

10 WEEK PLANNER

How to Start a Successful Blog



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Introduction

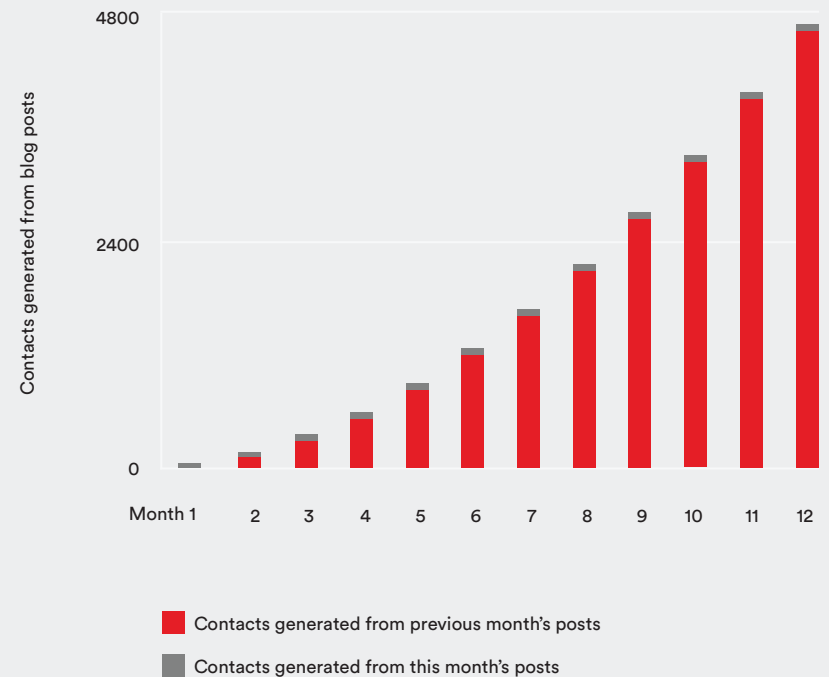
It's 2018, and your business either doesn't have a blog, or it's time to upgrade and assess how your blog can really help function as a tool for business growth. If you've already decided it's time to launch a blog for your business, you've probably bought into the "why." Here's a reminder:

- B2B marketers who use blogs receive 67% more leads than those who do not.
- Marketers who have prioritized blogging are 13x more likely to enjoy positive ROI.
- Blogging is cost-effective in that the only thing you really need to spend is time.
- Companies who blog receive 97% more links directing to their website.
- Blogs have been rated as the fifth most trusted source for accurate online information.

Convinced yet? Blogging is a crucial part of inbound marketing because it allows you to quickly disseminate helpful information to your followers and new site visitors. This, in turn, helps build credibility, SEO juice, and helps you become more of a thought leader in your industry.

Not only that, blogging has an exponential long-term impact. The longer and more often you blog, the more traffic you'll generate over time.

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While the only real cost of blogging is time, you may be thinking, "Sure, but time is a BIG commitment." And you're right. Starting and maintaining a blog isn't a one-day task. It takes planning, resources, and the effort to gain adequate ROI. Luckily, we've created a 10-week planner to help you manage your time, prioritize the essential components of starting a blog, and plan for a successful blog launch or relaunch. We'll take you through all the essential steps to make the most out of



WEEK 1

Identify Your Target Persona

The essential first step to launch a successful blog is to know why and for whom you're writing content. You might be thinking, "What do you mean who am I writing for? I'm writing for my potential customers!"

That may be the case, but having the right target persona for your blog and products requires much more data and research. It's not enough to just want to help your customers by providing content; you also need to know who your potential customers are and what pain-points and challenges they want to solve.

To figure this out, start with a [buyer persona](#) — a fictional, generalized representation of your ideal customer. They help you understand your customers (and prospective customers) better, and make it easier for you to tailor content to the specific needs, behaviors, and concerns of different groups.

When it comes to blogging, having a buyer persona to target content helps you understand what kinds of content you should be writing to attract your target customers.

What type of information do you need to collect in order to understand your buyer persona? Start with these free [HubSpot buyer persona templates](#) and this free guide to [launching a content-first business](#).

