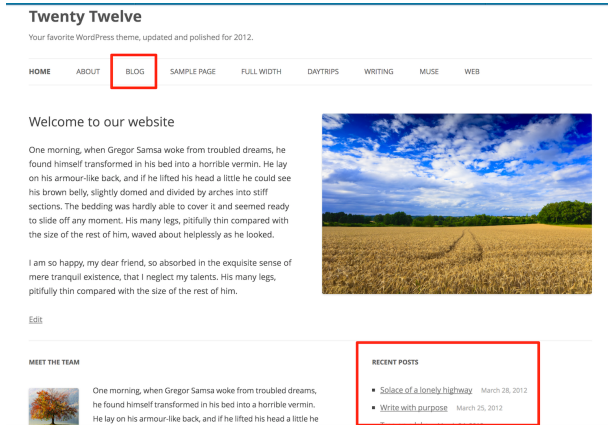


← → ↻ en.blog.wordpress.com/2013/02/26/reader-tips/

The post slug for [a recent en.blog post](#).

- **Create a descriptive tagline** for your blog that explains what your site is about. For example, a strong tagline for our sailboat site might be “On sailboats, sailing, and sailors. Ahoy!”
- **Use narrow and specific keywords** that will help interested readers find your site. If you yourself were looking for information on this subject, what search terms might you try? Be sure to use those terms once or twice in your post, assuming they are relevant. But don’t use them fifty times.
- Be sure to **publish new posts or update your content regularly**, even if you have a website. On WordPress.com, most sites are set up in a standard, blog-style format with a reverse chronological list of posts on the front page. However, many users [use WordPress.com for websites](#) consisting mostly of static pages. This type of site is not updated as frequently as a typical blog, so if you do have a website, it’s beneficial to have a blog component that you update more often. Link to that “[posts page](#)” from your site’s front page, whether by [using a menu tab](#), or by using [the Recent Posts widget](#) in the sidebar of your front page. Because most new visitors land on your front

page first, providing an obvious link to your most recent posts will help Google see that your site is current and active.



An example of a website-style layout, with a blog component and recent posts widget.

- **Focus on building your traffic in smart ways.** Seek out other blogs on your topic (or sharing your point of view) and leave substantive comments. Use [Publicize](#) to promote your blog to your social media circles. If you're more of a general interest blogger, involve yourself in the WordPress.com community by participating in the challenges over on [The Daily Post](#).

## SEO Dos and Don'ts

### Try to...

- Use a few precise categories and tags.
- Write for human ears.
- Build your traffic in smart, organic ways.
- Choose simple, meaningful post slugs.

- Create a descriptive tagline.
- Include keywords selectively.

### **Try not to...**

- Start duplicate sites.
- “Stuff” your site with irrelevant, broad categories, tags, or buzzwords.
- Write with search engines in mind.
- Purchase or exchange meaningless backlinks.
- Buy into SEO fads.
- Worry too much about SEO at the expense of writing good content.

If you're ready to get a bit more advanced, you can use **webmaster tools** (provided by Google and Bing) to collect more data about how visitors find your site. This can help you make decisions about which topics to focus on in future.

In the end, remember that while it's admittedly a lot easier and less scary to tinker around with SEO than to make yourself sit down and write, there is no shortcut to building a popular site. The surest way to improve your site's ranking is to regularly publish interesting, creative content that people want to read.

Are you ready to plunge deeper into the world of traffic growth? In the next section, we'll dive into the what you can do to make your content easy to find and to follow.

## PART II

# MAKING YOUR CONTENT AUDIENCE- READY

We may blog about different topics, but we all need a good content strategy. In this section, you'll learn how to shape and present your content in ways that'll help you find, and keep, a loyal audience. From post titles to editorial calendars, you'll be set for success.

# 4

## DRAW VISITORS IN WITH GREAT POST TITLES

You've been [working hard on your blog](#): you put thought and effort into [your About page](#), your [site title and tagline](#), and you've even picked a [funky blog name](#). You [sweat your photography](#). You read and re-read your drafts to make sure they're just so.

With over 1.4 million posts published on WordPress.com every day, how do you make sure your work stands out in the crowd? Crafting strong post titles is one way to snag reader attention, pique interest, attract followers,

and earn repeat visits. Here's a few ideas to think about as you write titles for your posts.

### Get original

There are plenty of posts like *What Game of Thrones Taught me About Modern Society* or *Everything I know about Marriage, I Learned from Homer Simpson*.

How many listicles have you seen recently? You know what we're talking about: *10 Signs Millennials Will Ruin the World*, or *15 Ways to Tell if You Really Are a Hipster*. If you want your work to stand out from the crowd, though, you might want to rethink these types of constructions, unless you feel you've got a piece that transcends the genre. And in that case, we can't wait to read it.

### Study the masters

Chances are, there's title inspiration and guidance in the blogs and magazine articles you're already reading. Are there a few sites or magazines that you really like? Study their titles. Consider what it is about these titles that **draws you in**.

What captured your attention? What tickled your curiosity? Try emulating your favorite authors when you write post titles.

### Lead with the end in mind

If you're writing to educate, be it to share a personal anecdote or offer hard-won advice, it's good to ask yourself: *What's the most important thing I want my reader to remember from reading this post?* Crafting the answer into

a post title automatically reinforces your most important point for the reader, making sure your message not only gets heard, but remembered.

Try creating intrigue or using the element of surprise with titles by alluding to something readers can only see or learn by reading the post.

Every good title contains a good slug

Your post's title automatically becomes your [post's slug](#), which is part of the permanent link or URL to your post.

If your post title is fairly long, (over six or seven words) [consider editing your slug](#) to remove words such as “to,” “from,” “our,” “this,” “that,” etc., that don't specifically relate to the post's topic, for speedier search engine parsing. For example, this chapter's slug would have been:

```
/draw-visitors-in-with-great-post-titles
```

We shortened the slug to the following to put the emphasis on the main idea: writing great post titles.

```
/great-post-titles
```

If you've got your blog automatically connected to push and tweet posts to [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), post titles are what gets sent out as a default via [Publicize](#), so it's important to consider how your post's title might be perceived when it appears on your social networks. As you write your piece, you may also want to think about the words readers will use to search for your post and ensure those words get a place in the title.

Your title is more than just a summary of your post's

main idea; it's the post's calling card on the web, from search engines to social networks. Make it count.



# 5

## GET ORGANIZED WITH AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR

When it comes to building a healthy [following](#), nothing is more important than publishing quality content [regularly](#). Keeping a steady pace isn't always easy, though.

Most of us have work, school, family, and friends (or any combination of the above) to juggle. Some of us even like spending a few hours (minutes?) a day away from a screen. All of which often means that blogging goes down the priority ladder. Can an editorial calendar help you

navigate a hectic schedule? Here are some points to consider.

### Do you need an editorial calendar?

For many of us, blogging is a way to express ourselves and interact with others during our free time. The idea of setting deadlines and making plans can easily put off those of us who do it for the sheer fun of it, on our own loose schedule. And that's absolutely fine.

Other bloggers make significant strides in gaining traction by having a plan in place; for [group blogs](#), some form of scheduling is all but necessary.

Whatever your needs, the great thing about editorial calendars is that they can be as detailed or vague, as rigorous or elastic, as *you* see fit.

For some, publishing twice a week (or once a month, or every day, or... you get the point) is already a calendar of sorts. Many bloggers build a foundation for a calendar when they introduce a [regularly scheduled feature](#) mixed in with off-the-cuff material. Making *any* pact with yourself about the regular rhythm of your posts is a huge step beyond the “whatever, whenever” of having no plan whatsoever.

### Scheduling: a procrastinator's best friend

An editorial calendar allows you to plan in advance and allocate your limited time wisely. Let's say you plan your blog monthly: you might already know that on the second weekend of the month you'll be offline for a wed-

ding, and that an important deadline is looming at the end of the month.

A calendar allows you, first, to start writing in advance. Since you can [pre-schedule](#) the publication of your posts, you're done once you're pleased with your draft. Your blog will take care of the rest while you're dancing (or working) the night away.

Second, a calendar lets you make smart decisions about the mix and the timing of the posts you want to publish. A busy week? Why not schedule posts that are shorter or easier to write. More free time? You can finally dive into that long essay on the history of Korean BBQ you've been meaning to start.

In other words, you can (and should!) play around with the types of posts you publish, giving your audience time to digest your meatier content by punctuating long, serious posts with shorter and lighter fare.

### The stats-driven calendar

Once you've been blogging for a while and have a bit of a track record, designing a calendar becomes even more important (and can yield even bigger dividends). You should consider [examining and analyzing your stats](#), then take your content planning to the next level. When you know what your most popular posts are, on the one hand, and what your strongest traffic days are, on the other, you can start maximizing on the patterns you detect.

For example, try combining a popular topic with a high-

traffic day to expose as many readers as possible to your strongest content.

On softer days, you could experiment with a new type of post you've been thinking about, or go with an interactive feature (like a post with a [poll](#), or a [blogging event](#)) to focus on higher engagement among your visitors.

The idea is to identify your blog's core audience and serve it the content it came looking for, but also to keep testing out new features that might expand and deepen your blog's appeal.

"Calendar." I like the sound of it. Now what?

Regardless of the kind of blog you keep, here are some editorial calendar-building pointers you'll want to keep in mind:

- **Go visual:** if it's only in your head, it's not really a calendar. Use your smartphone's calendar app, or a note-making tool like [Simplenote](#). Get any of the many templates available online. Or go old school with pen and paper. Having an actual document will help you to keep track of your progress (and to make changes when you need to).
- **Be realistic:** it's better to schedule two posts a week that you *know* you'll publish on time, than a daily post you'll miss three days out of seven.
- **Budget in time for interaction:** Consider the time you'll want to spend responding to your audience. Don't schedule a post that's likely to generate a lot of discussion if you know you

won't be able to moderate and [respond](#) to comments.

- **A calendar's not just a plan, but also a record:** Once you've crossed off the week's/month's/year's scheduled posts (great job!), don't toss away your plan. Go over it and try to detect long-term trends: what posts did you most enjoy publishing? What kind of content elicited the strongest reactions from your visitors? Planning will be easier once you rely on actual data rather than gut feeling alone.
- **A calendar is not only for publication dates:** create a space in your calendar for thoughts that haven't yet matured into fully-formed post ideas. Keeping an inventory of these can pay off whenever you're having a moment of writer's block, or need to change plans quickly. It'll also make it easier to create future calendars, as you'll never be starting from scratch.

A good calendar is a flexible one

While having a schedule in place is often useful, having one that's too rigid can backfire. A predetermined calendar leaving you with no leeway can fast become a fun-killing distraction (and bloggers who don't enjoy maintaining their blogs, don't).

Practically, too, having some wiggle room is important. Keeping a day open, here and there, gives you the space to write spontaneously and publish [time-sensitive content](#) your readers might be eager to read.

Did your team just win a big game? Did your partner just

propose? Did you just accidentally bake the best chocolate chip cookie in recorded human history? Time for an impromptu post! In other words, plan for the unexpected by not *over*-planning.

# 6

## DRIVING TRAFFIC TO YOUR ARCHIVES

Even if you consistently come up with great editorial calendars full of new ideas, it's important not to forget your archives.

Given the ephemeral nature of the internet — from breaking news to memes to reader attention spans — it feels like we, as online publishers, are pushed to keep pace with the web, writing post after post each day.

Most blogs are set up for this kind of schedule, with front pages displaying your latest posts. But while your read-

ers (and search engines) love seeing fresh content on your homepage, we encourage you to promote your archives, too: your best posts, your hidden gems, and your timeless content. It's great to drive traffic to older posts and different parts of your blog.

You've got handy tools in the dashboard to promote your older content, from the [Archives Widget](#) to the [Categories Widget](#). But let's look beyond these and discover other ways to drive traffic to your archives.

### Custom menus of pages or categories

You can create a "Best Of" page and curate a shortlist of your favorite and most popular posts, then add the page to your menu. The [Top Posts & Pages Widget](#) may generate a similar list for you, but if you want more control over your selections — and want to display this list on its own page rather than your sidebar — this is a simple way to do it. (For users who like tinkering with shortcodes, consider the [Display Posts Shortcode](#): using various shortcode options, you can fine-tune the posts you want to display on a page, too.)

You can create a custom menu with categories as well (or mix it up and include pages *and* categories, plus external links). If you don't write frequently on your blog, you might consider a menu for your most popular categories, which highlights older posts. You'll make your categories more accessible, and allow readers to easily discover content that's more than a year old.

### Custom image widgets

Consider adding clickable custom [Image Widgets](#) to your



sidebar. (You can use an online image editor like [PicMonkey](#), which is free and doesn't require registration.) The widgets not only jazz up and visually enhance your blog, but can drive more traffic to different areas of your blog. You can create an Image Widget for your most popular categories, and consequently direct your readers and new visitors to some of your most time-tested content.

Revisit our [Widgets 201 tutorial](#) for a refresher on creating custom Image Widgets — they're a great way to direct readers to specific pages and posts, and can enhance your [blog's overall visual look](#).

### Featured post sliders

Some WordPress.com themes have the option to activate a post slider — a slideshow of featured images, often at the top of your homepage, that highlights selected posts. In the Theme Showcase, you can browse [themes that support post sliders](#) and the different ways your featured posts can be displayed.

A post slider is a great visual way to call attention to older posts. Since you decide which posts appear there, nothing should stop you from choosing posts that have stood the test of time, bringing new life to content that's already a few months (or years) old.

### Recurring posts, roundups, and anniversaries

Another way to direct traffic to your archives is by publishing [an ongoing series](#). If you group all related posts in a category, you could then feature older installments in a category page.

You can also curate your own content. Why not write a “Year in Review” post that summarizes your year and includes standout posts (you could do the same at the end of each month, or even every week, if you’re a prolific blogger)? Or, if you’re a food or DIY blogger who writes about seasonal recipes or craft projects over the holidays, be sure to promote and link to older posts you’ve written. These are opportunities to highlight your writing and work in timely, relevant ways.

Some bloggers create [editorial calendars](#) to keep regular schedules per week or month, while others write annual posts, too. Expat and nomadic bloggers pen “travelersary” posts that mark another year of living abroad or traveling the world; in these kinds of posts, bloggers revisit older “travelersary” posts and look back on what they’ve accomplished and experienced.

Not an expat or traveler? You can draft a similar post, no matter your niche, and then call attention to related posts from your archives.

The key thing to remember: posts don’t disappear into the sunset once they’re a few days old. Their value is still there, and it’s up to you to help readers discover them.

# 7

## CREATE ANTICIPATION WITH SERIAL POSTS

Going serial — introducing an element of repetition and regularity into your writing schedule — can go a long way toward creating anticipation among your readers and growing your traffic.

Bloggng gives you absolute freedom to create content and publish it on your own schedule, at the click of a button. The same freedom, however, can sometimes become your Achilles' heel. With no set deadlines to meet, you might feel less pressed to post regularly. Your readers, too, might stop expecting a steady flow of fresh material

from you. It's a vicious cycle many writers have encountered.

### Good habits, happy readers

When you decide to post (something, anything) in pre-fixed intervals you make a double pact. First, with yourself: as the person who sets the pace, you choose how to manage your time and your blog's schedule. Your pact is also with your audience, though: with a schedule in place they know they can trust you, and have a reason to come back for more of the good stuff.

There are many ways to serialize your blog — in part or in whole — and bloggers have been tremendously creative with structuring their blogs to fit with their busy schedules. At WordPress.com, we, too, have taken advantage of regularly scheduled features, from [Theme Thursday](#) to [Daily Prompts](#), designed to motivate bloggers to post something new every single day.

### A daily dispatch? A weekly wave?

For those who want to personalize their own post-a-day project, the options are limitless. You could embark on a 365 Project featuring a daily photo, or designate specific days of the week for recurring features. If you're part of a group blog, your collaborators can each be responsible for content on particular days, like newspaper columnists.

Some bloggers want to have more flexibility in their schedule, while still anchoring their writing activities with a weekly feature. There are really no rules other than making *a* rule. You can base your decision on your

own work schedule, or try to match your strongest, most reliably popular content with days on which you get the most traffic (how can you do that? A quick look at your [stats](#) will do the trick!).

Many bloggers prefer greater liberty in their topic selection or in their publishing frequency. Others might be worried about exhausting their chosen subject. Even so, enterprising writers have found creative ways to maintain a regular schedule and encourage a healthy, loyal readership.

### Your time, your blog

A weekly photo post might give an audience just enough time to want more. The same goes for weekly challenge entries or weekly update posts. Your respective readers might not know in advance what they'll encounter in each post, but they know it'll be there.

You shouldn't be intimidated by the need to create original content on call — in fact, some of the most interesting weekly features out there use a repeated feature as the space for some curation activity. Share some of your best finds of the previous week, or present your readers with a monthly reading report, or a best-of list with links to your favorite content of the previous month.

### A timely hook

A regularly scheduled post can serve one more useful purpose: showcasing your own best (recent) work. How about a weekly summary of your posts, accompanied by an attractive photo mosaic? Or a monthly digest of your blogging activities? Both are great ways to prolong the

shelf life of your posts and ensure that new visitors get a glimpse of [your archive](#), even if they had just stumbled upon your blog for the first time.

Building a loyal audience, however small — an audience that knows they can rely on your consistency — is a major step toward growing your blog's readership beyond your immediate network and expanding into the blogging community at large.

## PART III

# LEANING INTO THE WORDPRESS.COM COMMUNITY

One of the best features of blogging at WordPress.com is the built-in sense of community. In this section, discover the tools and features that let you make connections quickly and easily within this vibrant, diverse collective of bloggers, now numbering in the tens of millions.

# 8

## WORDPRESS.COM ESSENTIALS: COMMENTS AND BLOGROLLS

On WordPress.com, there are features to help make your voices heard, build your community, and expand your web presence. In this chapter, we'll cover some basics you should definitely do, from leaving comments to creating a blogroll.

Most of us start blogs because we want to write *and* we want to connect to others — if you weren't interested in the connection piece, you'd just keep a private diary. But



unlike other online communities like Facebook — where we go to connect primarily to friends and family — our blogs have the potential to reach beyond these immediate circles to the wider world.

While you might fantasize that the sheer force of your genius will propel your blog to viral fame, a three-book deal, and a recurring correspondent role on *The Daily Show*, your realistic blogger self knows it takes time and effort to build an engaged readership. (Some genius doesn't hurt, though!)

The basics? Leave comments and maintain a blogroll. Visit other blogs, read about topics that matter to you, and leave relevant comments and contribute to the conversations swirling around you. From there, you can naturally build a network of blogs — a blogroll — to follow regularly. Let's talk more about both.

### Leave comments

One way to build a readership is to engage with others in the blogosphere. This means you need to do more than just publish in your little blogular corner. If interacting with the rest of the internet feels overwhelming, break it down into manageable chunks: Five a Day.

Five whats a day? Five comments. Whenever you sit down at the computer to whip up a post or spend 15 minutes futzing on Twitter, commit to leaving five substantive comments on five different blogs. You can find them in a number of ways:

- Spend a few minutes serendipitously surfing the [WordPress.com Reader](#), clicking on [popular](#)

topics, Recommended Blogs, or specific or offbeat topics.

- Click through other bloggers' blogrolls, visit the blogs of commenters whose remarks you enjoy or find thoughtful, or browse for [Freshly Pressed](#) bloggers you admire.
- Encourage your readers to leave links to their favorite blogs and websites in your comments, so you can broaden your horizons.

Once you find a post that sucks you in from beginning to end, leave the blogger a comment. If you toss out a "Thanks" or "Great post," be sure to take it further to move the conversation along. Some questions to ask yourself:

- What was my reaction to the post? Did it make me laugh? Did it make me sad? Did it inspire me to take action? Why did it make me feel that way?
- If the blogger made a point or expressed an opinion, do I agree or disagree? If I agree, is there an additional reason why I think the same thing that the blogger didn't mention? If I disagree, why?
- If the blogger wrote about something that happened to them, have I ever had a similar experience I could share?
- If the blogger wrote about a book, a movie, or an album, have I read, watched, or listened to it? Did I enjoy it? Can I recommend anything similar the blogger and his/her readers might enjoy?
- Does any part of the post remind me of

something I've read elsewhere? If so, mention how it relates to the post and link to it in the comment.

- Is there an aspect of the story I'd like to hear more about? Any unanswered questions? Any point the blogger made or conclusion they drew that I didn't understand?
- Did the post change my mind about something, or teach me something I didn't know before?