In order to discover your buyer persona you need information on current customers and prospects. Here are some practical methods to get started:

- Interview customers** both in person or over the phone to discover what they like about your product or service, what their pain points are, and what kinds of content they're looking for.
- Interview your sales team.** They know your customers best, and are a great source of information about your buyer persona.
- Look through your contacts database** to uncover trends about how certain leads or customers find and consume your content.
- Survey your contacts database** and ask them key questions about their role, department, challenges, experience, etc.
- Research outside forums** related to your products and services.
- Capture important persona information** on your contacts and lead forms on your website. (e.g., if all your personas vary based on company size, ask each lead for information about company size on your forms. You could also gather information on what forms of social media your leads use by asking a question about social media accounts) from your brand, which also helps keep people on your website. The whole point of blogging is to disseminate information, so make sure to use links that provide additional helpful content to your readers.

Once you know who your target audience is, it's time to start generating a list of content ideas to post on your blog.



WEEK 2

Start Building a Bank of Evergreen Content Ideas

You know who you're writing for. Now the question is: How do you build and sustain a blog with content for that target audience? Where's the best place to start? The answer: by building a list of evergreen content.

Evergreen content is any content that stays relevant no matter what week, month, season, or year it is. It's timeless, high-value, canonical pieces of content that will remain interesting to your audience no matter when they interact with it.

Unlike timely or newsworthy pieces, which are also valuable content for you to consider on your blog, your evergreen content is where you should start your content brainstorming. It's also what will help you rank for keywords and build authority with search engines over time.

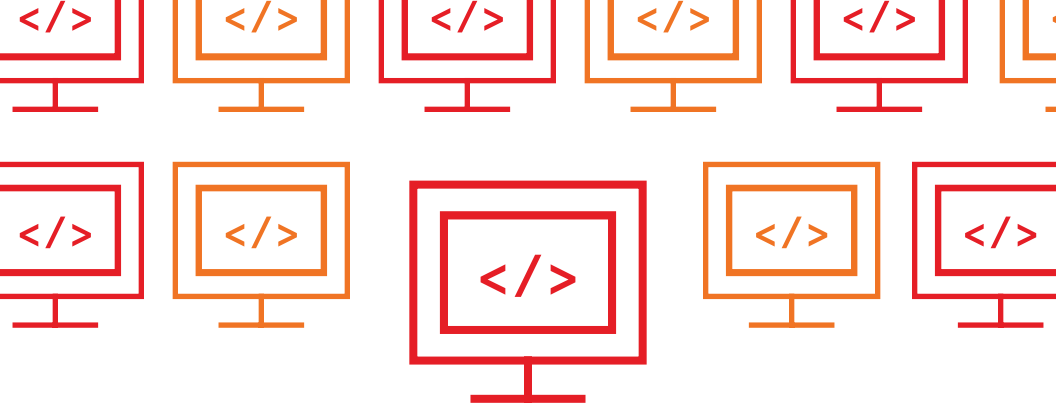
Now that you've done research on your buyer persona, it should be a lot easier to think about what evergreen content you should be writing — both at launch and as time goes on.

In order to discover your buyer persona you need information on current customers and prospects. Here are some practical methods to get started:

- Look at your buyer persona's list of pain points.
- Come up with one topic or keyword, then brainstorm a list of different angled pieces around that same topic.
- Do keyword research to find out what kinds of keywords people are searching around your main topics.
- Look at other content that you've created and repurpose it into blog posts.
- Go negative vs. positive. If you already have content on the best practices for a topic in your industry, do another post on the "do's and don'ts" or "how to do X that doesn't suck"
- Schedule a team brainstorm to bounce ideas off of each other — at HubSpot we often find that one person's idea generates a whole batch of new ideas from other teammates.
- Try out HubSpot's blog topic generator.
- Research what your competitors are writing about and think of newer thought-provoking angles to explore.

Once you have a good topic list going, start writing or assigning those posts to your team. Bookmark your brainstorm list for later, and continue to build on it into the future.

You'll be surprised how many more ideas you think of once you start writing!