The beauty of the blogosphere is that others are doing the same thing, and they'll see and click on *your* interesting/witty/erudite comment, ultimately bringing you more traffic and readers. If five a day feels like too much, then try four a day, or two a day. Heck, even one a day spreads your searing insights across seven new blogs a week.

The Five a Day method is not a path to overnight success — perhaps only an Oprah endorsement can do that! But it *is* the simplest, most natural way to build a community of engaged readers interested in the same things.

### Build a better blogroll

Another task on your must-do list is creating a [blogroll](#). A blogroll is a list of links to other sites you love. The list can be as long or as short as you like, and you can have various categories for blogs on different topics (such as food, travel, and photography). You can link to any websites you like — they don't have to be other WordPress.com sites, or even blogs.

When you find a blog you really like, always look for its blogroll — it's like getting recommendations from a

friend rather than blindly falling down the rabbit hole of the internet. Throw in the community- and traffic-building benefits, and a blogroll becomes a win-win-win-win proposition.

Blogrolls are a great way to burrow deeper into the blogging community, bring in new readers, and spread some bloggy love.

But why should I have one? I want people to stay on my blog, not click away.

What is it that they say? *You get what you give? You have to spend money to make money?* Well, they're on to something. Adding links you love has some great benefits:

- Show your stuff. You can tell readers more about yourself, personality, and interests through what you share.
- More traffic. Sometimes, those you link to will link to you in return, introducing your site to new readers. At the very least, the blogger you link to may stop by for a visit when they realize you've linked to them.
- Community building. The more people you introduce to subjects you love, the more that community grows. Good for the community, *and* good for you.
- Mutual support. We're all building the blogosphere together, so it behooves us to share the love and support each other. Show you're a caring member of the community, and the community will care about you.
- Satisfy your readers. Giving them recommendations isn't just a low-impact way to

share great content — it turns you into a trustworthy source of great stuff.

Do you have some tips for building a better blogroll?

Why yes, we do.

- **Tell us why we should click.** You can add [hover-over text](#) to the links, giving you an extra chance to plug your links with punchy descriptions. “The funniest blog about reptiles on the internet!” “Easy-to-follow tutorials for Renaissance Faire costumes.” You get the idea. You can also link directly to a post you love, rather than the blogger’s home page.
- **Keep it concise.** Avoid link overload! If you’ve got dozens of sites you want to feature, consider creating a separate “Links” page on your blog or rotate your blogroll, highlighting 10-20 of your favorites every month or week.
- **Categorize.** If you’re into parenting blogs, home renovation blogs, and video game blogs, split your blogroll into categories to organize the content.
- **Don’t set it and forget it.** If your blogroll is full of dead links or links to sites that haven’t been updated since 2009, it’s not a reflection of sites you read, throwing your credibility into doubt. Weed your blogroll monthly.
- **Don’t feel like you have to link to everyone who links to you.** Your blogroll is a reflection of what you read and love, not a quid pro quo. Readers will click on your blogroll links because

they trust your judgment and want to see what you recommend, not random sites you've included just to "return the favor."

The internet without links is like a road with no intersections. Make the blogging experience better for yourself, your readers, and your community with a blogroll.

# 9

## WIDEN YOUR CIRCLE: GUEST BLOGGERS AND GROUP BLOGS

Now that you've ventured out of your own blog and made a habit of leaving comments and updating your blogroll, let's talk about a few more ways to widen your circle. It's time to consider finding guest bloggers and joining (or establishing) a group blog.

### Guest bloggers

Bloggng isn't just about publishing. It's about sharing, commenting, and connecting. When we engage with one

another, we strengthen the fabric that sustains the blogosphere and us as individual bloggers.

One way to both grow your blog and contribute to the community is with [guest bloggers](#). More engagement? More readers? More conversation? Where do I sign up?! Here are some points to think about when inviting guest bloggers into your online home.

### **Why would I want to publish someone else? Am I not enough?**

A guest blogger is exactly what it sounds like: it's someone who's not you, publishing something on your blog — simple as that.

One thing to note is we're talking about personal blogs and friends helping friends here — not commercial enterprises. There are many paid guest blogging opportunities, which you can find on sites like [ProBlogger](#). This type of guest blogging is more like freelance writing than just lending your voice to another individual's blog.

So, what does a guest blogger add to your site? Potentially quite a bit.

### **Qualitatively:**

- **A counterpoint.** Perhaps your blog is topical, or you've had a series of posts on a particular issue. A guest blogger can offer a counterpoint that deepens the discussion and stimulates more conversation (and your own thinking).
- **Expertise and perspective.** On a related note, guest bloggers can bring in expertise and perspective that fill in your gaps, like a post on



the mechanics of yeast on your amateur baking blog, or one on traveling with small children on your budget travel site. Inviting a voice to add new details is a service to your readership.

- **Inspiration.** An accomplished guest blogger is motivating for you and your readers; someone who has published several books could be a great coach on your writing blog.
- **A fun new voice.** Guest bloggers don't need to be "experts" — a guest can simply be someone whose work you enjoy. Introduce your readers to a new voice they'll love.

### Quantitatively:

- **More readers and traffic for you.** Your guest blogger will likely tell his or her readers about your site; a personal recommendation from a trusted blogger can boost your readership. Guest blogging is a fantastic mutual growth opportunity.
- **Increased conversation.** When you introduce a new point of view, you naturally stimulate conversation. Plus, visitors who followed your guest over will likely enter the fray.
- **SEO benefits.** You already have [great SEO](#) on WordPress.com, and more inbound links makes it even better. If your guest links to you on his or her blog or new readers add you to their blogrolls, your overall visibility gets a boost.
- **Positioning.** If you write a topical blog, you'd probably love to establish yourself as a go-to site for people interested in your subject. Making your blog a resource for information is one way

to do that. Inviting guest bloggers who have good advice turns your blog into a one-stop shop.

### Building a guest list

Anyone who's ever planned a wedding or child's birthday party knows that building a guest list is fraught with peril. But finding a guest blogger won't be as stressful as figuring out where to seat your cousin's father's ex-wife's daughter whom no one really likes. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Your favorite blogger to read.
- A frequent commenter on your blog, especially one who pushes back and makes you think.
- Someone who complements what you offer with a different but related perspective.
- A blogger you almost never agree with — point/counterpoint!
- Someone you often write about — such as a friend, significant other, or older child.

Once the post is live, spread the word of your stellar partnership! If you both use Twitter, be sure to use their Twitter handle [when you promote the post](#). If you're friends on Facebook or Google+, tag them in your post. Ask them to do the same. Twice the social network means twice the love, twice the readership, and, hopefully, twice the conversation.

### Group and collaborative blogs

Another great way to expand your online presence and reach — and grow your traffic in the process — is being

part of a group blog, which can be a fertile space for a mix of voices and perspectives. On WordPress.com, you'll stumble upon pockets of micro-communities on every imaginable subject.

Collaborative sites take advantage of built-in tools in the dashboard that make group blogging easier. If you're thinking of creating a group blog, or just want to know how the process works, read this checklist of settings you can configure. The most basic settings below — like your user profile — are essential to establishing your presence across the web.

### User profiles and gravatars

With numerous users on one blog, it's important for each person to set their [User Profile](#) on WordPress.com at **Users** → **My Profile**. You don't have to include *all* of your details, although you should set your display name, which is how you'll be known on your group's blog, as well as the entire WordPress.com community:

A screenshot of a user profile settings form. On the left, the text 'Display name publicly as' is stacked vertically. To the right of this text is a rectangular input field with a thin border and a light gray background, currently empty.

[Gravatar](#) powers the user avatars on WordPress.com, and it's best for members of your team to have gravatars that represent them — while we've got default ones to choose from, the community would rather see your face! After you [configure your avatar](#), you'll see it when you post on your own site, comment on blogs and in the forums, and interact on other areas across WordPress.com.

Simply put, you want the internet to know who you are.

### Create your group blog's team

At **Users** → **Invite New**, you can [invite others](#) to join your team to be [contributors](#), [editors](#), or [authors](#). These fellow bloggers will organically help promote you and your work; one of the advantages of a collaborative blog is building a tight-knit circle of people with similar interests, so they will naturally refer and link to your work, engage with you on social media, and interact on your group's blog (as well as your personal blog).

If you're interested in learning more about setting up a group blog, read more in [our group blogging guide](#). For more inspiration and examples of collaboration, read about more [group blogs](#).

Belonging to a tight-knit community of bloggers — whether via featured guest bloggers or participation in group blogs — will increase your visibility, expand your network, and will make your path toward better traffic easier, not to mention far less lonely.

# 10

## **EVENTS AND CHALLENGES: FIND YOUR FANS AND GROW YOUR READERSHIP**

There's yet another path to community-building around your blog, one that complements the strategies we've already mentioned in this section on the WordPress.com ecosystem.

If you're looking for a way to jump-start your entry into the blogging community, or breathe new life into an

existing blog, we've yet to create a *Bring Me 100 New Readers* button in the dashboard, alas. However, participating in blogging events and challenges can help fast-track you from the margins to the center.

### Join a blogging event or challenge

To make it easier to find and participate in events and challenges, you can browse the [blog event listings](#) on *The Daily Post* (or sift through the “challenge” and “blogging challenge” topics in the Reader).

Most blog events and challenges work like the ones [hosted at The Daily Post](#) — the event organizer will post a theme, prompt, or some instructions, and you publish an entry on your blog and leave a link back on the original challenge post. The organizer — and other participants — then visit and comment on each others' entries — boosting views, likes, and comments on participating blogs. Often, organizers highlight entries in posts on their own blogs for a little extra link love, and sometimes there are even prizes and [giveaways](#) (yay!).

Blog events run the gamut from single-post [flash fiction](#) events, to month-long “post every day” marathons, to [genre-specific events](#) like recipe contests and DIY/crafting challenges. No matter what your blogging interests are or how much time you have to spend, there's bound to be an event that works for your blog and schedule. (Also, some events aren't restricted to a schedule and can be shaped to fit your needs. Consider the [Zero to Hero challenge](#), for example: a month-long series of tasks that any blogger, new and old, can do to improve their blog in digestible chunks.)

Most events have robust and welcoming communities, which opens the door to new readers and fans. On the [blog event listing page](#), you can browse listings that interest you, including events under [Photography & Visual Arts](#), [Fiction & Flash Fiction](#), [Non-Fiction/General Blogging](#), and [Niche-Specific](#).

Go ahead, host your own!

Some of you might be toying with the idea of running an event or challenge on your blog, but aren't sure how to organize it (or think your blog isn't a big enough deal to warrant an event).

Events don't require massive traffic or infrastructure. If you've got a few interested readers and are willing to put in a little time, you can run one that enriches all participants' blogs — and build your own presence within a topic or niche. To help you figure out whether you want to try one and get you going, browse our guide to organizing and running a blog event:

- [Why organize an event?](#)
- [Kinds of Events](#)
- [Basic Logistics](#)
- [Announcing and Publicizing](#)
- [During the Event](#)
- [Event Wrap-Up](#)

You can also browse more [blogging event examples](#) for inspiration.

So, we encourage you to try an event or challenge, or consider hosting and organizing your own — it will grow your audience *and* your blogging prowess.

Following the steps outlined in this chapter will ensure your posts won't be published into a vacuum, but rather welcomed by a supportive community of like-minded bloggers. This will make blogging more rewarding, give your traffic a desired boost, and set you up for success as you publicize your blog in the wide-open waters of the web.



## PART IV

# CAST A WIDE SOCIAL NET

With your WordPress.com community on your side, it's time to think about branching out beyond your own cozy corner of the blogosphere and into the open waters of the internet. In this section, we'll consider strategies to promote your blog across your social networks, starting with Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

# 11

## **PUBLICIZE AND PROMOTE YOUR BLOG ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

All of your friends subscribe to your blog, right? What about your coworkers? Your family members? Your classmates or former classmates? People who don't necessarily know you, but work in your field? People who don't know you at all, but like to mock the same celebrities you do?

**Capitalize on existing connections**

Chances are, your social network is larger than you think it is. Luckily, these days, there are more ways than ever to

reach people who share your interests, your pet peeves, and your sense of humor. Done well, social networking is the single best way to make friends and influence people on the web.

So, how to make sure you're making the most out of social media opportunities without overdoing it? First of all, it helps to have a solid understanding of the ways in which the various social networks differ, and what each one specifically is for. In this section, we'll concentrate on the Big Three: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Which networks should you tap into?

The distinctions between networks are important, since it's likely the people who follow you on each of these different services are interested in you for different reasons. Granted, you undoubtedly have friends and fans who follow you on all of them and subscribe to your blog as well. But you also likely have family members who follow you on Facebook and might check out your blog if you post pictures from holiday get-togethers. Maybe you have coworkers in your LinkedIn network who will check out any posts having to do with your industry, but aren't so interested in your Twilight fan fiction.

You'll want to let these occasional readers know if you've posted something that they'd like. The easiest way to do that is to [connect your blog to your social media services using Publicize](#). Publicize will automatically post to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or Tumblr every time you post, so you don't have to worry about doing it manually. You can also control which services you share with on a per-post basis — for example, if you post an expletive-

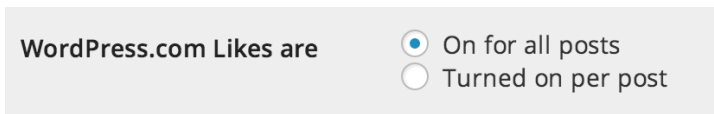
heavy rant you'd rather your grandmother not read, you can deselect Facebook before publishing it.

Remember, though, that for those true fans who do follow you on every service, seeing your blog updates in each place can be repetitive. Ideally, you should also create original content for each different service, so that all of your social media feeds are fresh, interesting, and entertaining. The funnier you are on Twitter, the more new followers will click those blog links to check out what you have to say at length.

#### Adding more social touches

Of course, make sure to use [social media widgets](#) on your blog itself, so that your subscribers know where else they can find you, as well as [sharing buttons](#), so your readers can alert all their friends to your brilliant work.

In **Settings** → **Sharing**, enable likes at the bottom of the page:



Finally, the same principles regarding blog commenting etiquette also apply to polite social media behavior: follow, like, friend, and message as you would want to be followed, liked, friended, and messaged. Seek out those whose content appeals to you, and make the first move. Don't be mean (unless that's your schtick). Don't let trolls waste your time or clutter up your feed.

The more you extend yourself on social media, the bigger

your network will grow, and the more blog readers you'll gain.

With these basics in place, let's plunge into the specifics of each network.

# 12

## SHARING YOUR BLOG ON FACEBOOK: THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF FAN PAGES

There are folks who use blogs purely as online diaries, but most of us hope for a readership — and social networks are a way to find and grow one. Should you create a Facebook fan page for your blog? How? And what do you do once you have it?

## Why create a Facebook fan page?

You already read and comment on others' blogs and share some of your own posts on your personal Facebook page. Is creating a separate page worthwhile? It can be — it offers capabilities that a personal page doesn't, and lets you use the “networking” part of “social networking” to engage new readers. A few of the perks:

- **No limit on fans.** A personal page caps your friends at 5,000 — not usually a problem for purely personal use, but an issue when your blog starts to take off. (We're pretty sure it will; you seem great.)
- **More statistics to work with.** Fan pages offer analytics (Facebook calls them “insights”) that let you see which posts are most viewed and shared, along with basic demographic data about your fans. You can use these just like [WordPress.com stats](#), to help you create blog content that speaks to your readers.
- **A place to share one-off thoughts and links.** Those quick ideas or links that you'd like to share, but wouldn't write a whole post about? Now they've got a home. Ditto for things readers want to share with you, but which don't necessarily have a place in your comments.
- **Expanded conversations.** Sure, you want to foster engagement on your blog and maintain a lively comment section. But if you want to foster other conversations, Facebook's discussion tools give you a place to do that. Maybe one of your knitting blog readers wants a sock pattern that you don't have. It might be

odd for them to ask on an unrelated post, but they can ask on Facebook and get several responses — and you get a great idea for a sock post, which ultimately brings more people to your blog. Win-win!

- **Networking, networking, networking.** We take our friends' recommendations seriously. When your best friend Sue follows your blog's fan page, all *her* friends see that — and they'll come check you out now that you have Sue's imprimatur. You can also comment on other friends' and blogs' content as your blog instead of yourself, generating more exposure. Rather than waiting for people to discover you, you're actively making connections among those likely to become readers.

A fan page also gives you a place to share your blog posts and related content without feeling like you're spamming friends and family; you can more easily [keep your personal life and blog life separate](#).

Creating a fan page isn't a non-stop path to viral success, and there's a notable downside: it's work. If all you do with your page is share your blog posts, it's not going to get you very far. A successful fan page needs a content plan, just like your blog does, along with regular tending. You'll also have lots of readers who don't use Facebook, and building a vibrant community there could leave them out of interesting conversations. Maybe *you* don't use Facebook, and don't want to — totally fine, concentrate your time and energy on mediums you enjoy spending time with.



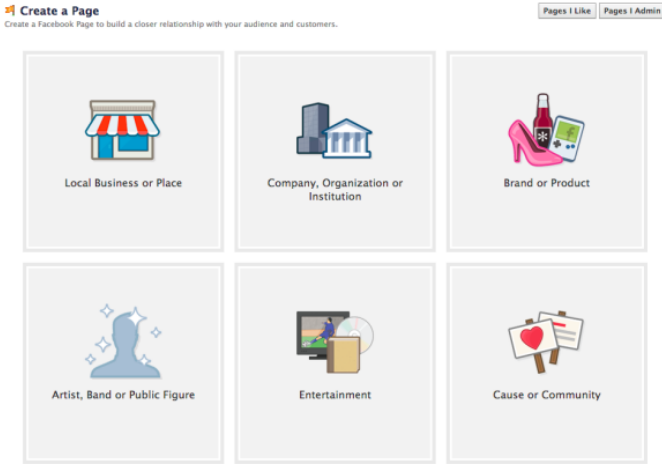
Still, if reader growth is a goal, fan pages have a role to play. If you're already a member of Facebook, adding a fan page for your blog can be an effective way to supplement your other activity in the blogosphere.

### **If you build it, they will come**

You could create an account for your blog the way you did for yourself, but then you don't get to take advantage of all the perks of fan pages. Instead, you'll create a page — you'll be the administrator and will access it through your personal account, but it'll be a totally separate entity and won't display your personal info.

Creating a page also allows people to like or follow it without having to add it as a "friend," which can seem like too much commitment. A like is less of an investment on their part, and keeps you from hearing the dreaded, "I just need some space... it's not you, it's me."

To get started, head to the [Create a Page](#) page, which looks like this:



Pick “Brand or Product” — yes, [you’re a brand](#) — and select “website” from the drop down menu that appears. A setup wizard will walk you through adding info about your blog; you’ll want [your great “About” copy](#), your URL, and a logo or picture. You can also add links to other social network profiles, to help fans find your Twitter feed or Pinterest boards. Once you’re done filling in the info, click “save.” Facebook will create the page and deposit you there. Any time you log in to your personal account, you’ll see a link to your page in the navigation on the left.

(Well, it’s on the left for now. You know Facebook.)

When you’re on your fan page, you’ll see a bunch of admin tools on the top and the page content below. Take some time to click around the admin tools; there are lots of handy tooltips to get you started. You’ll also see that once your page has 25 fans, you can claim a custom URL, so your fan page’s web address can be

www.facebook.com/myawesomeblog

instead of

www.facebook.com/pages/something-kinda-like-your-blog-name-987654321.

Way easier to remember, and looks much better on a Moo card.

**Your blog has a fan page. Now what?**

As the old social networking riddle asks, “If you build a Facebook fan page and no one likes it, does it still grow your traffic?”

No, it doesn't. (It's a pretty crappy riddle.) Your page needs (1) content and (2) fans.

To start with, share a few of your blog posts to the page, and add a little “Hello!” message so your company isn't sitting on cardboard boxes when they come for tea. Now, start rustling up fans with those most likely to like you: your friends, family, and existing readers. Share the link to your new fan page on your blog — try announcing it in a text widget if you don't want to dedicate a post to it, or just [add the Facebook Like widget](#) — and invite your existing Facebook friends to like the page (the admin tools have a wizard for doing that, which lets you select which friends to invite).