WEEK 3:

Choose the Right CMS for Your Blog

In order to successfully launch and maintain a blog, you'll need an effective content management system (CMS) — a digital system that enables you to host digital content.

While identifying your target persona and generating content ideas is the strategic side of launching a blog, these next few weeks are devoted to the equally important technical side.

So, what should you look for in a CMS?

Ease of use

If you don't have a lot of technical support at your company, choosing a CMS that's easy to use is crucial. Most content management systems come with templates you can use or support to help you design it, so make sure you choose one that will work for the skills on your team.

Key metrics you can track

Does the CMS allow you to track metrics like conversion rates, page views, and where your traffic is coming from? Analyzing the success of your blog will be incredibly important post-launch, so make sure your CMS allows you to track the success of your efforts.

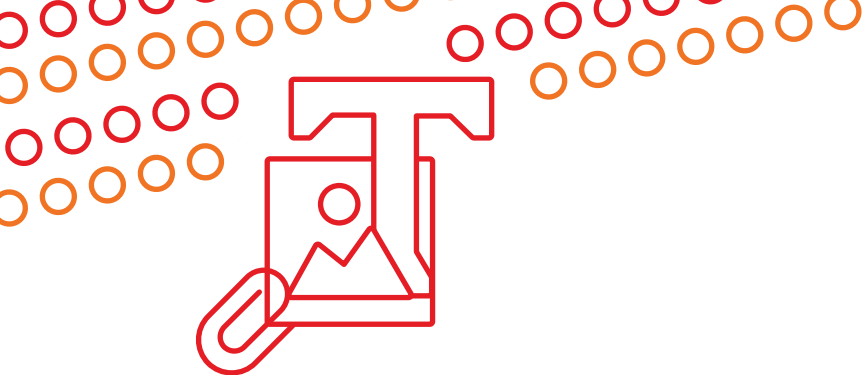
Responsiveness

60 percent of all searches on Google come from mobile, which means it's absolutely essential for your blog to be optimized for for any device that your user opens content on. A CMS that automatically makes your content responsive to device type is a must for marketers starting a blog in 2018.



Looking for a great content management system that's easy to use, gives you access to the metrics you need, and makes marketing automation easy?

Try HubSpot — it's not just a content management system, it's a content optimization system.



WEEK 4

Design Your Blog

Once you've chosen a CMS, it's time to make your blog come to life. You'll want to not only make your blog look awesome, but also optimize it for lead generation and turning visitors into prospects and, ultimately, customers. So, how do you design a great blog that will be easy to access and delight visitors?

It starts with the right elements and understanding user interface and user experience. If you or someone at your company knows how to custom create your blog, make sure you check off our list of essential design elements.

Most content management systems will offer you free templates that you can modify and use if your team has less design experience. And, if you're interested in the theory behind designing a great blog, you can enhance your skill set by learning user experience design with General Assembly.

Need a little inspiration for designing your blog? [Check out these awesome examples.](#)

Make sure our best practices for good blog design are checked off your list this week:

- Main blog page**
The main page should tell your visitors about the blog and include links to the most recent posts. Be sure to include a search feature and/or an archive of your past posts so visitors can access both new and old content.
- Color scheme**
To make your blog's design feels coherent, choose a color scheme and stick with it across all your pages. Trying using your brand colors as a base and adding a few accent colors to tie the whole design together.
- Branding**
Make sure your blog's design looks consistent with the rest of your site branding. While it's important to distinguish your blog's look from other pages on your site, your visitors should still feel as though they are on a related page.
- Blog post templates**
Each blog post should have the same general layout so readers have a consistent experience across each page. A simple way to ensure this is by designing a template to use for each new blog post!
- Calls-to-Action (CTAs)**
A blog is a tool to convert buyers at the top of the funnel, so linking to pieces of content that will nurture your visitors down the funnel is important.

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Here are 8 types of CTAs to consider building into each blog post. You can also try a slide-in CTA, another strategy to convert visitors.



WEEK 5

Focus On Your Content Strategy

For the past few weeks, you've focused your energy on the logistics of setting up your blog — from getting started on your CMS to designing and optimizing blog pages. There's still more technical room to grow, but now let's focus on your content strategy.

Before launching your blog, it's essential to think about an internal content strategy — both short-term and long-term. Your team needs to answer a few questions about how much time and bandwidth you're willing to devote to blogging.



Want to learn more about content strategy?
Check out [General Assembly's Digital Marketing course](#),
which will teach you how to develop your
own successful content strategy and beyond.

How often should you blog?

How often and when to post will largely depend on what your company does, how big your company is, and how much of an audience you're looking to attract.

That being said, the more you blog, the more traffic you'll attract over time. And more traffic means more leads and more customers.

As a team, it's your job to decide how much time you're willing to invest in your blog. But as a general rule of thumb, once a day or a few times a week is a good place to start.

What types of content are you going to write and post?

When it comes to content matter and post style, blogs are extremely versatile. You can post infographics, how-to posts, list posts, newsjacking posts, slideshares, editorials, etc. Decide what types of formats you want to try and how many resources you can put behind each.

Over time, analyze which format performs best to tailor your content strategy toward your audience. The more formats you try out from the beginning, the better your data will be over time.

What are your goals for launch and post-launch?

How much website traffic do you want to generate within the first weeks of launch versus six months out from launch? How will you track those metrics, and how will you promote your blog in order to hit your goals?

While some of these questions will depend on your current follower base, your CMS, and your promotional strategy, it's good to have an internal discussion about these goals well before launch so your team can align on their expectations.

Setting expectations internally while planning your content strategy is key. Does planning ahead mean your content strategy won't change over time? Not at all. But laying this groundwork will make you more flexible down the road and allow you to be more focused in the meantime.



WEEK 6

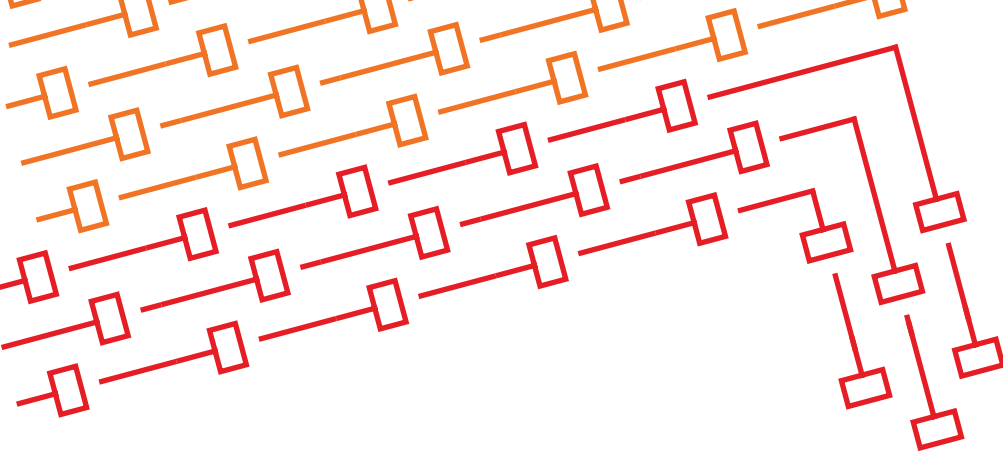
Set Up Subscriber Pathways

Now that your team has set content strategy goals, let's think about how you're actually going to meet those goals. How are you planning to promote your blog, and how will your content spread organically?

An effective way to encourage your content's reach is to encourage subscriptions. Ideally, this will lead the people who regularly interact with your content to see it, read it, and share it with people they know. Subscribers also help you communicate regularly with the same people, letting you nurture them to become leads and customers down the road.

Before launching your blog, make sure you set up the following to start getting blog subscriptions right away.