Now that the fan ball is rolling, you can leave that to grow organically as fans like and share your content... so you'll need some of that. You'll want to share new blog posts to the page (you can [set up Publicize](#) to do that automat-

ically), but that shouldn't be all — if the fan page does nothing but promote your posts, there's little point for anyone to follow it. In addition to posts, you'll want to add other content, like:

- **Other bloggers' posts.** There's nothing like sharing the love, and promoting others' good work ultimately brings people to you, too.
- **Random funny, interesting, or provocative links.** Your fan page becomes valuable when you curate, helping fans weed through the swampland of the internet to find the goodies. Links and posts with great images are especially shareable.
- **Questions.** If there's one thing people enjoy doing on Facebook, it's sharing opinions. You might not want to run a poll on your blog, but asking questions on Facebook is a good way to get people to engage and to get feedback on what your readers are interested in.
- **Status updates.** Are you on round three of the DIY project you're planning to blog next week? Are you headed to the movies to see the next film you'll review? Did you just spend 15 minutes trying to remember the word "conundrum?" Keep fans up to date and share blog-related glimpses into your life.

You don't need to do all of this every day; doing that is a good way to drive fans away, as you flood their Facebook feeds. But posting a few times a day, with a mix of blog posts and other related content, turns your fan page into a supplement to your blog — another place readers can come for good content.

In the end, building an engaging fan page helps you as a blogger — you're *not* creating an alternative to your blog, you're creating a feeder tool that funnels you readers and post content. Maybe you'll realize that the last few links you shared would make a great roundup or post topic, or conversations with fans will open new avenues of thinking.

It takes work to maintain a strong page, but in the end, the Facebook page should grow your readership, help you create more and better content, and ultimately boost your blog.

# 13

## TO TWEET OR NOT TO TWEET?

Twitter might seem like a counterintuitive destination for promoting your blog. How could joining the 140-character crowd possibly help your thoughtful, well-crafted posts? Besides, do you even have time to keep up with another network, where so many people appear to be discussing nothing but what they're having for lunch?

On one hand, these are legitimate concerns. It *is* yet another password to remember, there are lots of people talking about their lunches, and you can get sucked in and end up wondering where those three hours of your life went.

On the other hand, it can be a really effective and efficient way to make connections that you wouldn't otherwise

make. You can follow — and converse — with bigwigs in your field, along with lots of other folks dedicated to the same things you are. You'll read posts and find links to information that will inform and inspire, and can stay on the pulse of your issues.

Here are some considerations for helping you decide whether to join the fray:

- **It's a medium for conversation, not just broadcasting.** Yes, you can and should let people know about new posts on your blog via Twitter (you do that by [connecting your Twitter account via Publicize](#)). But if that's all you're doing, you're not going to get very far. Twitter is a place to extend the conversation, not just ply people with "Hey, Read Me!" links. If you're not tweeting original content and engaging with others (through dialogue or by re-tweeting them), don't bother.
- **It takes time.** It can be a worthwhile investment, and it doesn't have to take a *lot* of time, but it does require some. You'll need to figure out who to follow, and then make sure to interact. This doesn't mean you need to keep your Twitter feed open on your computer all day long, but it does mean you'll want to check in periodically to see what's going on. No one bothers following a person who posts once every two months.
- **It's not the same as Facebook, or Tumblr, or LinkedIn.** Your Twitter content should be unique. If all you're doing is auto-tweeting your

Facebook status updates, you're not really being an engaged twitizen.

The bottom line is that Twitter can be (1) a lot of fun, (2) a great place to connect with people in your areas of interest, and (3) a way to sow your blogular seeds among a larger audience. But if you're not prepared to invest a little time, you might be better off letting it go.



# 14

## LINKING YOUR BLOG TO LINKEDIN

For many bloggers, [sharing your posts](#) on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) might be a no-brainer — *clearly*, all your friends and followers want to read your latest piece of staggering wit. But what about professional social network [LinkedIn](#)?

Adding another network to your arsenal can help your blog grow, but there are also some points to consider before you decide to push your blog's content to your professional profile, too.

## Making the link

LinkedIn is the biggest and most vibrant business-oriented social network. It has hundreds of millions of members, who use it for job searches and for social interaction with actual and potential colleagues. It's also increasingly becoming a forum for the exchange of ideas between professionals, companies, and leading thinkers.

Setting up your blog posts to appear in your LinkedIn profile will be a breeze: you simply [use Publicize](#) to connect your blog to your LinkedIn account.

If you're looking to make the most of your blog's connection to LinkedIn, here are some quick tips:

- **Add InShare buttons to your posts** so that readers can share them directly to their own LinkedIn accounts.
- **Browse and join LinkedIn Groups** to find like-minded professionals and scout for ideas for new posts.
- **Connect your LinkedIn account to SlideShare**, another venue for your more visual content.

## Blog your way to the corner suite

For some WordPress.com users, the advantages of this connection are obvious. If your blog is your primary professional home, or if you often write about work-related topics on your site, having a presence on LinkedIn can give you a double boost.

First, you become a more visible, high-profile commentator on the state of your profession, be it teaching,

plumbing, investing, or artisanal cheese-making. This might lead to unknown benefits for your job (or job search), and open the door to interesting new opportunities and acquaintances. You make yourself known in a community of like-minded professionals, and take part in another public discussion, one that might be different in tone and focus from those you normally engage in through your blog.

Not less important, publishing on LinkedIn can broaden your blog's readership and increase its overall popularity. It's a form of syndication: readers who might never have heard of your blog if it had stayed only on WordPress.com now have the chance to consume and comment on your content. Sounds great, doesn't it?

#### Over-sharing as a professional hazard

Well, if your blog focuses on your alcohol-drenched travels through South America, chronicles your love life, or is full of vocal (negative) opinions on notable members of your profession, posting to LinkedIn might warrant a second thought. In fact, any personal post, even the most mundane one about your uncle's 70th birthday party, might feel out of place on a platform dedicated to (mostly) professional interactions.

There is, of course, nothing inherently offensive about any of these topics, just as there's nothing fundamentally wrong with dressing up whichever way you please. In a work-related environment, though, some people are used to certain codes of behavior, be it the things one talks about or the print on one's shirt. Appearing disrespectful of these codes might alienate some readers with whom

you'd still like to enjoy a professional relationship, if not a personal one.

As a rule of thumb, if you don't want to think twice about *anything* you write, and even more so if you tend to approach sensitive or controversial topics regularly, connecting your blog to LinkedIn might be something to reconsider.

### Finding a blog-work balance

Even with these caveats, it's important to stress that blogging on WordPress.com and maintaining a lively presence on LinkedIn are not mutually exclusive. If you wish to enjoy the benefits of linking these two platforms without worrying of separate worlds colliding, there are still ways to do that.

First, on any Publicize-connected account you have, you can decide which of your posts will get posted, and which won't.

Say you'd like your LinkedIn connections to read your insightful review of your new smartphone, but *not* your equally sharp critique of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Easy! In your post's Publish module, on the Publicize line, click on "Edit." Then, depending on your preference, leave the LinkedIn box checked for publication, or uncheck it to leave it out of your feed there.

It's important to note that even if you don't publish a specific post to LinkedIn, as long as you publish anything there, you never know which content on your site your connections might choose to visit.

For even greater separation between networks, you might consider having multiple sites: for example, a work-friendly blog, and an I-don't-care one. LinkedIn connections are made per blog, not per WordPress.com account — and since you can have as many blogs as you wish, you can compartmentalize your audience in whichever way you see fit.

Your WordPress.com account gives you the freedom to share your content across your various social networks, and to tailor your posts to specific audiences. Be sure to make the most of Publicize and its power to reach wide audiences beyond your blog's core readership.

## PART V

# EXPANDING YOUR BLOG'S REACH ACROSS PLATFORMS

You've taken care of pushing your content to your social networks. How about reaching out to new audiences by expanding your blog across multiple platforms? This section will show you how to use your blog as the hub for your online presence, and how to enhance it in more niche destinations like Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest.

# 15

## TUMBLR AS A COMPLEMENTARY PLATFORM FOR YOUR BLOG

So, you've worked hard to [build your blog's brand](#), have established [a posting rhythm](#), and are comfy in your digs. *Must you create more? Must you do All The Things?*

The short answer? No. While we offer advice and resources on how to blog more and better, you don't have to do, well, anything. But we want to lay out all these tools and possibilities, and you can pick and choose what's right for you. In this chapter, let's talk about how you can use another platform — [Tumblr](#) — as a comple-

mentary space for your blog, and to expand your online presence and reach.

Where, oh where, does your writing live?

We've introduced social platforms to promote your work online, but we haven't talked much about *where your writing lives*.

In other words, how do you, as a writer online, present yourself and organize your work on this labyrinthine web? You've likely built your blog on WordPress.com as your hub — your own cozy corner of the internet. People visit your blog to get a dose of *you*.

But with today's publishing platforms, your writing can appear in multiple places at once. You might have occasional opportunities for posting elsewhere, like guest blogging on a fellow writer's site, but what about writing on a platform like Tumblr to complement your blog? For some, it may not be necessary (and in some cases, might create a fragmented experience for your readers). But for others, it might be just what you need to take your work — and your traffic — to the next level. If this option is right for you, what could it look like?

WordPress.com and Tumblr

It's worth noting there's a difference between simply creating more accounts on the web and posting mindlessly and duplicating content on each, versus carefully considering your options and using a few.

So, enter [Tumblr](#). Some bloggers keep their writing on WordPress.com, and use Tumblr to compile quotes from



their favorite posts or publish sporadic short musings relate to the themes they explore on their blog. The setup might not make sense for everyone, but it could work for bloggers who engage in different types and formats of writing.

Many artists use Tumblr to share their art beyond their WordPress.com readership. Tumblr is a rich community for visual artists and art lovers alike, so it can give art blogs an extra boost. Successful cross-platform blogs aim for Tumblr and WordPress.com sites that are visually cohesive: for example, they might feature matching [headers](#) and [backgrounds](#). It's also a great idea to share the same name on both platforms to strengthen your personal brand.

Other bloggers use Tumblr to share ideas and interests beyond their blog's focus. If your blog focuses on book reviews, for example, you can use your Tumblr as a more visual space to share other related materials, from gifs, to memes, to quotes, in a way that's at once different from, and complementary to your blog.

So, is setting up a Tumblr right for you?

Here are a few points to consider:

- Use Tumblr as a way to attract a new set of readers to your blog.
- Experiment with different content that you're not sure fits on your blog.
- Create a secondary space for sharing ideas on your favorite topics.

- Use Tumblr for brainstorming and quick thoughts.

Used carefully, creating this secondary space can give you both an outlet for materials that didn't make it into your blog, and another stage from which to attract visitors to your WordPress.com site.

# 16

## USING INSTAGRAM TO GROW YOUR BLOG

Who doesn't like square, filtered, retro-feeling photos?

Some of you may not use Instagram as actively as others, but even if you're not an addict of the app, it might offer a new outlet to build your blog and personal brand. After all, your blog is just *one* aspect of you — if you're on Instagram, perhaps you can find ways to bridge these two platforms and grow your online presence.

### Lead new visitors to your blog

The simplest thing you can do? Include your WordPress.com blog URL in your Instagram bio, so app users can poke around on ([the mobile version](#) of) your site.

But let's say you're a food blogger, and you post pictures of the delicious meals you've whipped up, courtesy of the recipes on your blog. Why not mention in a comment that users can prepare these plates themselves by visiting your blog? (It's worth noting that currently, URLs in Instagram comments *aren't* clickable — folks, then, must copy and paste any links you leave in your comments into their mobile browser.)

### Use hashtags wisely

Adding hashtags in a comment is a simple way for new followers to find your Instagram photos (and, ultimately, your other online homes like your WordPress.com blog). There's a super-active hashtag community on Instagram — you can find just about anything in the “Explore” tool and connect with others with the same interests, from #streetart to #travel to #cooking.

One tip: use hashtags wisely! Don't tag a photo with every possible term imaginable, like this: #art #street #wall #paint #city #urban and on and on. It's spammy, and we encourage you to use only focused and relevant hashtags. In the long run, you'll attract people interested in more meaningful, thoughtful conversations, both on Instagram and WordPress.com.

For those of you who [run your own blogging challenges or other events](#), consider spreading the word on Insta-

gram with hashtags unique to your challenge or event. Do you host a nature photography contest each weekend for your readers? Establish a #weekendnaturesnapshot tag, which your participants can use to tag their entries on Instagram as well. Be sure to include your hashtag in your Instagram bio so new followers know where it originated. You might create some extra buzz and attract new submissions this way!

### Spread the logo love

For readers interested in [building their personal brand](#), consider using Instagram's visual nature to your advantage. Got a logo for your blog? Use [iWatermark](#) or [a similar app](#) to apply a text or graphic watermark to your images. This [BlogHer article](#) nicely summarizes steps to add watermarks to your photos.

Some of you might feel like shouting: "But Instagram is instant and easy, and meant to capture our fleeting moments — no way am I spending time on all of this!" You certainly don't have to add your logo to your pictures, but for those of you who want to experiment with building a visually cohesive online presence, it's a good start. You'll make your logo — and you — more memorable.

### Create a new side of you

Adding an extra dimension to your digital presence — like activating an [Instagram Widget](#) in your sidebar or [embedding an Instagram shot](#) from your feed — offers a different window, and a new angle of *you*, to your readers. An Instagram Widget also injects your sidebar with

an extra dash of color, and can be used as an integral part of your blog's visual design.

Instagram can feel quite intimate. Your followers get a peek at some of the candid moments of your day, and these images can complement the writing and photography you publish on WordPress.com. Any chance you get to engage your audience in your content in a more meaningful, personal way is an opportunity to grow your readership. Given how easy it is to use Instagram, it might very well be worth a try.

# 17

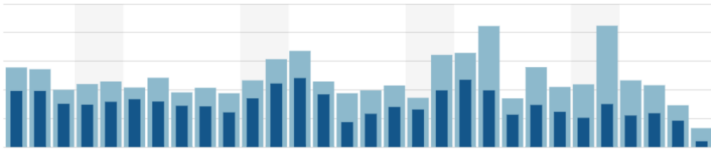
## HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF PINTEREST

We've talked [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#). But for many blogs, the biggest source of traffic from a social network isn't any of those: it's [Pinterest](#).

If you've eschewed Pinterest because you don't care about [ombre cakes](#) or [repurposing wooden pallets for home decor use](#), you might be missing out on a huge audience for your blog (and some delicious cake). In this chapter, we'll push past the [inspirational quotes with beautiful typography](#), turn left at the [green smoothies](#), and explore whether Pinterest is a good match for your blog.

## Why should I care about Pinterest?

We all love it when our stats show that someone other than our best friend reads our blog. Take a look at these:



These are one month's stats for a blog that hasn't been updated since the *autumn of 2012*. The slowest day had about 200 views; the best day, over 400. Just sitting there, dormant, this blog has traffic that many of us would do a happy dance to achieve.

How? Pinterest. No, really.

## What is Pinterest?

Pinterest is a virtual, sharable bulletin board. When you find something on the web you want to remember or share, you can pin it to your board. You can create multiple boards — if you need to separate your [purple ombre cakes](#) from your [yellow ombre cakes](#), for example, or if you pin a wide variety of things — to organize your collections. Each pin links back to the website where you first saw whatever it is you want to remember.

Once you're on Pinterest, you can follow other users and browse their collections. If you see something you love, you can re-pin it onto one of your boards — just like reblogging on WordPress.com.

As you develop collections, you not only create a handy catalogue for yourself, you become a resource for your



blog's readers *and* for other Pinterest users who admire your excellent taste... some of whom will find their way to your blog.

It's especially useful for supplemental content that you wouldn't necessarily put on your blog, but still want to collect and share. If you're a book blogger, your site might feature reviews or [affiliate links](#) for your absolute faves, but your Pinterest boards are a place to park all the other titles that catch your eye.

Who should be using it?

Unsurprisingly, Pinterest is a hugely popular way to share content with a strong visual element — food, fashion, and memes abound. In our stats example, the blog is food-focused, so there are lots of drool-inducing photos that make great Pinterest fodder.

For some kinds of bloggers, Pinterest is a no-brainer:

- **Food bloggers.** Share images of your own finished masterpieces, and keep a virtual recipe box of need-to-make dishes you find as you read other blogs.
- **Style bloggers.** Pin other bloggers' looks and must-have items from other blogs and shops, and create a virtual dream closet.
- **DIY/craft bloggers.** Collect projects you love, or tools and materials you're drawn to for your readers' (and your) easy reference.
- **Design bloggers.** Share the photos of interiors or products to create an online vision board.
- **Photo bloggers.** Collect shots you love. Sort them by subject or style (black and white,

macro, street, film...). Be inspired to stretch your own photography, and inspire others along the way.

- **Travel bloggers.** Places you've been, places you'd love to go, offbeat locations that aren't on most travelers' radars — all are ripe for sharing on Pinterest.

What about me? I'm not any of those things.

Pinterest can be a low-stress way to explore peripheral interests. Maybe you mostly blog about writing, but love gardening, working the occasional gardening metaphor into posts about language. Start some gardening boards! Readers who are interested in gardening can visit them and learn more, but the focus of your writing blog remains the same. Maybe you write about attachment parenting, and use Pinterest to collect ideas for your toddler's room renovation.

Anyone can use Pinterest as a visual bookmarking system, or explore it as another way to connect with an audience. If the thing you want to save or share has a visual element, you can pin it. Album covers. Animated GIFs. Sports. Cars. The vast majority of things we create and share on the internet are connected to *something* visual.

What do I actually do with it?

You can use Pinterest as a purely personal bookmarking/bulletin board system — keep your boards private, and make it your own resource. If you do use it publicly, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- As with any other social network, you're using it

to continue and expand what happens on your blog. Feel free to pin your own posts... but don't pin your own content exclusively. There's no reason for anyone to follow you on Pinterest if the content is identical to your blog. Spread the love, and spread the traffic.

- Re-pin posts you love to help spread the word. Unlike reblogs, which some bloggers don't love, pins are meant to be pinned and pinned again.
- Check the rights before pinning possibly copyrighted content. Lots of people don't mind having their photos shared, but some do — check the license for images you pin before pinning them. If the photographer reserves all the rights, or you're otherwise unsure, ask before pinning.
- Consider a blog-specific account if you use Pinterest for very different purposes personally and, um, blogularly. Alternatively, you can set personal boards to be private and limit what you share.

Finally, if you use Pinterest to share products you like, you can use [affiliate links](#) on your blog for the ones you particularly love (think the [Amazon Associates](#) program, one of the most frequently used). Most affiliate links for reputable merchants are welcome — highlight books, music, clothes, gadgets, or any other product you love and recommend to your readers.

By extending your online presence into services like Pinterest, Tumblr, and Instagram, you increase your chances of finding audiences that might not otherwise stumble on your blog. That's especially true of those readers who are

primarily visual content consumers, or members of specific niches, who might still be interested in your blog's perspective on a shared interest. When you leave a meaningful stamp across platforms and engage in more conversations you automatically make yourself part of more communities from which to draw visitors to your blog.

## PART VI

# THE ART AND CRAFT OF BRANDING

Establishing a presence within the WordPress.com community, and expanding it into various social networks and platforms, are important steps on your road to (blog-)world domination. In our final section, we approach your next move in becoming a blogging pro: creating and maintaining a cohesive, consistent blogging brand.

# 18

## CONGRATS, IT'S A BRAND!

If you're a blogger, you're already more than that: you're a brand. Congrats!

You may never be Coca-Cola or Apple, but you can use branding to grow your blog. Time to become a household name!

What is a brand?

**Brand** (n): a particular product or a characteristic that serves to identify a particular product

Technically, yes, that's what a brand is — a product or its logo. But a brand is much more than that. As a blogger, your brand is:

- Your site's personality.
- Your name, tagline, color scheme, and design (including your logo).
- A promise you make to readers about what they'll find on your site.
- The way you represent yourself and your blog in other spaces online (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest...) and off (your business cards).
- The thing that differentiates your blog from the seventy kazillion other blogs.

A strong brand is much more than just a logo, it creates a guarantee. When one of your readers sees something associated with your brand — a post on your site, a guest post elsewhere, a tweet, an email — they're primed and know what to expect, be that a laugh, a great DIY project, a recipe, parenting advice, or whatever your blog is. It's unique to you, and it's distinctive. It creates an emotional connection with readers, and that connection is what keeps them coming back

If you've ever emailed a friend and said something like, "[Carrying the Gun](#)'s latest post made me really sad," or "You should really follow [Weebles](#)," you've interacted with a blogger's brand. You could have called them "Don" or "Julie," but you didn't — their blog is their identifier. They actively reinforce that around the web, and every time they do, it solidifies their brand and your trust in them.

### **Why care about branding?**

So why be a brand? After all, it seems like work. And

“branding” sounds suspiciously consumerist — you’re just a blogger.