- Subscriber emails**
Set up a workflow that automatically sends subscribers emails with your latest posts. Make an email template with links to your posts that curates your scheduled content and send it on to your subscribers. Over time, make sure you're optimizing the subscriber emails for clickthrough rate and conversions. [Check out the anatomy of a blog subscriber email here.](#)
- Subscriber forms**
How will your site visitors sign up for a blog subscription? Set up forms on your main blog page and CTAs on your blog posts to enable people to sign up. Subscribers must opt-in to be emailed, so be sure your CTAs and form copy are compelling.
- Subscriber calendar**
Schedule your subscriber emails in advance of sending to allow time for corrections! [HubSpot's blog tool](#) can help with that.
- Frequency**
How often will your subscribers get emailed? Daily? Weekly? Each time a new post is published? It's important to be clear to your subscribers about how often they'll be emailed. Pro tip: The more you email people, the more likely they are to eventually opt-out. Keep the frequency to a minimum! We recommend weekly or monthly depending on how often you post.
- Unsubscribe pages**
You're required to give anybody you email the option to unsubscribe from your mailing list. Have fun with it! Check out [HubSpot's unsubscribe page](#) as an example and think of ways to delight your audience and perhaps even encourage them to continue receiving your emails.



Here are some logistical elements of blogging to consider before launching.

Social sharing buttons

Attract new visitors and encourage people to share your content by [adding social sharing icons](#) to your blog posts.

CTAs

Think about where you want visitors to go once they read your blog posts. You probably don't want them to leave your site, so add CTAs and hyperlinks to other content, offers, and site pages. Over time, test to see what works best for your audience. Maybe it's specific content offers, maybe it's visual CTAs, or maybe it's pop ups! Here's a [CTA best practices guide](#) to get you started.

How to handle comments

Most content management systems enable blog commenters on posts. Comments are a good feature because it encourages user generated content and engagements with your content. Make sure you plan for how to handle comments. Will comments be allowed all the time or just for a short period? Who will be responsible for responding to those comments or questions? Decide on your policy beforehand so your team knows how to handle comments from launch day onward.

Adding dates to blog posts

Don't forget to add publishing dates to all of your blog posts! It's important for visitors to know how recent and relevant your content is for credibility. It [also allows you to track metrics](#) over time and update posts when you need to.

WEEK 7

Plan for Logistics

Subscriber pathways are only the start of blog logistics you need to plan for. How else will you convert visitors into leads from your blog posts or get subscribers to interact with you elsewhere?

In Week 7, it's time to think through some of the other logistics of your blog — from encouraging social sharing to planning your launch day.



Below are 3 questions to ask yourself in order to help determine your editorial strategy and voice.

Who writes what?

The first step is planning who will write the blog content. Make sure you have enough resources and time to keep up with the content strategy you've set up. If you hope to publish three blog posts a day but only have one blog post author, you probably won't be able to keep up with that schedule for long. Take the time to plan out your resources, and put your best content writers on the job.

How is your internal editing process handled?

It doesn't matter how good your writers are, every piece of writing needs to be edited and reviewed by an editor. Identify a blog editor (even if it's one of many tasks they handle) to make sure no piece of writing gets published without being fact-checked and edited for typos.

What are your editorial standards?

Every team that writes content needs an editorial standard or style to look to for guidelines. Whether it's grammatical principles, citation guidelines, or capitalizations, make sure you have guidelines for you team in place. Most English online writing uses the [Associated Press Stylebook](#) (which we use at HubSpot, too!).

WEEK 8

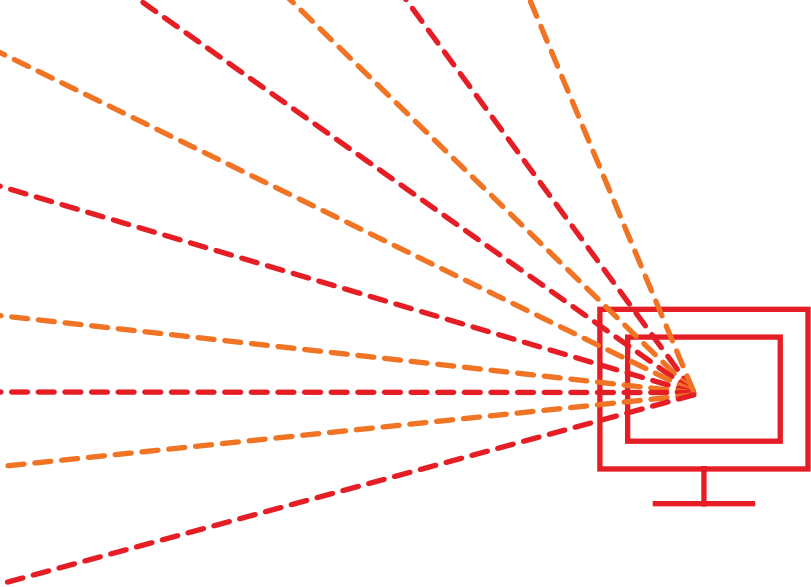
Decide on an Internal Editorial Strategy