First off, you’re already a brand whether you’re trying to be or not. As soon as you chose a theme, picked a blog name, and started publishing publicly, you became one. You announced to the world, “This is my space on the internet, and when you come here you’ll find XYZ.” You can choose whether you actively promote your brand, but it exists nonetheless.

Second, there are plenty of good reasons to cultivate a brand, like:

- You don’t blog under your real name and/or are establishing a persona for your site.
- You want to turn the site into a business, or use it as a portfolio.
- You plan on extending the site across the internet — for example, by creating a page for it on Facebook.
- You blog about a specific topic, and want to establish your blog as a go-to source.
- You want more people to read your blog. (That is, you’re a blogger.)

A distinct personality and consistent experience for readers reinforces that your blog is worth reading/*is the* place to go for manga reviews/*the* reasons you’d be a great personal trainer/*whatever*. It helps readers become ambassadors for your blog — they can easily and quickly recommend you, secure that your brand promise (read: awesomeness) will be clear to new readers, bringing you one step closer to viral mayhem and internet dominance.



With these basics in mind, it's time to explore the key elements of a good blog brand and get you started extending your brand across your site and the web.

# 19

## THE ELEMENTS OF A GOOD BLOG BRAND

How do you go about crafting a consistent brand for your blog? Let's go over some of the basic, crucial ingredients.

- **Your blog's name and tagline.** These encapsulate your identity in a few, well-chosen words.
- **Your visual identity.** The logos, colors, fonts, and photos that make your blog instantly recognizable.

Picking the perfect title

Coming up with just the right title for your blog can be nerve-wracking — we often decide what sites to visit (or

skip) based simply on a title. Do you go clever? Punny? Long and descriptive, or short and cryptically punchy? Should it include your name? Does it offer enough context?

If you haven't chosen a name yet, or are not sure yours is quite right, here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- Do *I* like the name? Would I click over to a blog with this name?
- Does it reflect my blog's personality?
- Does it offer a hint as to what my blog offers?

Along with your creativity, you'll want to stay on top of some logistics: if you want your own domain name (web address), is the one you've chosen still available? Is it available on Twitter? Does it include words that people often misspell? Is it so long that people will be deterred from typing it, or does it make a bulky email address?

#### Add more context with a tagline

Along with your title, you can add more context with a tagline. Taglines aren't a necessity, but they can give you a few extra syllables to catch readers' eyes and convince them to give you a chance.

Taglines are usually a bit longer than titles, giving readers more information and letting more of your personality shine. For example, WordPress.com publishes a site for bloggers called *The Daily Post*. The title tells you that you'll find content every day. The tagline, *The Art and Craft of Blogging*, lets you know that the site focuses on tools for better writing, photography, and design, rather than the technical, back end of maintaining a website.

Here are three tricks for writing a great tagline:

- **Outline your journalistic W's.** Sketch out the who, what, when, where, and how. Who is your target reader? What do you write about? How often do you post? Why did you start a blog?
- **Pitch like a mogul.** Scriptwriters pitch with shorthand that mashes two existing ideas together. Is your blog “Gawker, by way of Sartre,” “LOLCats meets political analysis,” or “A blog about hats, in the style of soda commercials”?
- **Race the clock.** Set a 60-second timer in one hand. Scribble down anything related to your blog. Then take stock, and see how the pieces fit together.

These exercises will help you focus your blog, giving you a tagline to help would-be, fly-by reader know exactly what they're getting in to before reading a single post. Together with your title, it gives people key information for the split-second “Do I want to read this?” judgements we all make when browsing the internet.

You'll also use both your title and tagline on other platforms you choose to explore, like Twitter, allowing people to identify and connect to you instantly.

What's this all about?

Without an About page, you're an online nobody. It's one of the first places new visitors look, sometimes before reading a post. Unfortunately, many About pages miss the opportunity to sell new readers on your blog, and are laundry lists of disparate facts about the blogger. It's great

that you love Peruvian food, are studying to be a massage therapist, and have three cats named Larry, Moe, and Curly, but why does that mean we should read your blog?

Once you hook a reader with your title and tagline, use your about page to flesh out your blog's goal — to define your brand promise. Help readers find your best content and encourage them to engage while also providing insight into the wizard behind the curtain.

Not sure how? Here are our top tips:

- **Be clear about your blog's goal.** Know what you want readers to do: get in touch? Hire you? Subscribe to your newsletter? Even if your blog is purely personal, you have a goal — it could be as simple as “connect with other people with shared ideas.”
- **Connect the dots.** Your love of Peruvian food, massage, and cats is nice, but doesn't hold together. Combine the parts into something greater. Was your first massage teacher a Peruvian woman who introduced you to her cuisine one night after you found some abandoned kittens outside the massage studio, bringing back memories of your grandma? Now we've got a story — connect those dots for readers.
- **Front load it.** The first sentence is there to get the reader to the second sentence. The second sentence's job is to get them to the third sentence. If people aren't getting to the fourth, you're probably veering off course. Make sure you're reeling your target audience in the start

- explain what your blog's about up front, and make every word count.
- **Don't sugarcoat.** It's easy to slip into English-101-pretentious-writing-mode: flowery, formal language. Write your About page in the same tone as your blog. If you're not sure what that will be, try writing as though you were talking about your blog to a friend over coffee.
- **Kill your darlings.** 95% of first paragraphs are a waste of time; often we're just getting our writing mojo on in those first tentative lines. The same's often true for endings. Focused writing is powerful. Look at each word and sentence and ask how it contributes to your goal. If it doesn't, toss it.
- **Make it bite-sized.** Web reading is different from reading a book; people scan rather than read long paragraphs. The easier you make it for them to do that, the greater the chance that they'll make it through the page — and stick around for more.
- **Showcase your Sunday best.** Your About page is a great place for a virtual neon sign pointing to the posts you're proudest of. Give new readers an easy way to discover your best content and get invested with your blog.

Visual basics: logos, badges, and widgets, oh my!

There are plenty of great looking themes for blogs of all kinds, so your out-of-the-box site will be pretty spiffy. There's also lots you can do — much of it at no cost — to add your branding. First, though, you'll want to think

through the visual identity you'd like for your blog. Having a visual identity helps ensure that you'll end up with a consistently designed site that reinforces your blog's focus rather than a mish-mash of random elements that seemed cute at the time.

When people read something you've written, they get an impression of *you* through your words. Creating a visual identity reinforces that. If you write about crafts, how could you translate the mood, feeling and act of crafting into the look of your blog? If your blog is a personal journal about your travels, how could you make it feel more personal with a few visual flourishes, and how could you emphasize that it's about travel to the casual reader?

### Brainstorming your visuals

Even if you're not an artist or designer, you can come up with a simple visual identity and use free tools and photos, available online, to add custom touches to your blog. To get you started, here are a few prompts to help you brainstorm your visual identity.

- Figure out your blog's unique proposition, the thing that sets it apart from everything else — hopefully, you thought through this when creating your title, tagline, and About page. Need more of a boost? Finish this sentence: “My blog's the only blog that...”
- Think about the broader context of your blog. Are there any other blogs like it? If your blog were turned into a book, where would it be filed in a library or bookstore?

- What kind of atmosphere would your blog have if it were a restaurant or bar? Loud and exciting? Relaxed and peaceful? Think about the lighting, decor, furnishings, soundtrack, aromas, and people you might find in there.
- If your blog had a book cover or movie poster what would it look like? Describe it in simple terms, or make a quick doodle.
- Does the subject of your blog have its own existing iconography? Think knitting needles (crafts/knitting), typewriters (writing), dog leashes (dogs), ribbons (crafts), blood spatters (crime fiction). If there aren't any, how could you best represent the topic of your blog visually? If there are, how could you put a fresh twist on the familiar imagery?

### Customizing your site with your visual identity

The flourishes you add to your blog depend on the visual you want to include and the blogging platform you use. To get started, put these elements in place.

- **A header.** The header is the image or logo that stretches across the top of your site. If you're artistically inclined (or have some artsy friends), this could include a custom logo. You can also use a favorite photo or other image you love, or simply find a font you like and restate your blog's title and tagline.
- **A background.** You can't go wrong with a white background, and many bloggers prefer a streamlined, minimal design. However, a well-



chosen background can add life (and branding!) to your blog. Steer clear of busy images and patterns that distract readers, but think about whether a background photo or background color drawn from your logo/header works.

- **Widgets.** Widgets add information and functions to your blog, but they also contribute to the visuals. Start simple, by customizing the titles of widgets, then add some custom widgets to emphasize your brand. Our favorites include a Text Widget with some of your engrossing “About” text, and custom Image Widgets for your social networking profiles. If you have a logo, consider creating a badge for others to display on their sites — it engages readers, reinforces your brand, and draws in new readers.
- **Favicons and Blavatars.** Favicons (called Blavatars on WordPress.com) are the little icons that appear in the address bar of your browser when you visit a website, like Amazon’s little black and yellow “A.” Add one to your site, using either your logo, header image, or other small graphic that represents you blog.

Creating a striking, recognizable visual stamp for your blog — and blogging persona more broadly — might take some time and tinkering, but it’s an effort that will pay itself off in the long run. Once your brand and your content coalesce into one harmonious whole, your potential for growth becomes limitless.

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## EXTENDING YOUR BRAND ACROSS THE WEB

You've created a memorable logo (or at least a distinct visual vocabulary) for your blog. Your blog's name is unforgettable and specific to your content. What's next? Let's think of a few more ways to make your online presence consistent no matter where your readers might encounter you.

### All things domain

Your domain is the address people type into their browsers to find your blog. You can customize this to

bring your web address in line with your blog's name and goals. It's not necessary, although many bloggers find that it adds legitimacy to their sites and helps further define their brand.

### **What's a domain, exactly?**

When someone wants to visit your house, they pop your address into Google Maps, follow the directions, and arrive at your doorstep. Your physical home is the structure where you live and store your stuff: books, clothes, your photo albums. If your street name changed, your house would remain the same, but your address would change.

Websites work the same way. Your domain is like your street address — the address people use to find your blog. Your hosting provider is like your house; it's where you store all of your website's files. If you blog on WordPress.com, WordPress.com is your hosting provider.

Your blog's default address is likely something like `myawesomeblog.wordpress.com`. You can choose to use a custom domain instead, though, like `MaryLovesBaking.com` or `AllThingsHamster.com`.