When it comes to blog credibility and authority, there are two main facets to keep in mind: search engine authority and the reputation of your blog from your visitors. Building authority with search engines is all about SEO and link building, but we'll dive deeper into this next week. The reputation of your blog is all about your editorial strategy.

Think about it: If you read an article or blog post that doesn't cite sources, doesn't include relevant facts and statistics, and is full of typos, you're not very likely to find it valuable or share it with others. You might even be more likely to criticize the author of that content.

Providing valuable content isn't just about the writing, it's also about the editing. Let's plan for your editorial strategy: what are your standards and guidelines, and how will you keep your team accountable for those standards?

Now that you've focused on how you'll maintain the reputation of your blog through the editing process, it's time to move onto building authority and a reputation for your blog through search engine optimization and promotional strategies.



WEEK 9

How to Attract and Scale Traffic: SEO and Promotional Guidelines

In the long term, blogging can help increase your website traffic exponentially, but it will take some hard work on your end. How will you disseminate and promote your posts and make sure your content is ranking high on search engine results pages? It takes a little search engine optimization (SEO) and promotional effort to achieve this.

How to get started with SEO in the short term

How to do keyword research

SEO starts with ranking for keywords that your target audience is searching for. The best way to rank for keywords is by designing your blog posts based on the keywords you're trying to rank for. Start with keyword research, and use those keywords to brainstorm and tailor your posts.

How to decide what to rank for

While researching, you'll probably notice that some keywords have very high search volume with high competition. This makes them very difficult for any new publication to rank for right off the bat. Look for long-tailed, niche keywords with low competition to start. You may not generate high search volume right away, but the more niche your keywords are, the better qualified your visitors will be.

Optimize your blog posts for SEO

Once you've chosen keywords, it's time to optimize each blog post for SEO. Make sure you're optimizing your meta description, page title, keywords, URLs, etc. for the keywords you're trying to rank for. Want to learn more about SEO? Check out [this video](#) and [OnPage SEO template](#).

Strategies for promoting your blog

Social media

Once your blog launches, promote the launch and blog posts on your social media accounts. Leverage your existing audience to generate traffic to your new blog. Don't forget to use images, videos, and compelling copy in your posts!

Paid campaigns

Want to reach more people not already interacting with your brand? Use paid campaigns on social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to promote your new blog.

Press release

The launch of your blog is a great time to write a press release and announce the launch to the public. The more [backlinks](#) you get to your blog on launch day, the better for your SEO juice and the more traffic you'll bring in.



WEEK 10

Write Your First Posts

With just a week before launch, it's finally time to start writing your first posts and building a bank of content to publish during the first few weeks your blog is live. If you focus your energy on writing in advance, you'll give yourself more time to get ahead of schedule and deal with other items that may come up when launch day arrives.

Remember back in Week 2 when you generated a list of evergreen content ideas? Start with that list, and choose a few of your top ideas to start writing. You can always continue thinking of new ideas or timely posts to write about.

Once you've chosen a few initial topics, keep these [blog writing tips](#) in mind:

- Make it skimmable**
Use images, bullets, lists, and short paragraphs to make your blog posts easy to read and easy to skim. Your goal is to encourage your audience to keep reading, not scare them away with large chunks of text.
- Plan a promotional strategy for your first post**
Once you've written your posts, how are you planning to promote your blog launch? Go back to last week's tips on SEO and social promotion, and create a promotional checklist for launch day. Consider writing an announcement blog post to tell your visitors about your blog and why they should follow it. Plan out your promotional strategy across social channels, email, and paid promotions.
- Images**
Did you know that colored images make readers 80% more willing to read a piece of content? Use images, graphics, or even videos to make your blog posts more appealing to readers. Start with [stock photos](#), or use [Canva](#) to make custom graphics.
- Link to other resources**
Don't forget to use hyperlinks in your post to connect readers to other resources. This is important for two reasons; First, people want to know where information and facts are coming from, so due diligence and proper citations are critical. Second, you can use your blog posts to link to other resources and content from your brand, which also helps keep people on your website. The goal of blogging is to disseminate information, so make sure to use links that provide additional helpful content to your readers.

Determining the Success of Your Launch: Metrics to Analyze

Your first blog posts have been written, everything has been planned out, and you've spent that last 10 weeks setting your blog up for success. Now, it's time to determine how you'll measure that success.

When it comes to blogging, it's important to set up and analyze key metrics over time. First, identify your team's goals for your blog. What are you trying to accomplish? Likely, the goals will be gaining subscribers, leads, and then customers by bringing blog visitors through the buyer's journey to your product or service. Once you've answered those questions, set realistic goals based on the following metrics:



Keep in mind

Don't stress too much if you don't see high metrics right off the bat. Blogging helps provide exponential growth — the longer you blog, the more authority you will build over time. No blog goes viral overnight. Start small, and set realistic goals for the future.

If you don't hit your goals immediately, revisit them and look at your metrics. Are your promotional efforts working? If not, run as many tests and experiments as you can until they do.

Page views

The main way to measure how much traffic your blog receives is tracking the number of page views each post generates. In other words, how many visitors are coming to and reading your posts?

Click-through rate (CTR)

One key component of building SEO juice is the click-through rate that each of your posts see. Are people coming to your blog, then clicking on hyperlinks within the post? The more visitors click through and stay on your site, the better it is for the overall authority of your blog.

Sources of traffic

One important measurement to consider is where your traffic is coming from. Are your promotional efforts paying off? What are the big levers that drive most of your traffic to your blog? Whether it's your social promotion, emails, or paid campaigns, make sure you're tracking which channels drive the most traffic. This information will help you tailor your content strategy over time.

Leads and customers gained from your blog over time

It's up to you to decide how you track this number. Some companies track leads from their blog on a monthly basis, while others do so each quarter.

So, how do you track this data? Most content management systems enable you to track these metrics easily, so make sure you know how to analyze them within your CMS before launch.

Now that you know what and how to track the right metrics, it's time to set post-launch goals for your team, both short- and long-term.

Hold a planning meeting with your team to set goals for page views and click-through rates within the first month, six months, and year after launch. If you set realistic goals and hold your team accountable accordingly, you'll set yourself up for success at the outset of your blogging adventure.

Congrats! Now, Some Things to Avoid

Congratulations! You've reached the end of your 10-week guide and have (hopefully!) successfully launched your blog. We'd love to say your work here is done, but, blogging is a long-term effort. Luckily, it's one that pays off.

Now that you've launched your blog, keep this checklist of dos and don'ts in mind:

DO

Test your content strategy over time.

Find out what works for your audience and what doesn't, then tailor your content accordingly.

Keep blogging even if you don't see immediate high-traffic volume! Blogging is beneficial for your business, but only if you keep at it!

Continue to research tips and ideas for better blogging. The HubSpot Marketing Blog has tons of posts that can help you out.

DON'T

Keep using a CMS that doesn't work for you.

If your CMS is hard to use or doesn't easily track data on your blog, it's not doing its job. Luckily, HubSpot can recommend a great CMS for you to try!

Forget to do your keyword research, or optimize every blog post for SEO.

Rely on organic traffic alone. Don't forget to promote your blog posts and drive traffic to your posts as often as possible!

Try to rank for highly competitive keywords right off the bat. SEO is a long-term game. Trying to rank for highly competitive, high-volume keywords won't work for a brand-new blog. Keep looking for niche, long-tail keywords that will build up your SEO juice in the short term.

NOTES



Looking for a great content management system that's easy to use, gives you access to the metrics you need, and makes marketing automation easy?

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Want to learn more about content strategy?

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