Your domain registrar and your hosting provider don't have to be the same company. It can be more convenient to keep all website costs in one place by buying your domain and hosting your site through a single company, but many people host their site with one service and use a second to register a domain name.

## Having fun with custom domains

When you blog with WordPress.com, you can purchase a custom domain on your site's dashboard (just go to the WordPress.com Store) or through another company. You can also connect a domain you already own to your WordPress.com blog. Using a domain that you've purchased elsewhere requires you to map it to your WordPress.com blog, a simple three-step process.

The most common domains end in .com, .net, .org, .co, or .me.

You can register a custom domain that echoes your site's title, so everything a reader sees is connected. You can also get creative with domains for a tailored URL that's perfectly you. Think:

- **fishing.net** for a fishing enthusiast forum.
- **macra.me** for your crafting blog.
- **casta.net** for a site about Flamenco.

Some websites also use country-specific domains, like .ca (Canada) or .it (Italy). You can really push your brand (and have some fun) with these country-specific domains, like the sites [ma.tt](#) (the personal site of WordPress co-founder Matt Mullenweg, using the country-specific domain from Trinidad and Tobago) or [picturesofthin.gs](#) (a photo blog using the domain from the South Georgia Islands). If you're considering the offbeat route, [domai.nr](#) is a particularly handy tool for finding domain variants.

This is also a good time to see if the domain (or something like it) is available on Twitter, or any other service

you might want to use in connection with your blog — Instagram, Flickr, etc.

### **Branding your blog across rest of the internet**

If you're serious about branding your blog, you'll want to extend your brand identity across the internet. As we mentioned in earlier sections, you might want to establish a Facebook page for your site, join Twitter and make your blog's name your username, or create a group on Google+ for your fans.

In each case, you'll want to make sure you use an image that represents your blog — a logo, if you have one, the image you use in your header, your favicon, or your Gravatar — so readers can instantly identify the content as originating with you (same if you participate in online discussion forums, listservs, or others groups).

You might also want to create an email address for your site, either using your custom domain or a free your-greatblogname@gmail address. Now, you can sign up for social networks using that address, use it as a publicly available way to contact you, and have something to use when emailing others about your blog (and of course, make sure you add a signature with a link to your blog to your regular email).

### **In summary...**

As you solidify your blog's identity through your content, your brand, too, will emerge and come into greater focus. You will find it is easier to attract new readers from across — and beyond — the blogosphere with a unified, branded front. At the same time, you will inspire greater

loyalty among your existing audience, who will know your blog as more than the sum of the posts you've published. A strong brand will lay the foundation for your blog's consistent, stable growth.

## PART VII

# ENCORE: BLOGGING PROS WHO'VE CRACKED THE CODE

In this ebook, we've thrown the kitchen sink at you: the idea is to let each blogger choose the resources, features, and strategies that are right for the blog in question. While no two blogs are the same, it's still incredibly useful — and inspiring — to see how other bloggers have built their own brand and created a successful, popular blog. We leave you with two case studies to get your creative juices going: no blog begins by being a runaway success story. But with some time, work, and smart decision-making, you'll never have to wait too long before the right readers find you.

# 21

## CRISTIAN MIHAI, NOVELIST-BLOGGER EXTRAORDINAIRE

*Romanian writer Cristian Mihai has catapulted [his eponymous site](#) into the blogging stratosphere over a remarkably short period of time. We asked him to share some of his well-tested wisdom.*

As of January 2014, you've got over 60,000 followers. What's your secret?

The secret is to do something you're passionate about, something you care deeply about. Because if you do so, odds are that someone else will relate to what you're



doing. If every post you write means something to you, it'll undoubtedly mean something to other people, too.

Another key aspect is consistency. It's not all about quantity — posting every day, for instance — but also about quality. Readers should know what to expect every time they get notified that you posted something new on your blog.

Blogging is not a numbers game. Yes, as you become more popular it's easy to lose track of things; it becomes more and more difficult to realize that those numbers are actually people. Every like, comment, and follow is an action performed by another human being.

Statistics only offer you a cold perspective of what's going on with your blog, but what matters more is the level of interaction that you manage with fellow bloggers. Also, if you think too much about followers and such, you're going to try too hard. And you're going to fail.

**In your experience, what types of posts perform better?**

It's almost impossible to determine why some posts perform better than others. Sometimes it's ironic, because you worked really hard on a certain piece — did a lot of research, tried to make it all come together in the most attractive way possible — and you just don't get people to care enough to leave a comment. Other times, the exact opposite happens.

Popularity simply means how many people relate to what you're doing. Engagement means how many people care enough — whether they agree or disagree — to actually respond. The goal is to figure out what it is that makes

people follow your blog. What type of posts do they enjoy reading most? That's when your [stats](#) may prove useful. If you analyze the posts that perform better, you'll see they're often similar in theme, structure, and so on. That's what readers want most.

Let's take a closer look at your blog.

I started out reviewing books, which wasn't something I was terribly good at. Then, somehow, I began writing short essays on art. That's when I won the jackpot. For whatever reason, people enjoy reading my posts about the artistic process.

If we take a look at my ten most popular posts, we see four essays about my struggles as an artist ("[The Portrait of a Writer](#)," "[Never give up on your dreams](#)," "[Jazz: A \(sort of\) Foreword](#)," and "[I am an artist because...](#)"). They're all personal, about my own journey and process, but they also describe every artist's struggle.

Then there's "[The 7 Golden Rules of Blogging](#)." Lists, if done right, perform better than regular posts. It's one of the few posts I've written about the blogging experience, so I can see why people like it so much. "[Famous Rejection Letters](#)" is also a "list post," and it performed so well that Random House posted a link to it on their Twitter profile.

"[Struggling Artists and Pain](#)" was the first post to get [Freshly Pressed](#), so I suppose that's why it's so popular. "[What's irevuo?](#)" is about my other blog, an online magazine that promotes independent artists. This is one of the top ten posts because it was "[sticky](#)" for an entire month. The last one on the list is "[E-book vs.](#)

[Print](#),” which is kind of a surprise, even though it’s a subject that many people are interested in reading about.

Now for the big question: are these posts my best so far? Some of them, yes, I would’ve picked them myself. But I’ve written so many other posts that never got more than a few likes and comments, even though I thought they were really good.

The thing is, we really are our worst critics, and it’s difficult to determine what posts will trigger certain reactions. As I mentioned, lists, rules, and so on tend to perform better. Everyone wants to read a how-to guide on doing something they’re not really sure how to do.

It’s also about timing: the most you can ever hope to achieve is for another person to read your words when they need them the most. And, sadly, there’s no step-by-step guide for that.

How do you use social media to promote your blog, and what platforms do you find especially useful?

The [Publicize](#) tool is extremely important. You want your posts to automatically (and instantly) go on all the social media profiles you have. Also, there’s no good reason not to allow sharing on all the social networks, even if you don’t have a presence there.

I use different social networks to provide people with different types of information, especially information I can’t share on my blog. For instance, if I stumble upon an interesting quote on art or writing, it wouldn’t make sense to write a new post for it, but I can easily share it on Facebook.

Social networks allow you to create a more dynamic image of what your blog is all about: it drives engagement and allows you to interact with your readers on more than one level.

What's the most useful feature available to you on WordPress.com?

It's not exactly a feature. The community. I'm always amazed to see how people interact with each other. A blogging community is modern technology at its best — it helps us reach people and places we wouldn't be able to otherwise.

For instance, I live in Constanta, Romania, thousands and thousands of miles from all my readers from the United States, yet I can interact with them on a daily basis through my blog. That's the brilliant thing about a well-developed blogging community: it provides a perfect habitat for online interaction.

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## ROBERT BRUCE, THE BIBLIOPHILE BEHIND 101 BOOKS

*We sat down with Robert Bruce, who created popular literary blog [101 Books](#) to chart his adventures in reading (and beyond).*

At the time of this writing, you've got over 24,000 followers. What's your secret?

There's really no secret. It's just steady, consistent posting over a long period of time. [101 Books](#) is more than three

years old now, and I've had more than 700 posts. When you post that often, people are bound to find you. Then, the key is to just write content that relates to them. Most people don't care about what you had for breakfast, but if you can help them learn something new, then they'll keep coming back.

In your experience, what types of posts perform better?

The funny thing about my blog is that, even though it's centered on the "101 Books" project, these book reviews don't perform as well as the quirkier stuff.

One of the most popular posts I've had was a post about [my two-year-old son judging books by their covers](#). I put a couple of classic book covers in front of him and asked him what he thought they were about. His answers were hilarious. That post took about 15 minutes to put together, but because it was unique and fresh, it became a hit.

Obviously, list-style posts do well, and I probably tend to overuse them because of that. (I'm not BuzzFeed.) Also, for whatever reason, people gravitate to more negative-sounding titles, like ["7 Words That Should Die A Horrible Death."](#)

There are many blogs about books on the web. Why do you think yours has been so successful?

There's a lot of great book blogs out there, and a lot of bloggers who write incredibly detailed book reviews. My blog is a little different because I review books in small chunks; I take a small passage from a book and write about it. Or I write about some cool, unusual fact from

the author's background. So I think it stands out a bit in the book blogging world.

Plus, I think people can easily get behind the idea of someone pursuing a crazy goal and the ups and downs that come with that. It's like a literary version of the *Julie and Julia* book (and movie). Not that I'm near as creative and successful as she was, but you get the point.

What widgets or tools in your dashboard do you use to promote your work?

I love the [My Community Widget](#). I think it's cool for my blog readers to come to my blog and occasionally see their avatar on the sidebar. It's a small way to say thanks and maybe even send a little traffic their way.

I also think the [Top Posts and Pages Widget](#) is useful. My readers can easily see the ten most popular posts on *101 Books* at any given time. This is great for newer readers who wouldn't otherwise see the older posts that always tend to perform well.

Do you have tips for someone who wants to focus their blog on books?

Be honest. Don't feel like you have to like a book or dislike a book because of what the critics say. On my blog, I'm very vocal of my dislike for Mrs. Dalloway, but it's my honest opinion.

If you want to write a book blog with an academic voice, that's great. But you'll probably realize that not many people will read it. I try to write about literature in an

approachable way, and that style involves *forgetting* what my English literature professor taught me.

I think it's also important to **forget about being perfect**. Sometimes you've just got to push the publish button because an almost-perfect blog post is better than no post at all. Don't pass over the great in search of the perfect.